protiviti®
Face the Future with Confidence

FEELING STUCK LEARNING POWER AUTOMATE FLOWS AND POWER APPS?
YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Tips, Tricks, and Lesson’s Learned to help you build your Business Application Skills

November 16 2019

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ABOUT US

I'll help you build great apps

Haniel Croitoru

I'm passionate about simplifying life

Super-Dad | Office 365 MVP | Speaker | Author

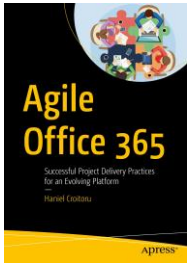
I'll help you fix them!

David Drever

Happily increasing the efficiency of your day-to-day

Office 365 MVP | Speaker | Part-Time Farmer

MVP Microsoft® Most Valuable Professional



MVP Microsoft® Most Valuable Professional

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WHAT DID WE LEARN AT IGNITE LAST WEEK?

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3-SESSION POWER PLATFORM EXTRAVAGANZA

1 Integrate All The Things

- High level overview of Power Apps and Power Automate
- Learn how swiftly and easily you can integrate multiple systems into a fully functioning system from design to implementation.

2 Feeling stuck learning Flow and Power Apps - You're not alone

You are here

- Are you new to Power Apps and Power Automate, looking for places to learn or just want to hear some tips and tricks from the trenches? Then you don't want to miss this session.
- Find out about the great places to learn how to make great solutions.
- Discuss with us the different tricks we have learned and maybe share some of your own.

3 You've got an error in you flow? Great! Let's deal with it.

- What are common error types that one may encounter when creating flows?
- Approaches for capturing, reporting, and dealing with flow errors.

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ENTER THE RAFFLE

Raffle

- Register using the QR code for some great prizes

Please Help Us Out

- Turn phones off or set the ringer to vibrate
- Make sure you are in the correct room

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WHY AUTOMATE?

What are the benefits we got from Business Applications?

Considerations

- **Save Time** – an automated task will usually run faster than when done manually
- **Reduce Waste** – paper-based processes produce a lot of waste
- **Reduce Risk** – manual data-related tasks are more error prone
- **Grow your Business**– allow your employees to work on revenue-generating initiatives
- **There's no other option** – access to various LOB systems may not be available to individuals

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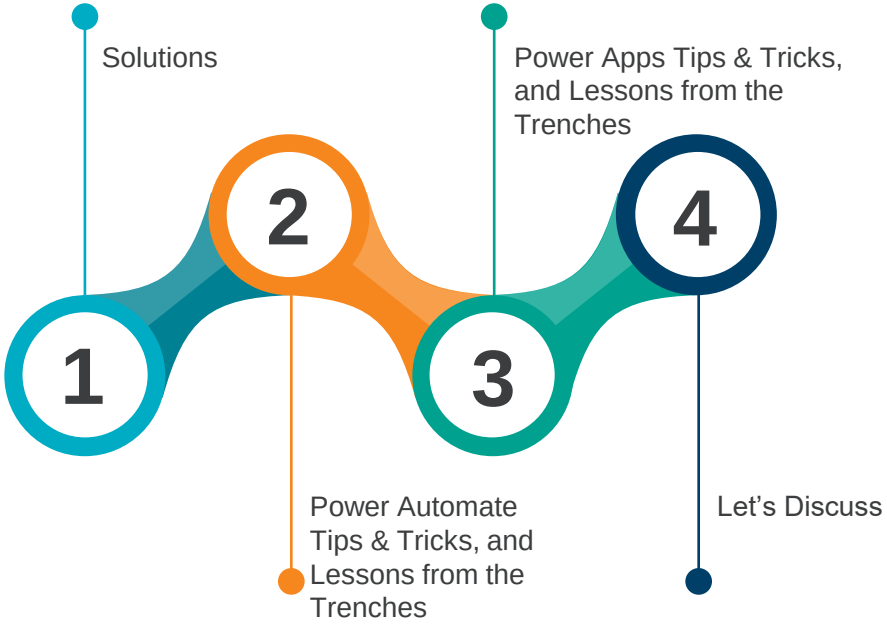
WHAT WE'LL DISCUSS TODAY



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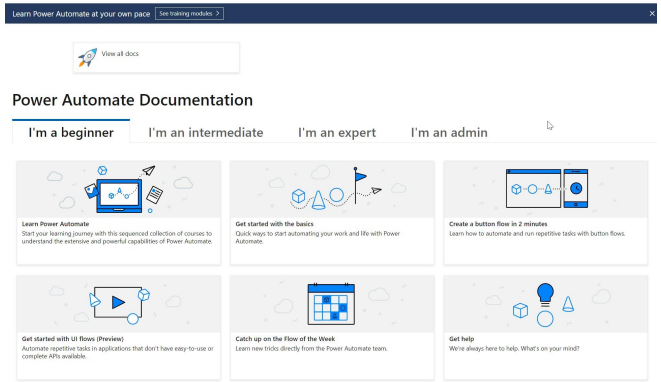
OVERVIEW

GETTING INTO THE FLOW OF THINGS – KEEPING UP TO DATE

Official Microsoft Flow Documentation Site - https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/flow

- Broken out by experience/knowledge level
- Continuously updated with the latest information from the Microsoft Flow team
- Information ranges from “What is Flow?” to working with Common Data Model and Logic Apps
- Includes full training modules



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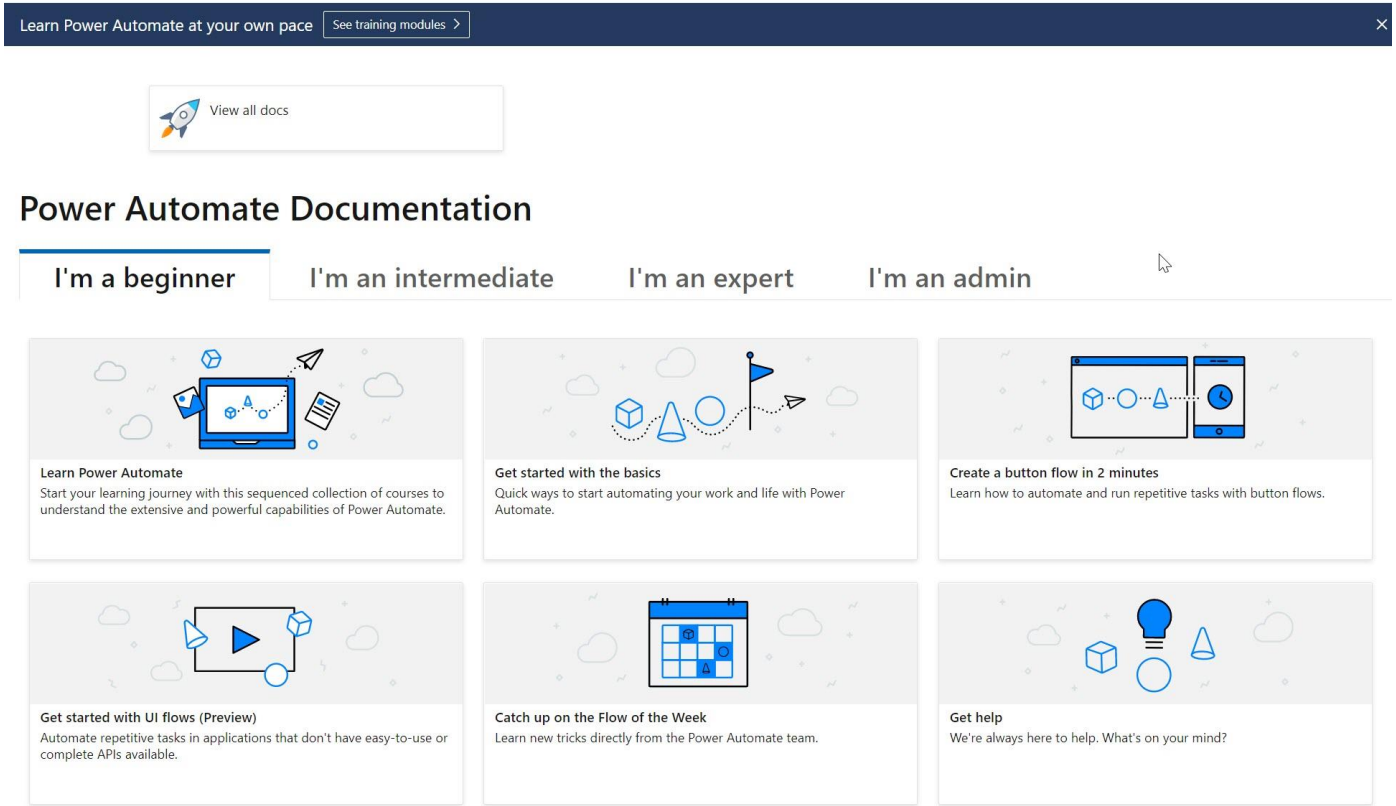
GETTING INTO THE FLOW OF THINGS – KEEPING UP TO DATE



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GETTING INTO THE FLOW OF THINGS – KEEPING UP TO DATE

Microsoft Automate Community Site

- Forum style layout
- Ranges from “how to” questions to “I have this thing and it’s broken”
- Able to report suspected bugs, request features\enhancements and receive feedback
- https://powerusers.microsoft.com/t5/Microsoft-Power-Automate/ct-p/FlowCommunity

Community Blog Sites

- There are many great content providers existing on the web. Some suggestions: Haniel Croitoru, David Drever, John Liu, Serge Luca, Jon Levesque
- It’s really about finding the provider that deals with the information YOU are looking for.

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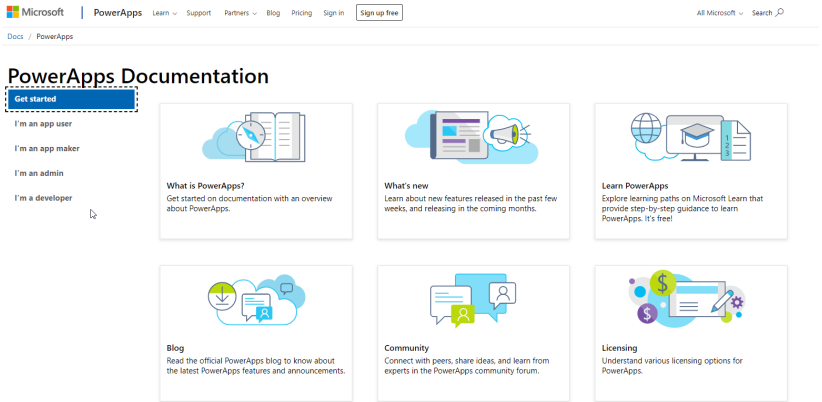
LEARNING TO BUILD WITH POWER APPS

Official Power Apps Documentation Site - https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/Power Apps/

- Separated by role (App User, App Maker, Administrator and Developer)
- Continuously updated with the latest information from the Microsoft Power Apps team
- Information ranges from “What is a PowerApp?” to building Power Apps with CDS to building custom connectors



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LEARNING TO BUILD WITH POWER APPS

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Docs / PowerApps

PowerApps Documentation

Get started

I'm an app user

I'm an app maker

I'm an admin

I'm a developer

What is PowerApps?

Get started on documentation with an overview about PowerApps.

What's new

Learn about new features released in the past few weeks, and releasing in the coming months.

Learn PowerApps

Explore learning paths on Microsoft Learn that provide step-by-step guidance to learn PowerApps. It's free!

Blog

Read the official PowerApps blog to know about the latest PowerApps features and announcements.

Community

Connect with peers, share ideas, and learn from experts in the PowerApps community forum.

Licensing

Understand various licensing options for PowerApps.

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LEARNING TO BUILD WITH POWER APPS– KEEPING UP TO DATE

Microsoft Managed Power Apps Community Site

- Ranges from “how to” questions to “I have this thing and it’s broken”
- Community created Power Apps you can download and use yourself
- Able to report suspected bugs, request features\enhancements and receive feedback
- https://powerusers.microsoft.com/t5/PowerApps-Community/ct-p/PowerApps1

Community Blog Sites

- There are many great content providers existing on the web. Some suggestions: Haniel Croitoru, David Drever, Shane Young, Daniel Christian, Keith Whatling, Samit Saini
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SOLUTIONS

SOLUTIONS

More than just containers

- Solutions contain Power Platform assets, such as CDS entities, Power Apps, flows, Dashboards, and Reports.
- Solutions are used to manage these assets as a unit and help transport them across environments.

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SOLUTIONS

Managed vs. Unmanaged

- Unmanaged – used during development and to transport to other environments
- Managed – used to distribute to non-development environments

Unmanaged Layer

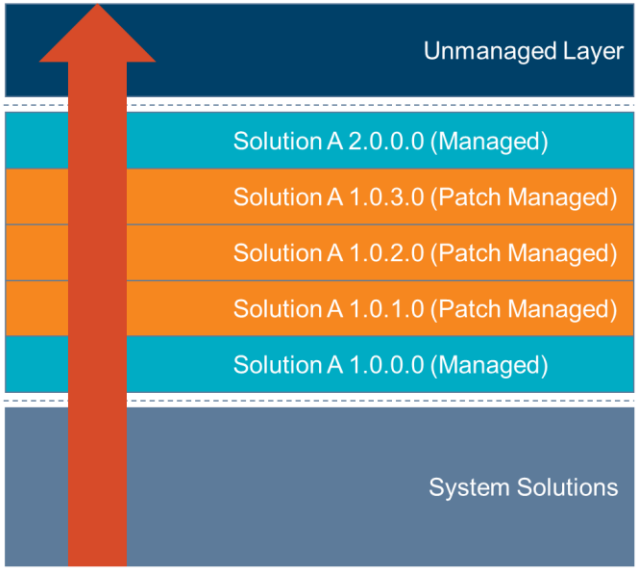
Includes unpublished changes

Managed solutions

Each managed solution will expose the top layer to the user. Each managed solution may include numerous solution versions and patches

System Solutions

Managed by the system. All solutions are built on top of this layer



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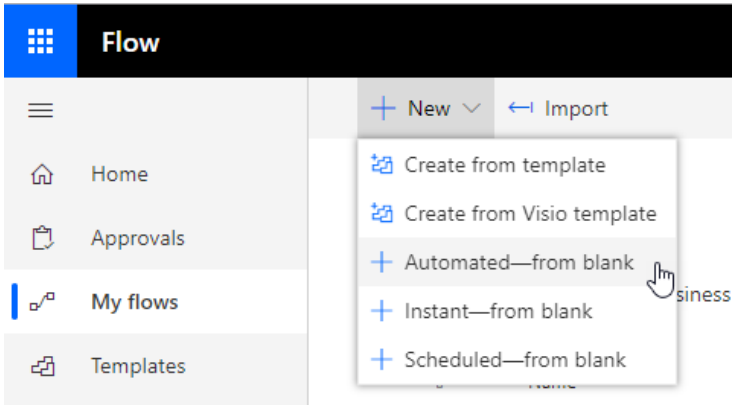
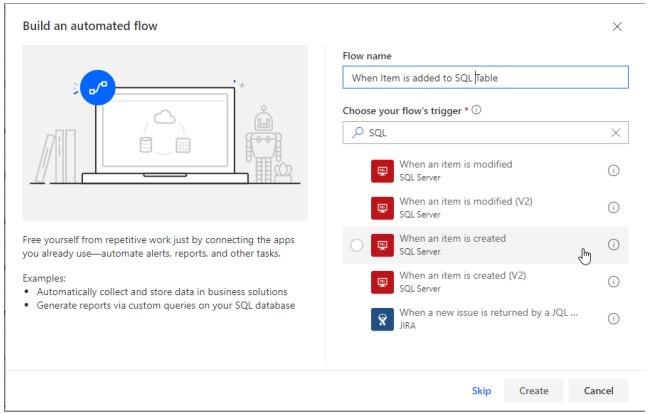
POWER AUTOMATE – TIPS, TRICKS, & LESSONS FROM THE TRENCHES

STARTING FLOWS

There are 5 ways to begin a new flow in Power Automate

- Use an existing template - hundreds of templates to choose from
- Visio document - A pre-created Visio doc can create the flow structure
- Automated – Occurs when a trigger happens in a monitored system
- Instant – Occurs when initiated by a user.
- Scheduled – Occurs on a regular schedule





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VARIABLES IN A FLOW

Variables play an important role in Flows

- Can be used for
  - Counters if looping
  - Holding values returned from activities in a Flow

How do I use variables?

- Must to be declared using **Initialize variable** before they can be used
  - Must be declared at the top level (can't be done in a loop or other grouping action)
- Can be updated anywhere after being declared using **Set variable**, **Increment variable**, **Decrement variable**, **Append to array variable**, and **Append to string variable**

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FLOW CONSTANTS

Why would this be important?

- Lower chance of errors in flow from typos or copy and paste errors
- Quicker development by being able to choose from a list of pre-configured items as opposed to trying to remember the list name or site address you need to deal with

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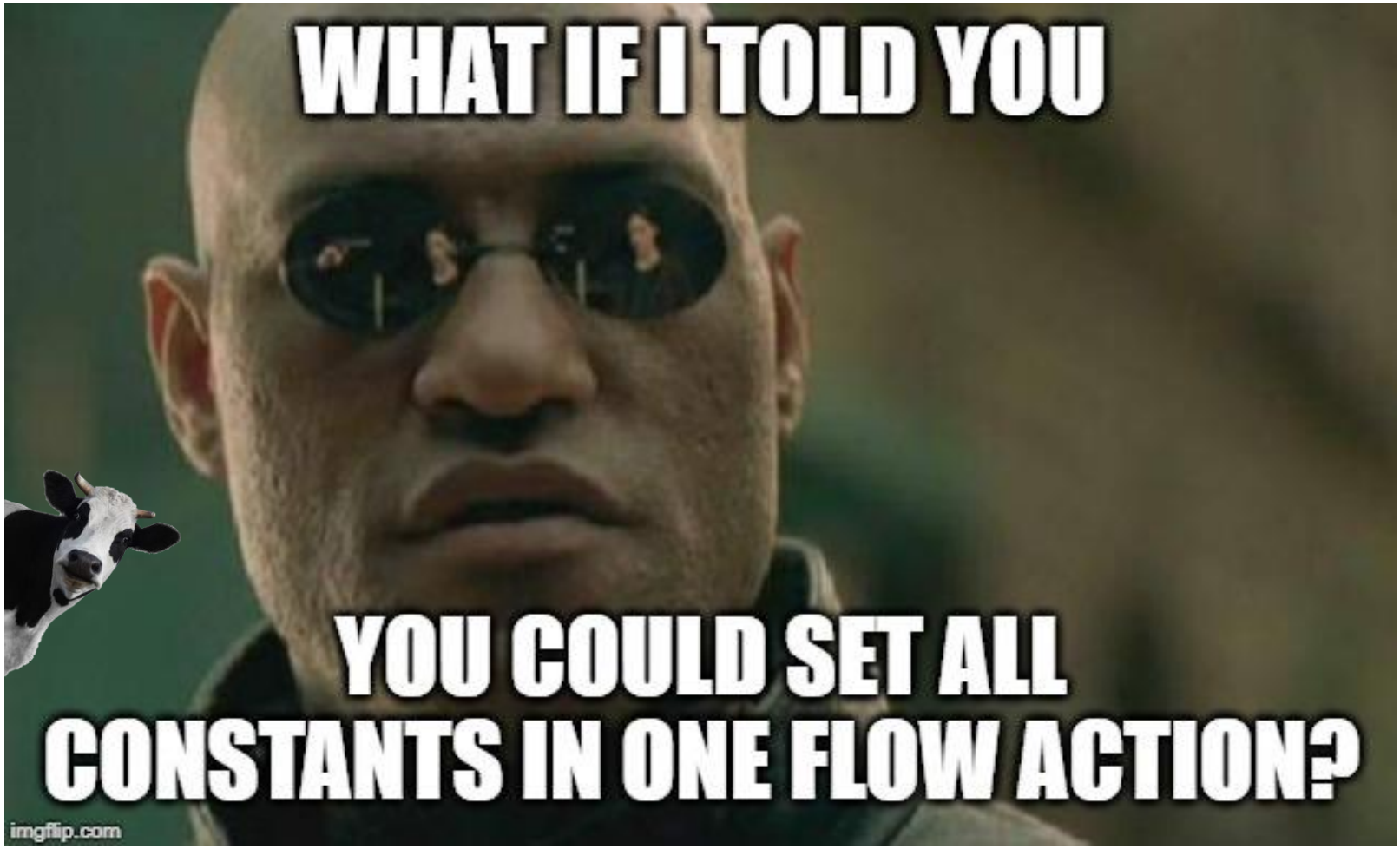

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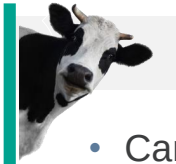
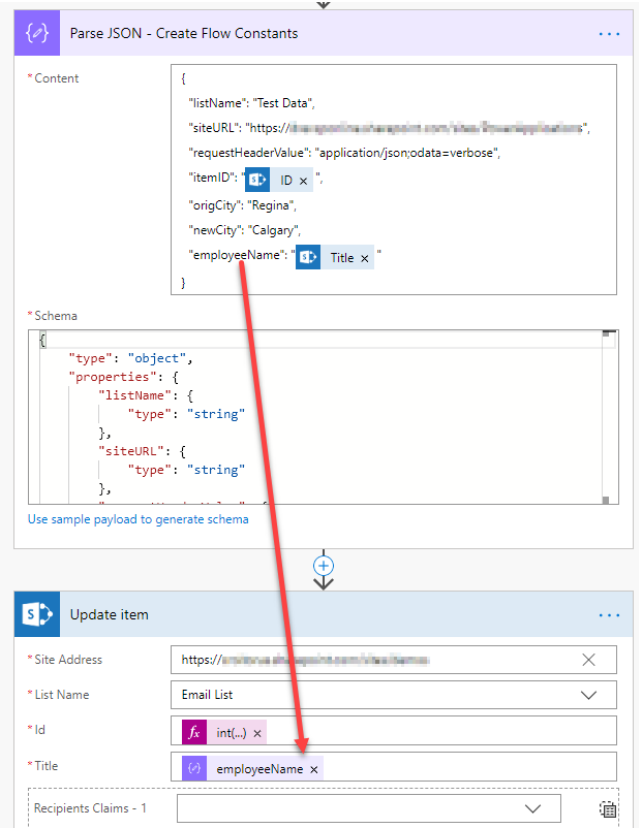


Initiating numerous variables unnecessary

- Can avoid the long list of variable initiations
- Build all constants in one flow activity
- Technique will NOT work for dynamic variables.



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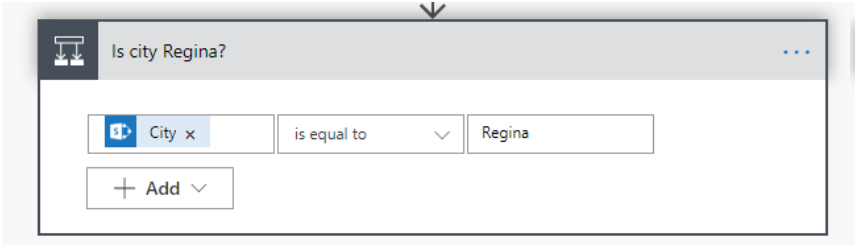
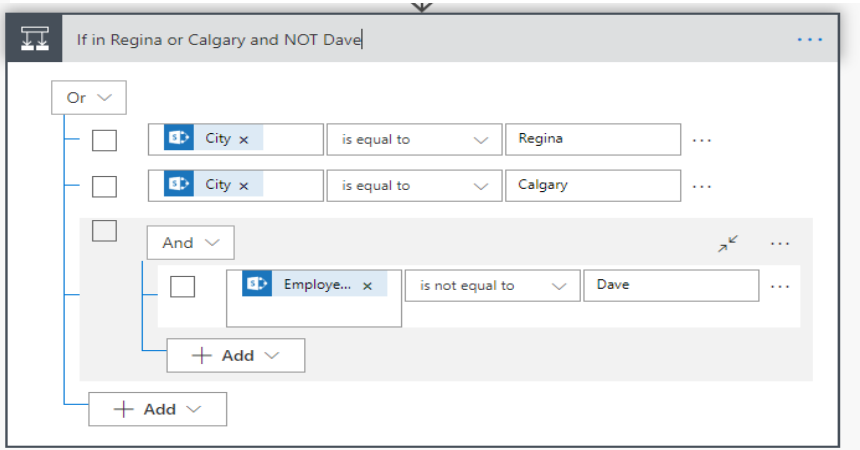
CONDITIONALS

If Condition

- Branches flow based on true or false
- Can include single checks or multiple checks (and\or)
- Shouldn't be overused (avoid nesting)





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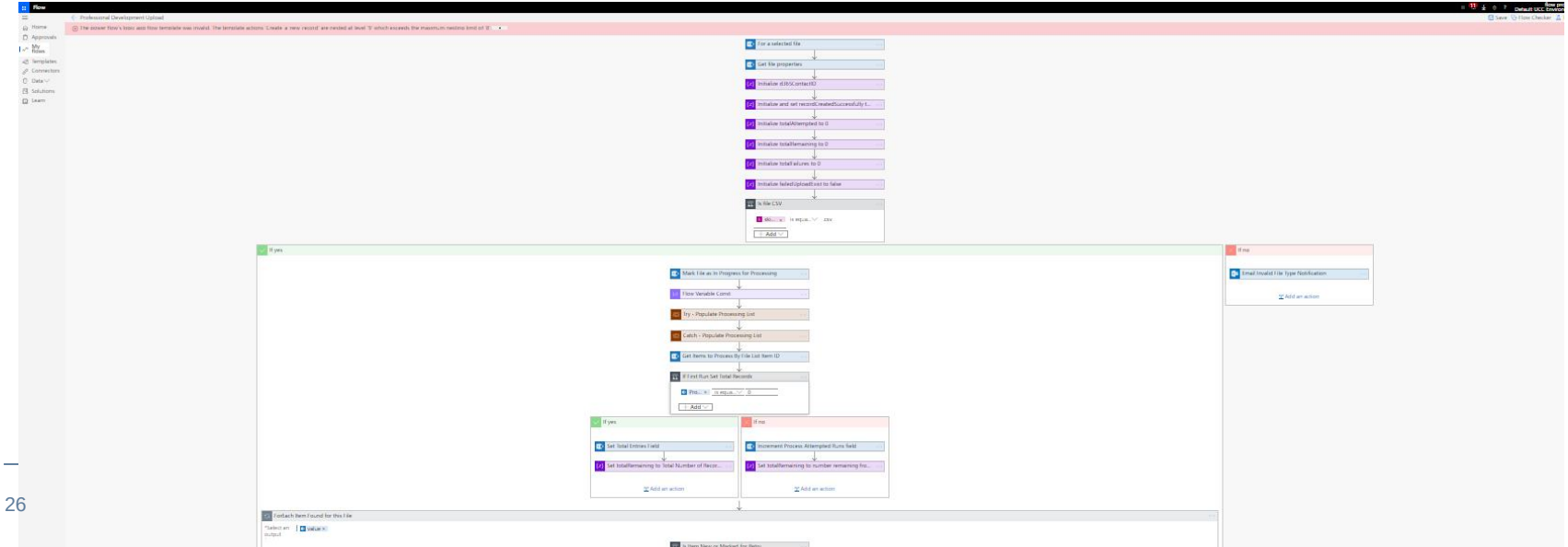
NESTING CONDITIONALS = BAD

Flows only allow 8 levels of nested conditionals

- Have you ever seen this error message: “The power flow's logic app flow template was invalid. The template actions ‘<ACTION NAME>' are nested at level '9' which exceeds the maximum nesting limit of ‘8’”?
- Deeply nested flows should be avoided. One of the main reasons is readability:



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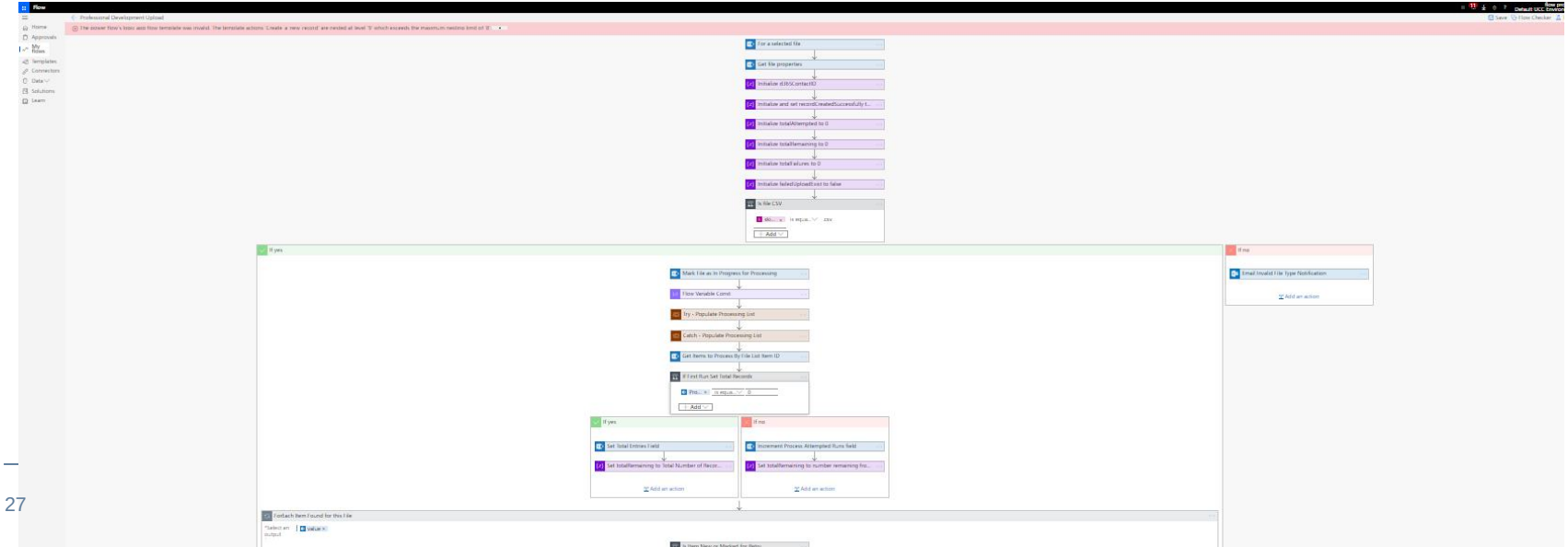

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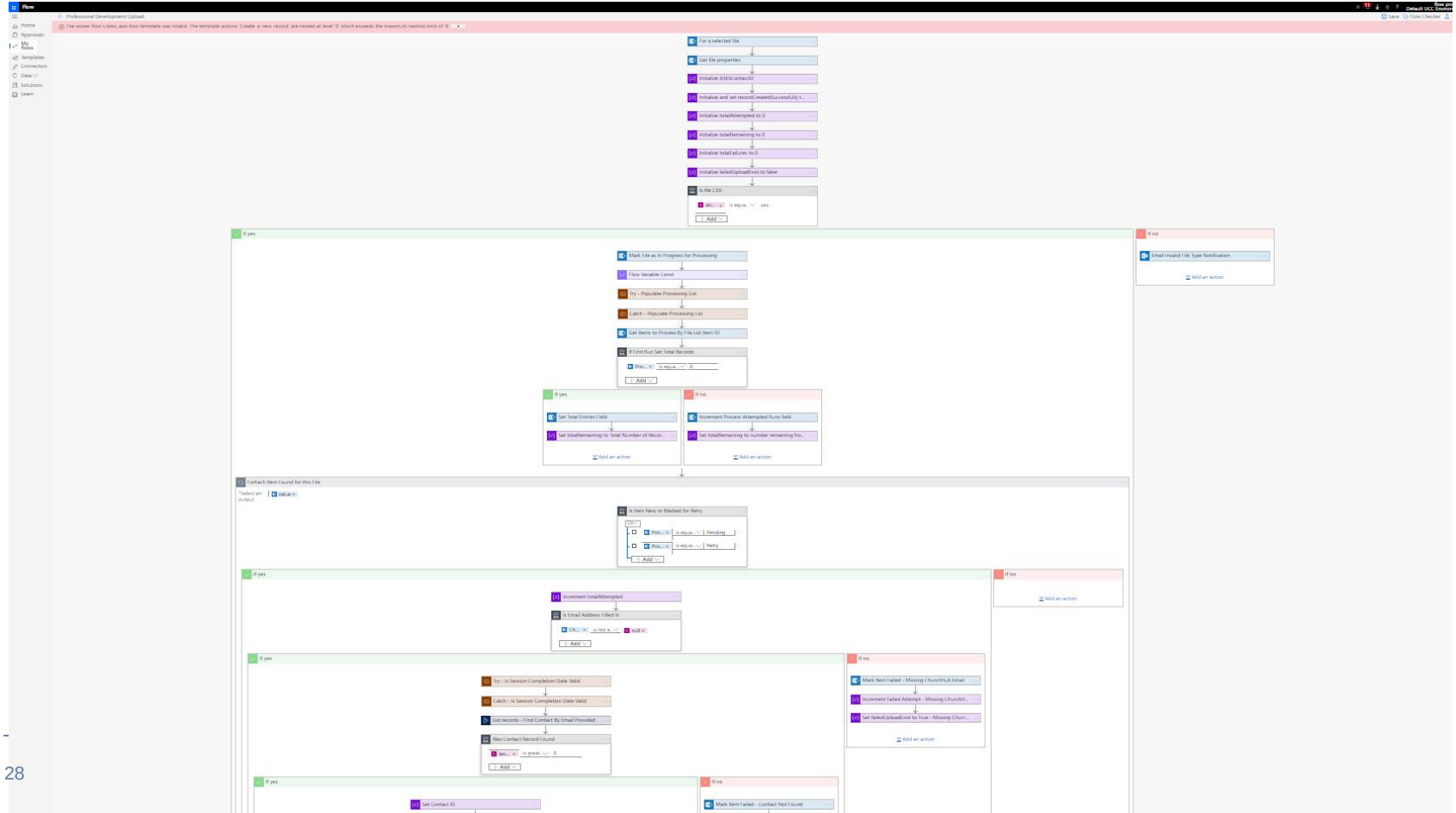
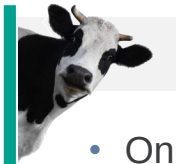
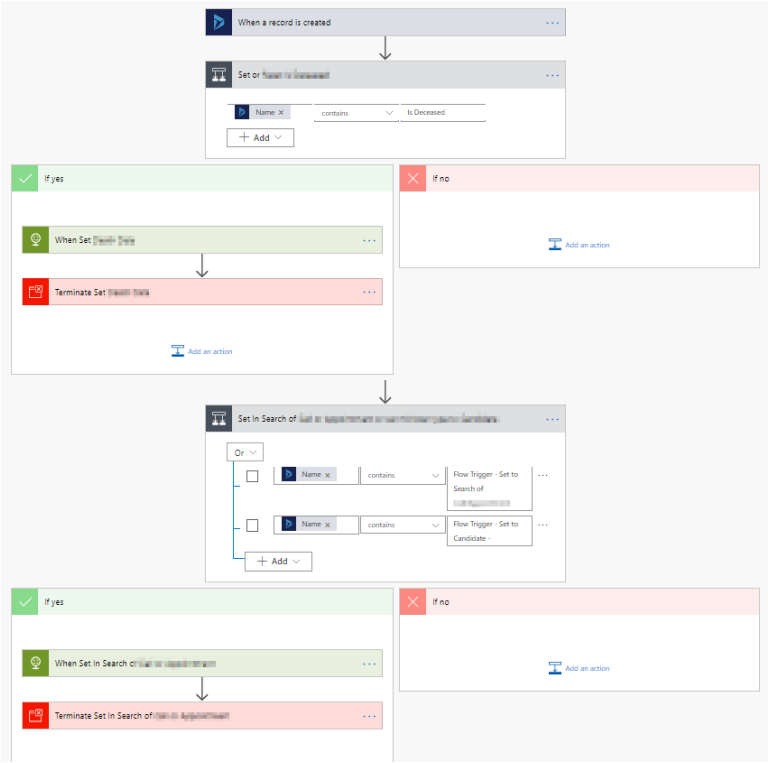


FLATTEN OUT CONDITIONALS



Use Terminate

- One of the conditions should terminate to end the Flow. The other should continue
- Will not work if within a ForEach



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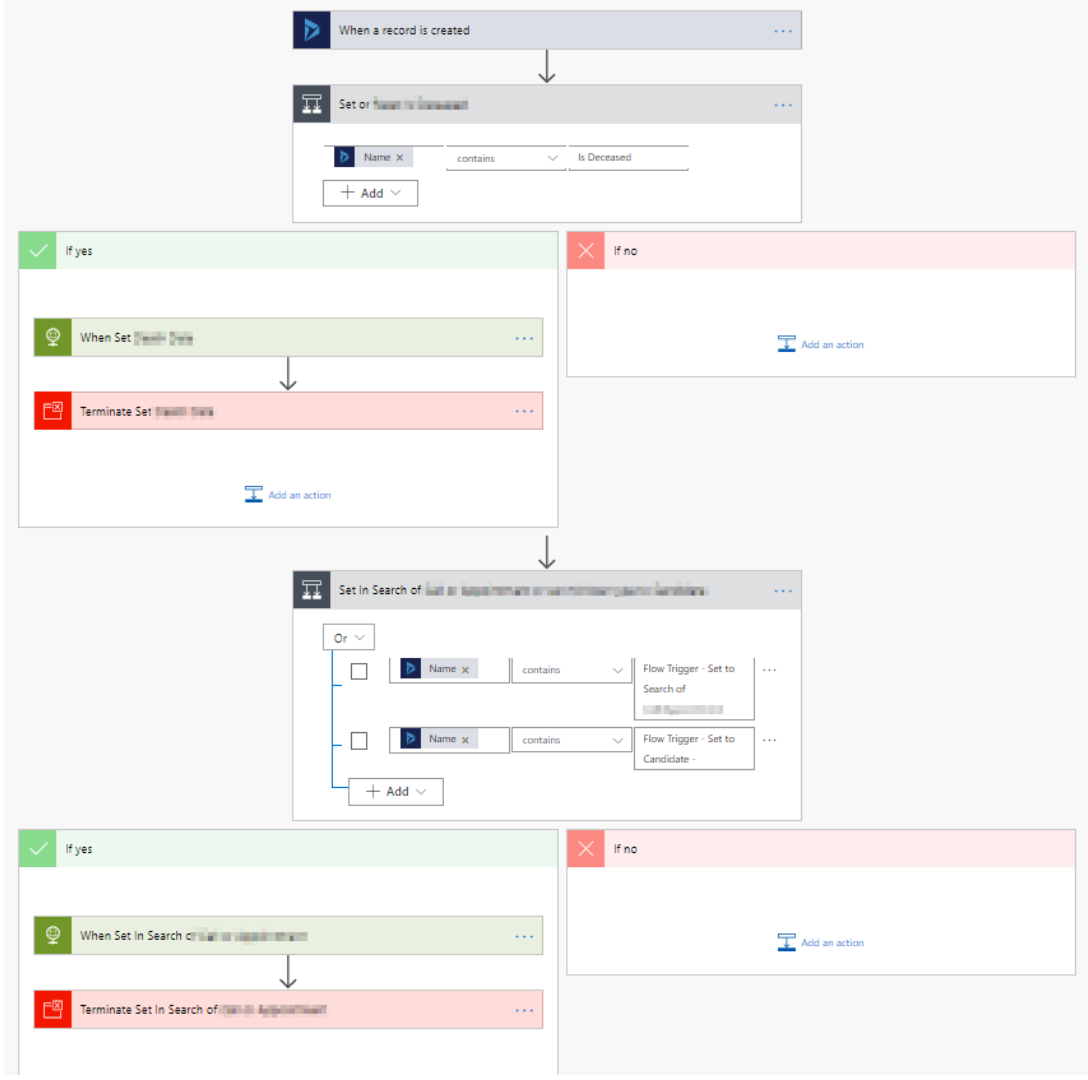
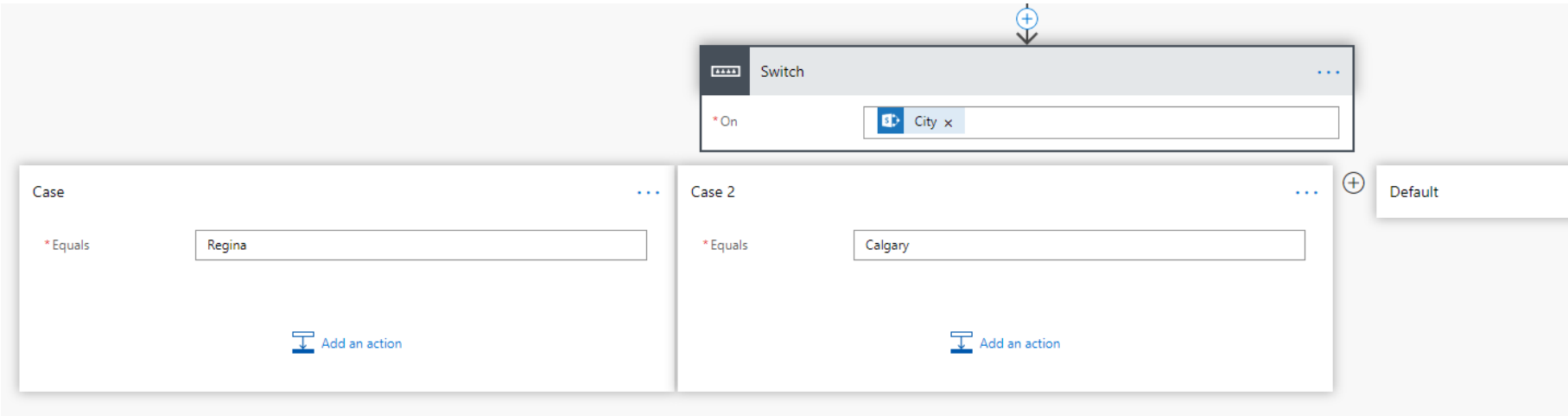

When a record is created
Set or
Name
contains
Is Deceased
Add
If yes
When Set
Terminate Set
Add an action
If no
Add an action
Set In Search of
Or
Name
contains
Flow Trigger - Set to Search of
Name
contains
Flow Trigger - Set to Candidate -
Add
If yes
When Set In Search of
Terminate Set In Search of
If no
Add an action

CONDITIONALS

Switch

- Checks if a variable or property is one of multiple possible values
- Avoid large number of if-conditions



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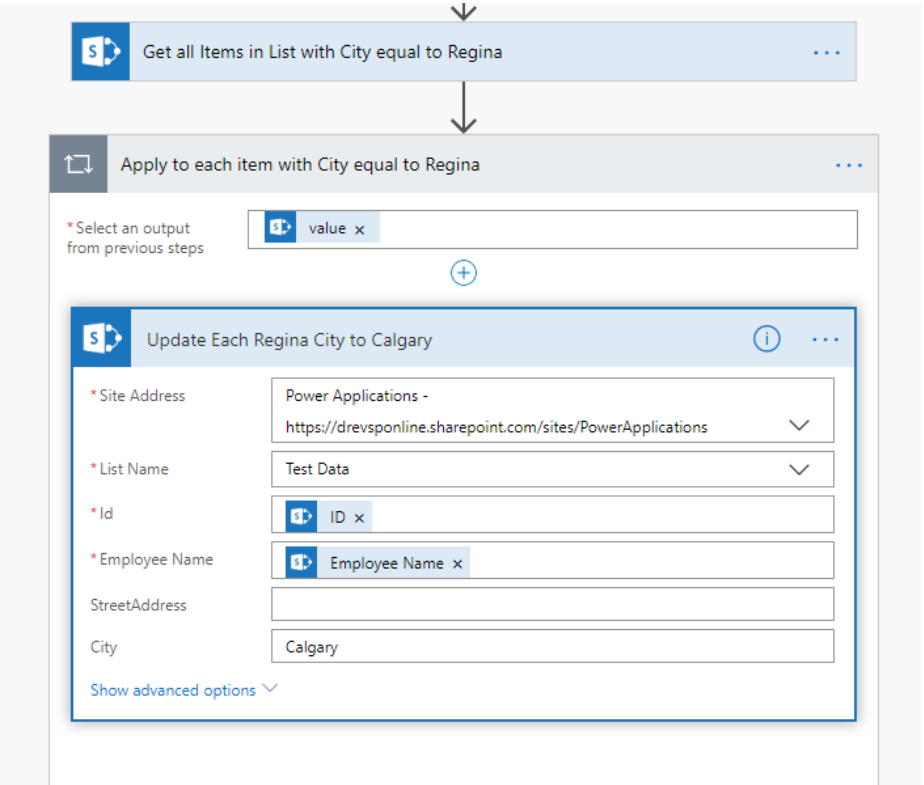
LOOPING

Apply to Each

- Also known as “For Each”
- Runs for each item in an array or collection
- Can’t force and exit
- If error occurs can cause Flow to fail without dealing with all items in collection



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JSON – THE BASIS OF FLOWS

All Flows are built on JSON

- JSON (JavaScript Object Notation) is a lightweight data-interchange format
- Easy for parsing and passing information between systems
- Flow uses JSON to pass data between triggers and actions


```
{
    "@odata.etag": "\"1\"",
    "ItemInternalId": "260",
    "ID": 260,
    "Title": "Jason",
    "Modified": "2019-07-24T15:36:30Z",
    "Author": {
        "Claims": "i:0#.f|membership|haniel@vertexpoint.com",
        "DisplayName": "Haniel Croitoru",
        "Email": "haniel@vertexpoint.com",
        "Department": null,
        "JobTitle": null
    },
    "Author#Claims": "i:0#.f|membership|haniel@vertexpoint.com",
}
```


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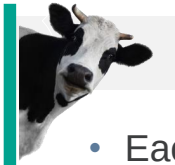
NEVER “FIRE AND FORGET”



Always handle the response

- Each action returns some information
- The information will include the output of the action and also indicate whether the action was successful or not

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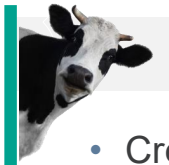
HANDLE HTTP RESPONSES QUICKLY

Learning the response

- Flows often require the responses to be parsed for later used
- Hard to know at times the format of the response (schema)



Use Flow itself to determine the format

- Create a “dummy” flow that sends the HTTP query
- Response is automatically captured in the HTTP call
- Run the “dummy” flow and paste the response into the builder of a **Parse JSON** action

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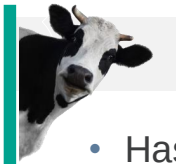
CHILD FLOWS



Call another flow from a flow

- Has some rules to consider
  - Only available in solutions (not available to a single flow)
  - Child Flows MUST have a response or can't be added

- Being part of a solution creates further rules:
  - A Power App in a solution can only see flows that exist in that solution
  - A Flow in a solution is not available as a Flow outside of the solution.
  - A Flow in a solution can call another flow in a solution via HTTP.
  - A Flow in a solution can call another flow NOT in a solution via HTTP.
  - A Flow NOT in a solution can call another flow IN a solution via HTTP.

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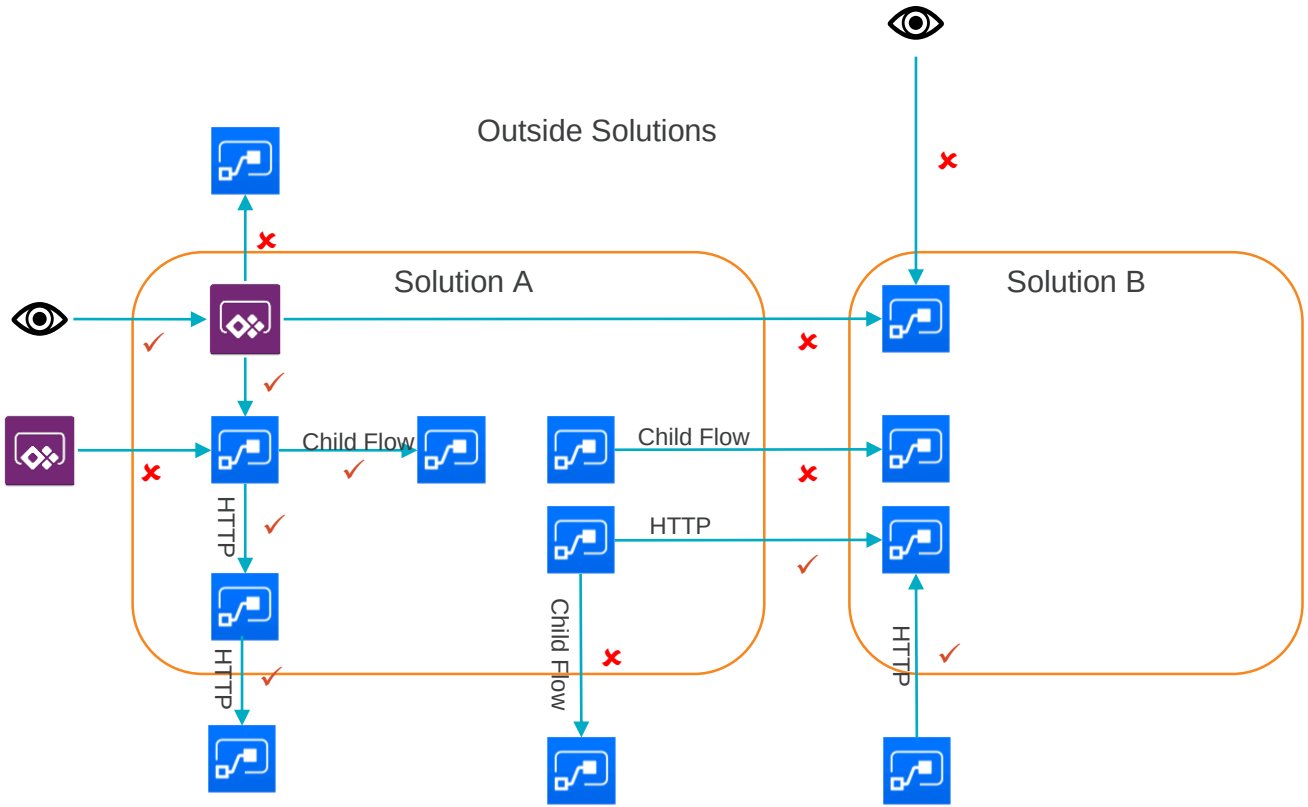
CHILD FLOWS



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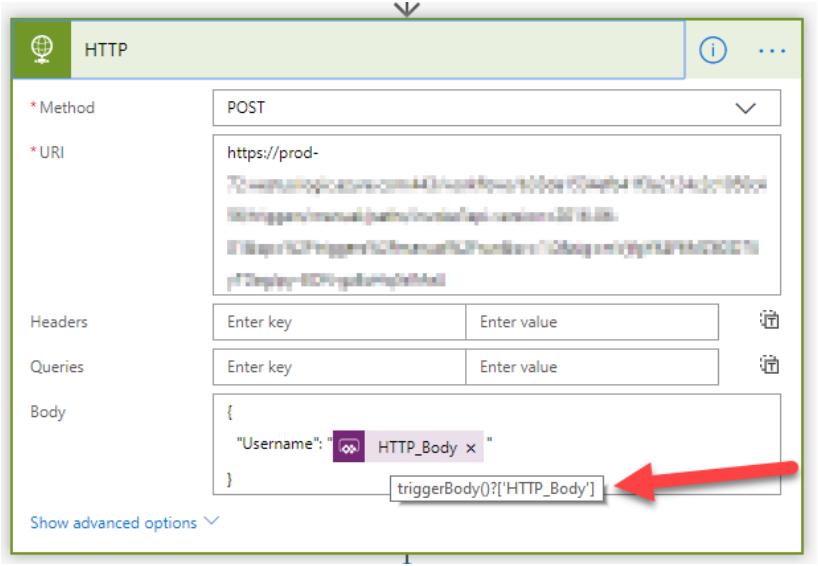
VIEWING DYNAMIC CONTENT WITH HOVER

Dynamic Content is also JSON

- Hover on top of Dynamic Content to find out its reference
- Important when there is no direct access to the value from the Dynamic Content selector



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WRITING EXPRESSIONS

Anatomy of an Expression

```
fx replace('Title: placeholder', 'placeholder', 'Flow')
```

- Many reasons to use expressions:
  - Convert types
  - Perform simple, inline calculations like string manipulation or arithmetic, or date/time manipulation
  - Generate data like the current time, a GUID or a random number
  - Handling optional values
  - “If” conditional statements / control flow
  - Working with lists

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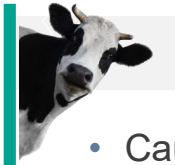
WRITING EXPRESSIONS



Handling Optional Values

- Caution: trying to use a property that's not set – aka "null"
  - Will cause the flow to fail
- Two steps to handle:
  - Use the "?" character after selecting the property (this happens automatically). Use when chaining access to sub properties.
  - Then, use the coalesce() function to provide a default value

```
fx coalesce(body('Get_record')?['parent']?['child'],'Default Value')
```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POWER APPS – TIPS, TRICKS, & LESSONS FROM THE TRENCHES

POWER APPS ARE DECLARATIVE

When you think Power Apps, think Excel!

- Build an app as easily as building a spreadsheet
- Leverage all of your existing Excel knowledge
- Control properties cannot be set, value is defined by a single formula
- Logic automatically performed as values change – the app “recalculates”
- Lots of formulas, no monolithic procedures

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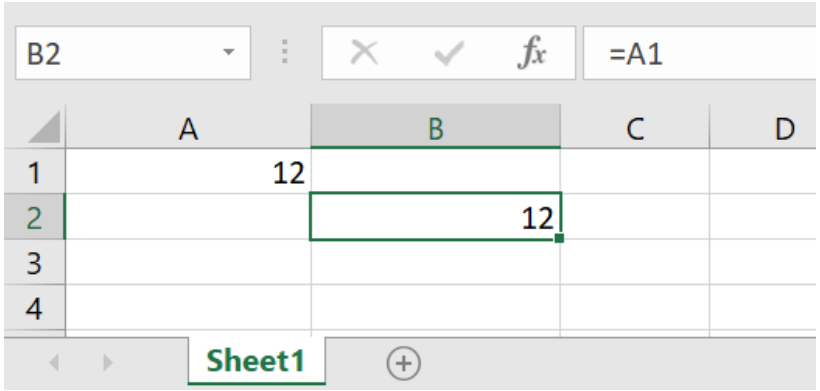
POWER APPS ARE DECLARATIVE



Excel

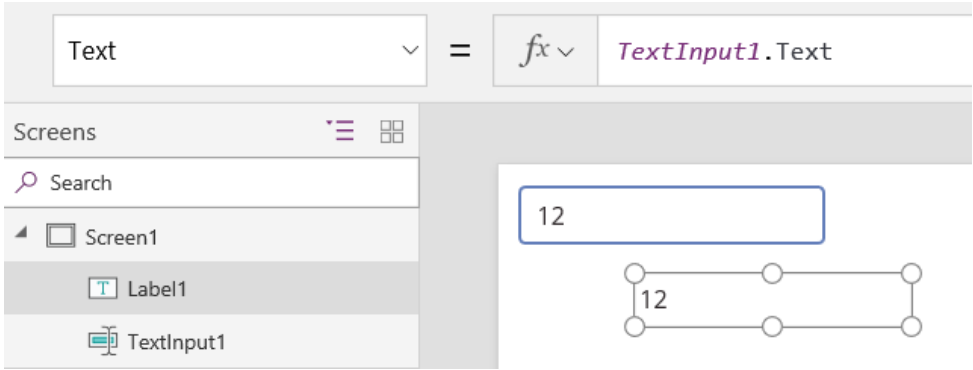
B1's cell value depends on A1's cell value

Automatically recalculated as A1 changes

Power Apps

Label1's Text property depends on TextInput1's Text property

Automatically recalculated as TextInput1 changes



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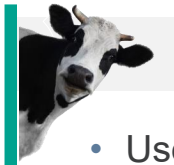
SETTING APPS ON START

OnStart()

- Imperative formula runs when application starts execution
- Set as a property of the first screen
- Not actually a property of the screen, instead a property of the app
- To rerun during authoring, need to reload the app



Loading Data

- Useful for preloading data, starting on a particular screen, …

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CHANGING ACTIVE SCREENS

OnVisible()

- Imperative formula runs when a screen is shown
- Set as a property of each first screen
- Useful for updating information on the current screen

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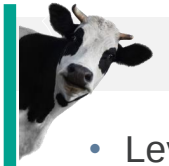
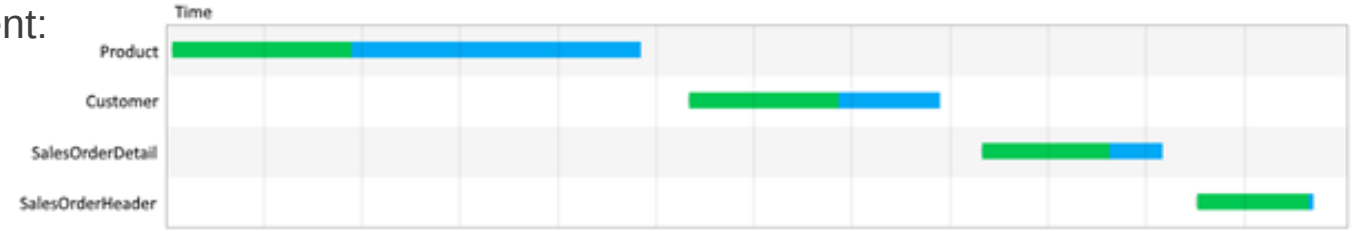
CONCURRENCY



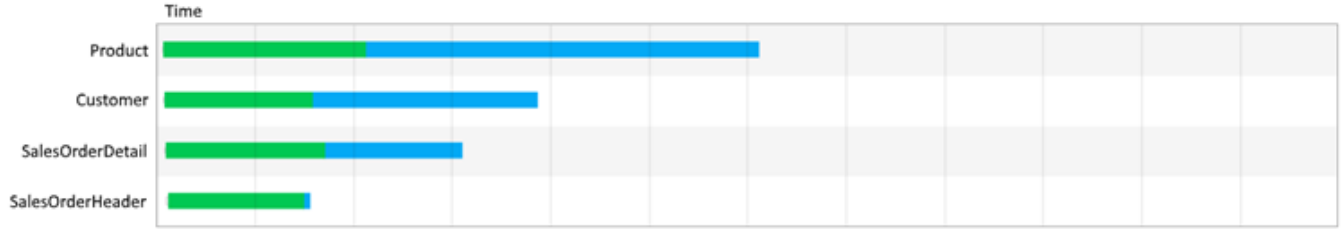
Concurrent Data Loading

- Leverage Concurrent() to save time pre-fetching data

Without Concurrent:



With Concurrent:



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GLOBAL, CONTEXT AND COLLECTION VARIABLES

Global Variables

- App wide scope
- Primary function: **Set**
- App wide scope

Context Variables

- Local screen scope (the screen's "context")
- Primary functions: **Navigate**, **UpdateContext**
- Pass values to a screen like passing parameters to a procedure

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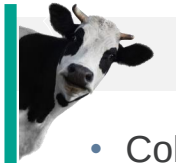
GLOBAL, CONTEXT AND COLLECTION VARIABLES

Collections

- Tables only
- Primary functions: **Collect**, **Clear**, **ClearCollect**, **Update**, **Remove**



Collections Offline

- Collections can be saved to the local device with **SaveData**
- Collections can also be loaded from local device with **LoadData**
- Great for taking apps offline

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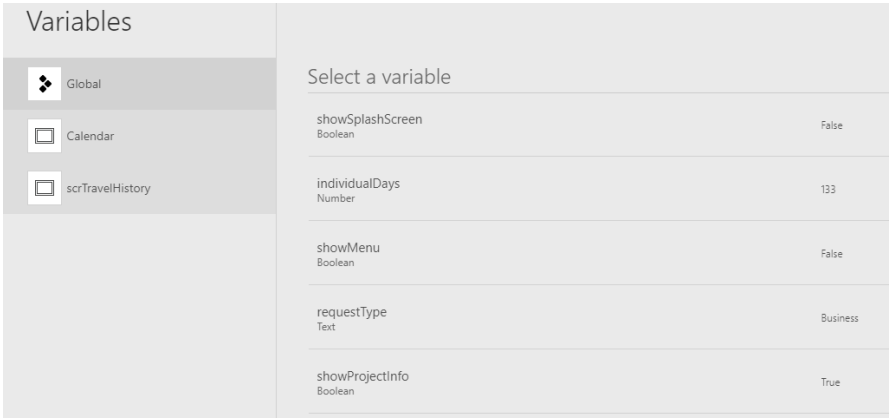
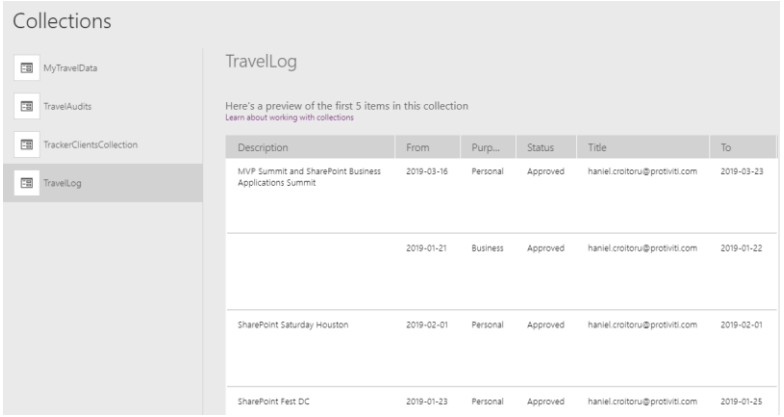
GLOBAL, CONTEXT AND COLLECTION VARIABLES

Checking Values

- Use the Variables and Collections menus





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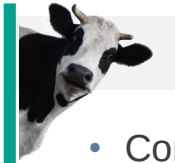
GLOBAL, CONTEXT AND COLLECTION VARIABLES



Run-Time Variable Values

- Consider adding a *Debug panel* inside the app to show the real-time updates without leaving the app

User [redacted]

Role

Change State Draft

Change Role cofadmin

Minister ID:

Minister Type:

Minister Type: Candidate

COF has manse:

Assignment Type: 801270000
Item ID:-1

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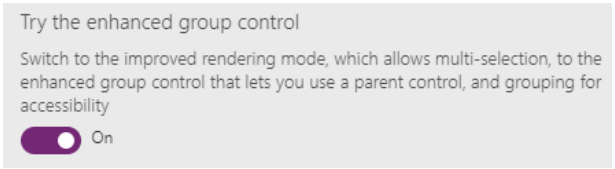
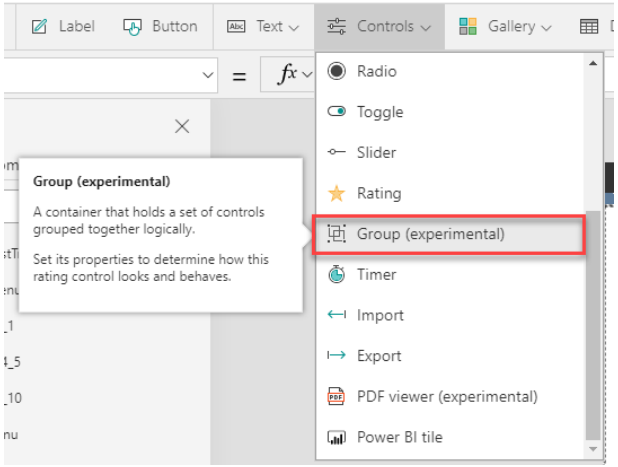
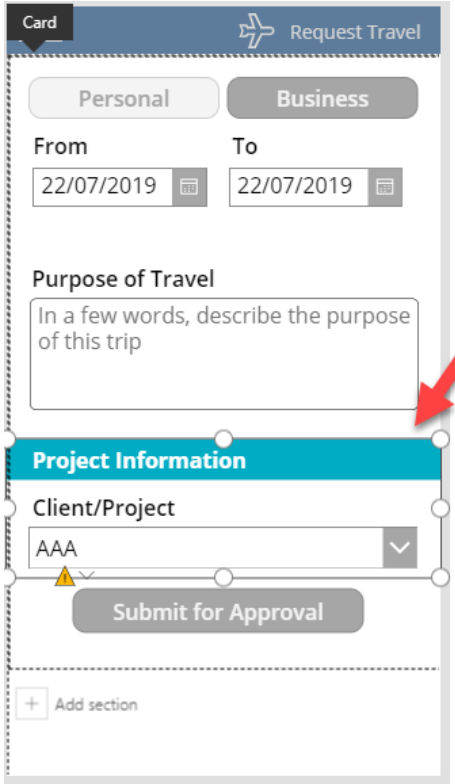
GROUP CONTROLS FOR EASIER MANAGEMENT

Enhanced Group Control

- Under App settings/Advanced settings, turn on *enhanced group control*
- Simplify control positioning and visibility
- Every control within a Group become relative to the boundaries of that group







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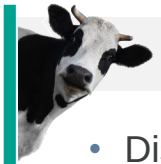
RESPONSIVE DESIGN

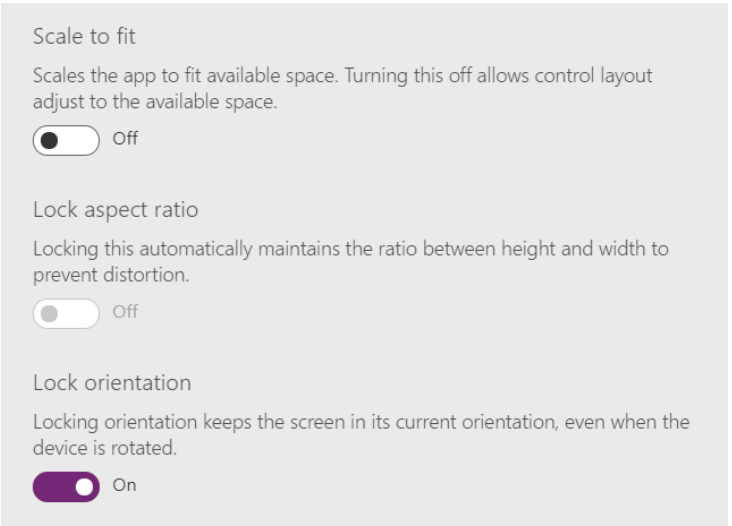
Build once, use on many

- Power Apps built should work on many devices
- Problem: By default, apps are set to a specific resolution



Relative positions and sizes

- Disable *Scale to fit*
- Disable *Lock orientation*
- Use Group control
- Use *App.Width* and *App.Height* to determine position and orientation of controls
    - Avoid *App.DesignWidth* and *App.DesignHeight*



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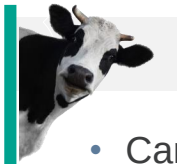
POWER APPS AND FLOW: A GREAT PAIRING

Can use Power Automate from within Power Apps

- A common usage of Power Automate within a Power App is to insert, update or delete data from a source
- Often started with a button click action after data has been modified on the form



More than just inserting data

- Can use a Flow to pull data based on information within the form
  - User information
  - Info for dropdown lists
- Commonly happens at on App or screen loads, but can be done anywhere
- **IMPORTANT**: If you change the Schema of the response, you have to remove and re-add the Flow connection

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