

Ethical Principles for the Metaverse and their Implementation

Exploratory Group Proposal

FINAL

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1. Proposers

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1. Exploratory Group Scope

This exploratory group will build consensus and draft a proposed charter for a Domain Working Group on Ethical Principles for the Metaverse and their Implementations.

2. Proposed Working Group Goals (and Non-Goals) and Deliverables

The emergence of the metaverse in recent years has prompted reflection on its ethical challenges. The many facets of the metaverse and the many and varied technologies involved (XR, blockchain and NFTs, digital twins and AI, etc.) may raise numerous ethical issues at many levels: privacy, cybersecurity, identity, impact on physical and mental health and well-being of users, issues related to equal access and the digital divide, bias and discrimination, and representation and inclusivity, among others.

The ethical challenges posed by the Metaverse, and the ethical principles that should guide its development, have already been addressed - either more summarily or more comprehensively - by multiple actors, including public and private institutions [1,2], NGOs [3], professional guilds [4], and citizens' panels [5], among others. While these approaches have some apparent similarities and show common values, there are also some differences. The existence of different lenses through which to approach ethical issues [6], cultural differences, and even different individual appreciations, highlight the multiple perspectives and legitimate ways of approaching this issue.

This group will start by recognising this variety of perspectives, and rather than adopting a prescriptive or normative position, will focus on a *descriptive* approach: the main aim will be to review and take stock of the different approaches that have been proposed as a basis for the ethical principles of the metaverse, to synthesize those principles that generate great consensus, as well as to identify those issues that prompt greater debate and stimulate reflection on them. Also, to identify different mechanisms for implementing these principles in organisations, and to issue recommendations around them.

Therefore, the proposed charter would set goals and key activities to create a committee to bring institutions together to collaborate on ethical principles for the metaverse and their implementations. In particular, we propose to:

- Identify previous accounts of ethical principles for the development, use, procurement and commercialisation, of the metaverse. Analyse the principles on which different actors and groups working on the issue are more in agreement, the potential discrepancies among them, and possible ways to reconcile different visions.
- Define a methodology and governance model to implement ethical principles in organisations.



- Define and implement tools to support detecting and mitigating ethical problems with specific uses of the metaverse.
- Share best and worst practices on the undesired social, societal and ethical impact of metaverse use.
- Ensure that diverse perspectives are integrated throughout the process.

Non-goals:

- In the same way that the Metaverse Standards Forum does not develop standards but aims to facilitate the conditions for their development, this group does not assume the *prescription* of ethical principles as a goal. The objective is not to develop a code of conduct or a set of binding principles for all, but to map the state of the art, to encourage discussion, and to raise awareness and facilitate the adoption of ethical principles and codes of conduct by different organizations in the future. Thus, this group will not undertake any direct advocacy or lobbying activity.
- This group will avoid overlapping with the work of other groups. Specifically, this group will coordinate with the Domain Working Group on Privacy, Cybersecurity & Identity to avoid dealing doubly with issues already addressed in this group and coordinate possible joint work strategies between the two groups.
- Although the group may explore technological tools that could facilitate the implementation of ethical principles, it is not the group's objective to carry out such implementation.

Method / Activities:

In order to reach the above goals we propose the following set of activities:

- State-of-the-art analysis of ethical principles and their implementation of other disruptive technologies (e.g., AI).
- Identification of similar initiatives and contributions on ethical principles for the metaverse
- Review of ethical principles for the metaverse that have been proposed, synthesize the commonly accepted elements and those that generate debate, integrate this knowledge into a common framework.
- Survey on proposed governance methods, identify and critically analyze advantages and disadvantages, propose ethical governance models and methods based on these.
- Survey on existing organizational processes for the implementation of ethical principles.
- Survey on technical implementation of tools, what options exist, advantages, disadvantages, limitations.
- Create and operate forum for sharing best and worst practices
- Socialize initiatives with external partners such as regulators and international organizations.

3. Coordination

Given the cross-cutting nature of ethical issues, this group will actively seek to coordinate with groups that are addressing similar issues, including:

- Groups within the Metaverse Standards Forum:
 - Metaverse Standards Forum Standards Registration Working Group
 - Metaverse Standards Forum Domain Working Group on Privacy, Cybersecurity & Identity
- External groups, such as the XR Guild (<https://xrguild.org/>) and others working on similar topics.

4. Risk Factors



- Too broad scope, too many topics to be included.
- The ethical principles considered, on which there is sufficient consensus, are too broad and generic to effectively guide practice.
- "Well-meant" internal debate doesn't result in a real improvement in ethics in the field.
- Having too many members in the group can make the group difficult to operate.
- Difficulty in reaching consensus in the face of widely divergent views among group members, particularly on specific topics that could generate heated debate.
- Lack of sufficient diversity in the group leading to partial or biased conclusions.

5. Target timeline to create proposed Working Group charter

12 weeks

6. Additional Contributors

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7. References

[1] Polona, C. A. R., André, M. T., & Maria, N. (2022). Metaverse: Opportunities, risks and policy implications. *European Parliamentary Research Service*. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733557](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)733557)

[2] Benjamins, R., Rubio Viñuela, Y. & Alonso, C. (2023). Social and ethical challenges of the metaverse: Opening the debate. *AI and Ethics*, 3, 689–697. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-023-00278-5>

[3] <https://www.protiviti.com/sg-en/blogs/mekong-club-ngo-ethical-metaverse>

[4] XR Guild <https://xrguild.org/>

[5] European Citizens' Virtual Worlds Panel (2023). *Developing fair and desirable European Virtual Worlds. Panel output*. https://citizens.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/Recommendations_Citizen%20Panel%20Virtual%20Worlds_v2.pdf

[6] Vallor, S., Raicu, I., Green, E. (2020). *Technology and engineering practice: Ethical lenses to look through*. The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University. <https://www.scu.edu/ethics-in-technology-practice/ethical-lenses/>