

Ethical Principles for the Metaverse

Working Group Charter

1. Status and Change History

23 October 2024 – Initial Draft for Oversight Committee approval

3 December 2024 - Finalized Charter for Oversight Committee Approval

2. Officers

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3. Motivation and Goals (and NON-Goals)

The rise of the Metaverse has raised important ethical questions. Historically, digital ethics have been reactive—businesses have often operated without guardrails, leading to harm. The Metaverse's diverse technologies introduce ethical issues in areas such as privacy, cybersecurity, identity, mental health, access, discrimination, and inclusivity. As the Metaverse is still evolving, now is the time to establish ethical standards to prevent repeating past mistakes.

Ethical spaces in the Metaverse should promote safety, health, equality, and inclusion. Ethics are complex, with regional and cultural differences, and as a dynamic concept, they must evolve. Our goal is to support Metaverse system designers in prioritizing ethics in their products and services and to collaborate with other working groups on ethical issues. We also believe interoperability is fundamentally an ethical issue, which will be the foundation of our group's proposed work.

Various actors—including public and private institutions, NGOs, professional guilds, and citizens' panels—have begun addressing the ethical challenges of the Metaverse. While their approaches share common values, they also reflect different cultural and individual perspectives. This diversity highlights the need for an informed understanding of ethical boundaries across different commercial and cultural norms as the Metaverse becomes more interconnected. Interoperability, a key goal for the MSF, aligns with this group's aim, though sensitivity to personal, cultural, and legal ethics is crucial.

Rather than adopt a prescriptive stance, this group will focus on reviewing and synthesizing the various ethical approaches proposed for the Metaverse, identifying areas of consensus, and addressing contentious issues. We also aim to explore mechanisms for implementing these principles and collaborate with other MSF groups on relevant use cases.

Goals

1. Create a committee to bring institutions together to collaborate on ethical principles for the Metaverse and their implementations.
2. Identify previous accounts of ethical principles for the development, use, procurement and commercialization of the Metaverse. Analyze 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. Examples of previous attempts at ethical best practices with the



Metaverse/digital citizenship include: GDPR regulations, XRSI list, Responsible Metaverse Alliance, XR Guild, and other SDOs.

3. Identify ethical principles such as those relating to Accountability and Transparency, Security, Privacy, and Bias, Accessibility and Access Equality.
4. Identify unethical behaviors such as manipulative patterns, coercion, lack of transparency, the reproduction of harmful bias, and inaccessibility to inform technology developers and users against the proliferation of these harms.
5. Identify unanticipated and future harms possible with emerging technologies
6. Share best and worst practices on the undesired social, societal and ethical impact of Metaverse use.
7. Ensure that diverse perspectives are integrated throughout the process: such as those of users and developers.

Non-goals:

1. 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.
2. 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, Digital Asset Management, and Accessibility to avoid dealing doubly with issues already addressed in this group and coordinate possible joint work strategies between the two groups.
3. 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.

4. Project Deliverables and Requirements

Annual Report

- Current analysis of ethical principles and their implementation of other disruptive technologies
- 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.
- Research proposed governance methods, identify and critically analyze advantages and disadvantages.
- Research existing organizational processes for the implementation of ethical principles.
- Research practical implementation of ethical guidelines.
- Key content, such as the definition of the meaning of ethics in the Metaverse, present perspectives on what should be included in a common framework, principles, glossary, etc.

Monthly Meetings:

- Create and operate forum for sharing best and worst practices
- Align with external partners such as SDOs and international organizations.
- Interviews with leaders of other organizations - WG members to suggest and carry out interviews (government orgs, other not for profit). What are some out there suggestions for concerns that cut across ethics in the Metaverse
- Assessing MSF WG Use Cases

Events:

- Speaker series: invite speakers from organizations engaged in ethics
- Workshops, and case study presentations
- Semi annual or annual "MSF Ethics Summit" Town Hall open to wider group and industry with invited chairs from other groups to hear about ethical concerns: gather feedback as well as prepare for an event where we also hear from the participants (collecting data from both ends)

5. Milestone Plan

- 30 days: Monthly meetings set up
- 90 days: Speaker series set up
- 6 months: Town Hall planned
- 1 year: Annual Report delivered

6. 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 Groups:
 - Privacy, Cybersecurity, and Identity
 - Accessibility
 - Digital Asset Management
- External groups, such as the XR Guild (<https://xrguild.org/>) and others working on similar topics.

7. Communication Plan

The Working Group will determine the frequency and cadence of meetings throughout various phases. Meeting agendas will be posted to its space within the Metaverse Standards Forum (MSF) portal. After each meeting, the minutes and a recording of the meeting will also be posted. In addition to the meeting agendas, minutes, and recordings, the Working Group will provide a quarterly update and an annual report on its progress on key deliverables and initiatives to the Oversight Committee and, where appropriate, other Domain Working Groups. At the request of the Oversight Committee, updates can be provided to the general MSF membership.

There also may be times when the MSF may want the Working Group to communicate its activities externally. The form and content of such external communications will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

8. 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.
- Alignment of ethical topics being addressed with the diverse ethical standards issued by leading Think Tanks and associations (PAI ethical principles framework)

9. Working Group Renewal

The duration of this working group will be 2 years. Once the Working Group has reached its first anniversary, it should have a project plan with specific deliverables and due dates.

10. Project Funding and Resources

The exact process for funding is to be determined by the Forum Board. For any project listed here, a cost estimate will be provided, if needed, and a specific proposal will be submitted to the Board.

11. 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/>