



BSI Standards Publication

Systems and software engineering — Life cycle management

Part 7000: Standard model process for addressing
ethical concerns during system design

National foreword

This British Standard is the UK implementation of ISO/IEC/IEEE 24748-7000:2022.

The UK participation in its preparation was entrusted to Technical Committee IST/15, Software and systems engineering.

A list of organizations represented on this committee can be obtained on request to its committee manager.

This standard was produced by the US IEEE Computer Society within their committee processes and as such is a professionally produced standard. However, the UK committee have reservations about its usefulness as a standalone item for anyone interested in system design. The UK committee's reservations are as follows.

- a) It is difficult to treat ethical aspects of system design alone. BS/ISO/IEC/IEEE 15288:2015 *Systems and software engineering —System life cycle processes* already covers system design, and although it does not focus on ethical aspects specifically, it puts system design in the framework of complete system life cycle processes. BS/ISO/IEC/IEEE 15288:2015 is referenced informatively in BS/ISO/IEC/IEEE:24748-7000:2022.
- b) The UK committee did not get opportunity to provide technical review comments on this standard but hope to do so when it is reviewed in future.
- c) BS/ISO/IEC/IEEE:24748-7000:2022 can provide users with useful insight into system design. However, because it has not been widely used internationally, the UK committee urges caution to its users in applying the standard.

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Life cycle management —**

**Part 7000:
Standard model process for
addressing ethical concerns during
system design**



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IEEE Standard Model Process for Addressing Ethical Concerns during System Design

Developed by the

Systems and Software Engineering Standards Committee
of the
IEEE Computer Society

Approved 16 June 2021

IEEE SA Standards Board

Abstract: A set of processes by which organizations can include consideration of ethical values throughout the stages of concept exploration and development is established by this standard. Management and engineering in transparent communication with selected stakeholders for ethical values elicitation and prioritization is supported by this standard, involving traceability of ethical values through an operational concept, value propositions, and value dispositions in the system design. Processes that provide for traceability of ethical values in the concept of operations, ethical requirements, and ethical risk-based design are described in the standard. All sizes and types of organizations using their own life cycle models are relevant to this standard.

Keywords: case for ethics, concept of operations, ethical value requirements, ethical values elicitation, ethically aligned design, IEEE 7000™, software engineering, system engineering, value-based requirements, value prioritization

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Introduction

This introduction is not part of IEEE Std 7000™-2021, IEEE Standard Model Process for Addressing Ethical Concerns during System Design.

Organizations are becoming increasingly aware of the need to demonstrate socially responsible behavior when dealing with stakeholders, customers, regulators, and society in general. Socially responsible organizations recognize that their decisions and actions affect not just their financial bottom line but also society and the environment. One of the principles of social responsibility is ethical behavior.

Engineers, their managers, and other stakeholders benefit from well-defined processes for considering ethical issues along with the usual concerns of system performance and functionality early in the system life cycle. Consumers can be unaware of the ethical considerations regarding the products and services they use; it is only by rigorously examining ethical concerns that manufacturers, engineers, and technologists can align products and services with the results valued by acquirers, consumers, and users.

This standard aims to support organizations in creating ethical value through system design. Creating ethical value is a vision for organizations that recognizes their central role in society as shapers of well-being and carriers of societal progress that benefits humanity. Implementing IEEE Std 7000 can help them to strengthen their value proposition and avoid value harms. It is applicable to all kinds of products and services, including artificial intelligence (AI) systems.

IEEE Std 7000 is recommended for use by organizations engaged in concept exploration, requirements definition, or development of new or revised products or services. The standard requires consideration of values relevant to the culture where the system is to be deployed. It is applicable with any life cycle model or development methodology. IEEE Std 7000 is designed to work for all sizes and types of organizations (e.g., large, small, for profit, non-profit) aiming to deliver products that enable the ethical values of their customers and their own organization. The standard can help organizations to build better products with a more refined and nuanced value proposition and with less risk. This standard can be more easily applied in the context of organizational policies that are consistent with the organization's ethical values, such as the following:

- Readiness to include a wide group of stakeholders in the engineering effort
- An open, transparent, and inclusive project culture
- A commitment to quality
- A dedication to ethical values from the top of the organization
- A commitment to allocate sufficient time and resources for ethical requirements definition

IEEE Std 7000 is most effectively applied when organizational leaders and top management are involved in and assume responsibility for the products and services created. Through key roles defined for IEEE Std 7000 project teams, this standard seeks to help align management and engineering activities with stakeholder expectations for ethical values in the operational concept, value propositions, and design features being developed.

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IEEE Standard Model Process for Addressing Ethical Concerns during System Design

1. Overview

1.1 Scope

The standard establishes a set of processes by which engineers and technologists can include consideration of ethical values throughout the stages of concept exploration and development, which encompass system initiation, analysis, and design. This standard provides engineers and technologists with an implementable process aligning innovation management processes, system design approaches, and software engineering methods to help address ethical concerns or risks during system design.

IEEE Std 7000™ does not give specific guidance on the design of algorithms to apply ethical values such as fairness and privacy.

1.2 Purpose

The goal of this standard is to enable organizations to design systems with explicit consideration of individual and societal ethical values, such as transparency, sustainability, privacy, fairness, and accountability, as well as values typically considered in system engineering, such as efficiency and effectiveness.

Projects conforming to IEEE Std 7000 balance management commitments for time and budget constraints with the long-term values of social responsiveness and accountability. To enable this, the commitment of top executives to establish and uphold organizational values is important.

NOTE—A system is sometimes considered as a product or as the services it provides.¹

1.3 Applicability and constraints

To reach its goal, this standard primarily supports organizations to identify stakeholder values and to engage in value-based system or service development. It is applicable within any life cycle model or set of methods for systems and software engineering. If organizations have running systems that cause ethical challenges, then the processes in this standard can be used for reiteration of value-based analysis.

¹Notes in text, tables, and figures of a standard are given for information only and do not contain requirements needed to implement this standard.

The processes in this standard apply during system conception and design for organizations seeking to uncover, address and monitor value concerns for a system intended for a given context. When organizations use IEEE Std 7000, it is the respective project teams, stakeholder groups, and organizational leaders who determine the values that a system is supposed to address and sustain. The use of IEEE Std 7000 cannot guarantee that the system as designed and subsequently built is ethical, because the ethicality achieved in a system depends on the moral capabilities and choices of those who use the standard and the commitment of the organization offering the system to adhere to the recommendations made as a result of ethically aligned design as stated in the remainder of this clause.

This standard has a number of limitations to its scope, as stated in the remainder of this clause.

Some human values required of systems have been extensively treated in other standards (e.g., health, security, and safety) and are not further detailed in this standard on ethical values. Aesthetic characteristics (such as color or form) are in scope where they reflect social or cultural characteristics with ethical impact.

NOTE 1—The ISO/IEEE 11073 family of health informatic standards specifies numerous engineering solutions for interoperability of health information. The IEEE publishes many safety-related standards and codes, e.g., for electrical safety, nuclear power plant safety. In the area of systems and software engineering, IEEE Std 1228-1994 [B23]² can be consulted. The ISO/IEC 27000 family of standards includes close to a hundred standards on information security techniques, including privacy engineering.

The processes described in this standard do not prescribe what is ethical and what is unethical. While the standard is intended to be consistent with the IEEE Code of Ethics [B24], it does not provide ethical guidance for individual engineers in their personal ethical judgements regarding their professional work or specific rights or wrongs, nor advice to whistleblowers on how to address ethical lapses in an organization. As further discussed in C.4, the IEEE code of ethics (one example of professional ethics) has general applicability, but no specific requirements for applying ethical values in system design.

This standard does not prescribe any specific organizational ethical policies. Organizations also commonly develop ethical principles related directly to workplace ethics, consistent with legal and regulatory employment requirements. This standard focuses rather on how to operationalize ethical values that are commonly at stake in technology design and deployment. The use of IEEE Std 7000 does not imply that an organization following its processes is ethical in all other aspects of its mission, product or service development, or discharge of its social responsibility. However, adoption and implementation of ethical value processes in the design and deployment of new products and services or modification of existing legacy systems are illustrative of an organization that is cognizant of its social responsibility and the impact of its endeavors on the values of its stakeholders.

IEEE Std 7000 allows organizations to make their value choices transparent to anyone who uses the system as well as to auditors, potential certifiers, or governmental agencies. Moreover, IEEE Std 7000 provides processes for organizations that assume accountability for the ethical decisions they take. This standard helps organizations in the following:

- Understanding and anticipating value implications and consequences of their systems and taking investment decisions based on them
- Identifying ethical value requirements (EVR) and priorities for system design to be integrated into system requirements
- Choosing system design alternatives according to value priorities while avoiding or mitigating value harms or ethical pitfalls
- Keeping control of the long-term value-based sustainability of a system through ongoing supervision and information management
- Creating transparency and responsibility for the choices made and the system's resulting functionality

²The numbers in brackets correspond to those of the bibliography in Annex J.

This standard is most applicable to organizations that are building a system for a known context or at least known typical use cases for the products, services, and systems they build.

NOTE 2—IEEE Std 7000 does not challenge the ethicality of fundamental research.

1.4 Process overview

This standard can also be applied during the enhancements or modifications of existing legacy systems. The enhancements and modifications to products, services, and systems can adopt and conform with the requirements depicted in this standard. For example, it can be used by a device manufacturer building a care robot for a nursing home. It can be used for an artificial intelligence (AI) chat system that is employed in a specific use context, such as medical advice, teaching a language, or recommending music. This standard can be less usable for building a generic product, service, or system for which the deployment context is indefinite, such as a generic camera system or a computer chip usable in multiple ways. This standard can be more effective in specific application of products, services, and systems where the context of application and the stakeholder impact is discernible and amenable to clearer specification and analysis.

This document establishes a set of processes for organizations and projects that address the ethical values of software-based systems (and services) during design and development. The processes can be aligned with any system or software engineering methods, life cycle model, and engineering management style that an organization or project uses for design and development. The processes can be used for new design and development and for improvement of the ethical attributes of existing systems. Systems of interest are not limited to particular industries, sectors, applications, or system sizes. The processes can be used by organizations of all types and sizes, including small and innovative organizations.

Engineers, technologists, and other project stakeholders need a methodology for identifying, analyzing, and reconciling ethical concerns of end users and other stakeholders at the beginning of systems and software life cycles. The processes in this standard enable the pragmatic application of this type of value-based system design methodology. This standard provides engineers, technologists, and other members of the organization with implementable processes aligning innovation management processes, IT system design approaches, and software engineering methods to address ethical concerns in their systems that can affect their organizations, stakeholders, and end users. The processes of IEEE Std 7000 provide organizations with ethical requirements and design activities that enable systems engineering to support human wellbeing. By positively addressing the values of direct and indirect system stakeholders, organizations can attain more than mere legal compliance. They can attain ethical practices that engage with the original spirit of laws, human rights, or other social values in the specific context of a system's use as detailed further in 5.7.

Figure 1 illustrates the processes presented in this standard. These processes occur during the concept exploration and development stages of the product life cycle and are detailed in Clause 7 through Clause 11 of this standard.

The importance of considering potential values and harms during concept exploration and development of the concept of operations (ConOps) sets the context for the remaining processes. This process supports initial identification of values and an extensive feasibility analysis, which can help to refine the ConOps as well as anticipate value-based system requirements.

During the Ethical Values Elicitation and Prioritization Process, a wide range of stakeholders identify potential positive and negative system consequences, stakeholder virtues, and ethical duties that are impacted by the system concept. These are typically expressed by stakeholders in unstructured form (e.g., in terms of harms and benefits) but have underlying values that people care about. Consequences, virtues, and duties are identified with the help of ethical theories; specifically, utilitarianism, virtue ethics, and duty ethics, along with other culturally appropriate value systems or ethical theories. Values are prioritized with the help of an activity where the top management of an organization evaluates the importance of the value to the system of interest.

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IEEE Standard Model Process for Addressing Ethical Concerns during System Design

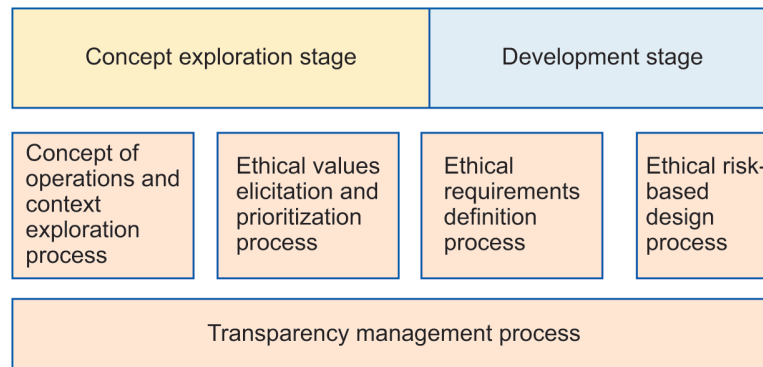


Figure 1—Relationship of processes and stages in IEEE Std 7000

(SOf). Once values are identified and prioritized, they are scrutinized again with a view to potential legal expectations and internationally applied ethical guidelines. The result is a list of value priorities for the system.

These value priorities are then analyzed more systematically and conceptually as the basis for the Ethical Requirements Definition Process, which generates EVR and value-based system requirements.

IEEE Std 7000 is compatible with many existing development practices, including iterative and incremental life-cycle models and agile methods. The Ethical Risk-Based Design Process translates value-based requirements into design characteristics and determines controls that can mitigate risks to values. Controls are system requirements or organizational policies and procedures. As EVRs are instantiated in the system design, the value dispositions are validated for incorporation of the specified values.

The value-based engineering processes include Transparency Management, based on the Information Management process of ISO/IEC/IEEE 12207:2017 [B40] and ISO/IEC/IEEE 15288:2015 [B41]. In this standard, the Transparency Management Process is refined to consider the special requirements of value-based engineering in communicating more openly with relevant stakeholders.

In this standard, the focus on concept analysis, requirements engineering, risk-based design, validation, and monitoring of a product's design, characterize it as deeply embedded into system engineering thinking. Its alignment with established system engineering processes is indicated in [Annex A](#); the relationship of processes in IEEE Std 7000 and in ISO/IEC/IEEE 12207:2017 [B40] and ISO/IEC/IEEE 15288:2015 [B41]. Those standards provide processes without the special focus on ethical values.

1.5 Word usage

The word *shall* indicates mandatory requirements strictly to be followed in order to conform to the standard and from which no deviation is permitted (shall equals is required to).^{3,4}

The word *should* indicates that among several possibilities one is recommended as particularly suitable, without mentioning or excluding others; or that a certain course of action is preferred, but not necessarily required (should equals is recommended that).

The word *may* is used to indicate a course of action permissible within the limits of the standard (may equals is permitted to).

The word *can* is used for statements of possibility and capability, whether material, physical, or causal (can equals is able to).

³The use of the word *must* is deprecated and cannot be used when stating mandatory requirements, *must* is used only to describe unavoidable situations.

⁴The use of *will* is deprecated and cannot be used when stating mandatory requirements, *will* is only used in statements of fact.

2. Normative references

This standard has no normative references.

3. Definitions, acronyms, and abbreviations

3.1 Definitions

For the purposes of this standard, the following terms and definitions apply. The *IEEE Standards Dictionary Online* should be consulted for terms not defined in this clause.⁵

NOTE—For additional terms and definitions in the field of systems and software engineering, see ISO/IEC/IEEE 24765 [B45], which is published periodically as a “snapshot” of the SEVOCAB (Systems and Software Engineering Vocabulary) database and is publicly accessible at <computer.org/sevocab>.

acquirer: Stakeholder that acquires or procures a product or service from a supplier.

NOTE—Other terms commonly used for an acquirer are buyer, customer, owner, purchaser, or internal/organizational sponsor.

acquisition: Process of obtaining a product, service, or system.

activity: Set of cohesive and purposeful tasks of a process.

agreement: Mutual acknowledgment of terms and conditions under which a working relationship is conducted. *Example:* Contract, memorandum of agreement.

architecture: <system> Fundamental concepts or properties of a system in its environment embodied in its elements, relationships, and in the principles of its design and evolution (ISO/IEC/IEEE 42010:2011 [B49]).

audit: Independent examination of a work product or set of work products to assess compliance with specifications, standards, contractual agreements, or other criteria (ISO/IEC/IEEE 15288:2015 [B41]).

NOTE—The scope includes professional and industry codes of practice.

benefit: Positive outcome that is voluntarily or involuntarily created by a system or process.

NOTE—Benefits correspond to one or more underlying desired values.

concept of operations (ConOps): Verbal and/or graphic statement, in broad outline, of an organization’s assumptions or intent in regard to an operation or series of operations (ISO/IEC/IEEE 15288:2015 [B41]).

NOTE—The concept of operations ConOps frequently is embodied in long-range strategic plans and annual operational plans. In the latter case, the ConOps in the plan covers a series of connected operations to be carried out simultaneously or in succession. The concept is designed to give an overall picture of the organization operations. *See also:* **operational concept**.

concern: <system> Interest in a system relevant to one or more of its stakeholders (ISO/IEC/IEEE 42010:2011 [B49]).

NOTE—Concern pertains to any influence on a system in its environment, including developmental, technological, business, operational, organizational, political, economic, legal, regulatory, ecological, and social influences.

⁵IEEE Standards Dictionary Online is available at: <http://dictionary.ieee.org>. An IEEE Account is required for access to the dictionary, and one can be created at no charge on the dictionary sign-in page.

consumer: Individual member of the general public purchasing or using products for private purposes (IEC/IEEE 82079:1:2019 [B22]).

context of use: Intended operational environment for a system.

NOTE 1—The environment determines the setting and circumstances of all influences upon a system, including not only other systems, but also people, settings, social, and ecological factors.

NOTE 2—Context of use can be captured using a Context of Use Description (ISO/IEC 25063.3 [B35]).

control: Ability to determine the nature, sequence and/or consequences of technical and operational settings, behavior, specific events, and/or experiences.

NOTE—Control includes cognitive control (that is, being informed about activities), decisional control (having choices over actions), and behavioral control (receiving feedback from actions).

core value: A value that is identified as central in the context of a system of interest.

NOTE—A core value is at the center of a value cluster of instrumental or related values and value demonstrators. A core value is a positive value. Typically, a system of interest (SoS) has several core values.

customer: Organization or person that receives a product or service (ISO/IEC/IEEE12207:2017 [B40]).
Example: Consumer, client, user, acquirer, buyer, or purchaser.

NOTE—A customer can be internal or external to the organization.

dependability: Ability of a system to perform as and when required.

NOTE—A measure of a system's availability, reliability, and maintainability.

design: (verb) <process> To define the architecture, elements, interfaces, and other characteristics of a product, service or system, or system element (ISO/IEC/IEEE15288:2015 [B41]). (noun) Result of the design process (ISO/IEC/IEEE15288:2015 [B41]).

design characteristic: Design attributes or distinguishing features that pertain to a measurable description of a product or service (ISO/IEC/IEEE15288:2015 [B41]).

duty: Obligation or expectation to perform a specific action when certain circumstances occur.

duty ethics/deontology: Ethical theory that identifies universal moral laws to bound the actions of all rational individuals.

enabling system: System that supports a system of interest during its life cycle stages but does not necessarily contribute directly to its function during operation. *Example:* When a system of interest enters the production stage, a production-enabling system is required.

NOTE—Each enabling system has a life cycle of its own. Each enabling system can, in its own right, be treated as a system of interest.

environment: <system> Context determining the setting and circumstances of all influences upon a system (ISO/IEC/IEEE 42010:2011 [B49]).

NOTE—Also applies to products and services.

ethical: Supporting the realization of positive values or the reduction of negative values.

NOTE—A system can be ethical or unethical in the sense that it bears value dispositions to cater to positive value creation or negative value prohibition.

ethical policy statement: A high-level declaration endorsed by the top management to explain and demonstrate the organization's commitment to respect core values in the conduct of its activities.

ethical principle: Shared proposition about ethical values that members of a community can pursue and uphold.

ethical requirement: Requirement that is either an ethical value requirement (EVR) or a value-based system requirement.

ethical risk: A risk to ethical values.

ethical value: Value in the context of human culture that supports a judgment on what is right or wrong.

NOTE—A virtue is an example of an ethical value.

ethical value requirement (EVR): Organizational or technical requirement catering to values that stakeholders and conceptual value analysis identified as relevant for the SOI.

ethics: Branch of knowledge or theory that investigates the correct reasons for thinking that this or that is right.

NOTE—Ethics are guidelines for conduct that help people in making a judgment about what is right or wrong.

functional requirement: Statement that identifies what results a product or process shall produce.

harm: (noun) Negative event or negative social development entailing value damage or loss to people. (verb) Acting with negative value effects for self or others, within a respective SOI, organization, or beyond.

NOTE—Harms correspond to one or more underlying values.

hazard: Source or situation with a potential for harm in terms of human injury or ill health (both short and long term), damage to property, damage to the environment, or a combination of these (ISO 31000 [B29]).

human rights: Rights to which every person is entitled.

incident: Anomalous or unexpected event, set of events, condition, or situation at any time during the life cycle of a project, product, service, or system (ISO/IEC/IEEE 12207:2017 [B40]).

information item: Separately identifiable body of information that is produced, stored, and delivered for human use (ISO/IEC/IEEE 15289 [B42]).

legal feasibility: Determination that the system of interest is consistent with applicable laws and regulations.

life cycle: Evolution of a system, product, service, system, project, or other human-made entity from conception through retirement.

life cycle model: Framework of processes and activities concerned with the life cycle that may be organized into stages, which also acts as a common reference for communication and understanding.

nonfunctional requirement: Requirement that describes not what the system does, but how the system does it.

operational concept: Verbal and graphic statement of an organization's assumptions or intent in regard to an operation or series of operations of a system or a related set of systems.

NOTE 1—The operational concept is designed to give an overall picture of the operations using one or more specific systems, or set of related systems, in the organization's operational environment from the users' and operators' perspective. *See also: concept of operations* (ISO/IEC/IEEE 15288:2015 [B41]).

NOTE 2—The operational concept can include major product, service or system elements and/or system components, boundaries and directly adjunct elements beyond boundaries, internal and external input elements (i.e., databases and/or applications serving the system that are outside of the SOI's boundaries) and output elements (i.e., databases and/or applications serving the system that are outside of the SOI's boundaries).

NOTE 3—The operational concept can be visualized.

operator: Individual or organization that performs the operations of a product, service or system.

NOTE 1—The role of operator and the role of user can be vested, simultaneously or sequentially, in the same individual or organization.

NOTE 2—An individual operator combined with knowledge, skills, and procedures can be considered as an element of the service or system.

NOTE 3—An operator may perform operations on a SOI that is operated, or of a SOI that is operated, depending on whether or not operating instructions are placed within the SOI's boundary.

opportunity: A condition or state with a potential to lead to a benefit or gain.

organization: Group of people and facilities with an arrangement of responsibilities, authorities, and relationships. *Example:* Corporation, firm, enterprise, institution, charity, sole trader, association, or parts or combination thereof.

NOTE—An identified part of an organization (even as small as a single individual) or an identified group of organizations can be regarded as an organization if it has responsibilities, authorities, and relationships. A body of persons organized for some specific purpose, such as a club, union, corporation, or society, is an organization.

participatory design: System design process that aims at investigating, understanding, reflecting upon, establishing, developing, and supporting mutual learning between multiple system stakeholders and system developers in collective reflection-in-action.

NOTE—The participants in a participatory design practice typically undertake the two principal roles of users and designers where the designers strive to learn the realities of the users' situation/requirements, while the users strive to articulate their desired aims and identify appropriate technological means to obtain them.

persona: Archetypal user of a product, service, or system.

NOTE 1—Personas can represent the needs of a larger group in terms of their goals, expectations, and personal characteristics. They can help to guide decisions about system design and design targets.

NOTE 2—The term 'persona' stems from the field of usability design where personas are typically described in a storytelling exercise. They bring personas to life by giving them names, personalities, and photos.