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**Software engineering — Lifecycle profiles  
for Very Small Entities (VSEs) —**

**Part 3:  
Assessment guide**

*Ingénierie du logiciel — Profils de cycle de vie pour très petits  
organismes (TPO) —*

*Partie 3: Guide d'évaluation*



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## Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) and IEC (the International Electrotechnical Commission) form the specialized system for worldwide standardization. National bodies that are members of ISO or IEC participate in the development of International Standards through technical committees established by the respective organization to deal with particular fields of technical activity. ISO and IEC technical committees collaborate in fields of mutual interest. Other international organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO and IEC, also take part in the work. In the field of information technology, ISO and IEC have established a joint technical committee, ISO/IEC JTC 1.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of the joint technical committee is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the joint technical committee are circulated to national bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the national bodies casting a vote.

In exceptional circumstances, when the joint technical committee has collected data of a different kind from that which is normally published as an International Standard ("state of the art", for example), it may decide to publish a Technical Report. A Technical Report is entirely informative in nature and shall be subject to review every five years in the same manner as an International Standard.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO and IEC shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO/IEC TR 29110-3 was prepared by Joint Technical Committee ISO/IEC JTC 1, *Information technology*, Subcommittee SC 7, *Software and systems engineering*.

ISO/IEC 29110 consists of the following parts, under the general title *Software engineering — Lifecycle profiles for Very Small Entities (VSEs)*:

- *Part 1: Overview* [Technical Report]
- *Part 2: Framework and taxonomy*
- *Part 3: Assessment guide* [Technical Report]
- *Part 4-1: Profile specifications: Generic profile group*
- *Part 5-1-2: Management and engineering guide: Generic profile group: Basic profile* [Technical Report]

Entry profile, intermediate profile and advanced profile will form the subjects of future Parts 5-1-1, 5-1-3 and 5-1-4, respectively.

Parts 4 and 5 can be developed to accommodate new profile specifications and management and engineering guides as follows:

- *Part 4-m: Profile specifications: Profile group aaaaa*
- *Part 5-m-n: Management and engineering guide: Profile group aaaaa: Profile bbbbb* [Technical Report]

## Introduction

The software industry recognizes the value of Very Small Entities (VSEs) in contributing valuable products and services. For the purpose of ISO/IEC 29110, a Very Small Entity (VSE) is an entity (enterprise, organization, department or project) having up to 25 people. VSEs also develop and/or maintain software that is used in larger systems; therefore, recognition of VSEs as suppliers of high quality software is often required.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) SME and Entrepreneurship Outlook report (2005) 'SMEs constitute the dominant form of business organization in all countries world-wide, accounting for over 95 % and up to 99 % of the business population depending on country'. The challenge facing OECD governments is to provide a business environment that supports the competitiveness of this large heterogeneous business population and that promotes a vibrant entrepreneurial culture.

From studies and surveys conducted, it is clear that the majority of International Standards do not address the needs of VSEs. Conformance with these standards is difficult, if not impossible. Subsequently VSEs have no, or very limited, ways to be recognized as entities that produce quality software in their domain. Therefore, VSEs are often cut off from some economic activities.

It has been found that VSEs find it difficult to relate International Standards to their business needs and to justify the application of the standards to their business practices. Most VSEs can neither afford the resources, in terms of number of employees, budget and time, nor do they see a net benefit in establishing software lifecycle processes. To rectify some of these difficulties, a set of guides has been developed according to a set of VSE characteristics. The guides are based on subsets of appropriate standards elements, referred to as VSE Profiles. The purpose of a VSE Profile is to define a subset of International Standards relevant to the VSE context, for example, processes and outcomes of ISO/IEC 12207 and products of ISO/IEC 15289.

ISO/IEC 29110, targeted by audience, has been developed to improve product and/or service quality, and process performance. See Table 1. ISO/IEC 29110 is not intended to preclude the use of different lifecycles such as: waterfall, iterative, incremental, evolutionary or agile.

**Table 1 — ISO/IEC 29110 target audience**

ISO/IEC 29110	Title	Target audience
Part 1	Overview	VSEs, assessors, standards producers, tool vendors and methodology vendors
Part 2	Framework and taxonomy	Standards producers, tool vendors and methodology vendors. Not intended for VSEs.
Part 3	Assessment guide	Assessors and VSEs
Part 4	Profile specifications	Standards producers, tool vendors and methodology vendors. Not intended for VSEs.
Part 5	Management and engineering guide	VSEs

If a new profile is needed, ISO/IEC 29110-4 and ISO/IEC TR 29110-5 can be developed without impacting existing documents and they become ISO/IEC 29110-4-*m* and ISO/IEC 29110-5-*m-n*, respectively, through the ISO/IEC process.

ISO/IEC TR 29110-1 defines the business terms common to the ISO/IEC 29110 series. It introduces processes, lifecycle and standardization concepts, and the ISO/IEC 29110 series. It also introduces the characteristics and requirements of a VSE, and clarifies the rationale for VSE-specific profiles, documents, standards and guides.

## ISO/IEC TR 29110-3:2011(E)

ISO/IEC 29110-2 introduces the concepts for software engineering standardized profiles for VSEs, and defines the terms common to the ISO/IEC 29110 series. It establishes the logic behind the definition and application of standardized profiles. It specifies the elements common to all standardized profiles (structure, conformance, assessment) and introduces the taxonomy (catalogue) of ISO/IEC 29110 profiles.

This part of ISO/IEC 29110 defines the process assessment guidelines and compliance requirements needed to meet the purpose of the defined VSE Profiles. This part of ISO/IEC 29110 also contains information that can be useful to developers of assessment methods and assessment tools. This part of ISO/IEC 29110 is addressed to people who have direct relation with the assessment process, e.g. the assessor and the sponsor of the assessment, who need guidance on ensuring that the requirements for performing an assessment have been met.

ISO/IEC 29110-4-*m* provides the specification for all the profiles in one profile group that are based on subsets of appropriate standards elements. VSE Profiles apply and are targeted to authors/providers of guides and authors/providers of tools and other support material.

ISO/IEC TR 29110-5-*m-n* provides an implementation management and engineering guide for the VSE Profile described in ISO/IEC 29110-4-*m*.

Figure 1 describes the ISO/IEC 29110 series and positions the parts within the framework of reference. Overviews and guides are published as Technical Reports (TR), and profiles are published as International Standards (IS).

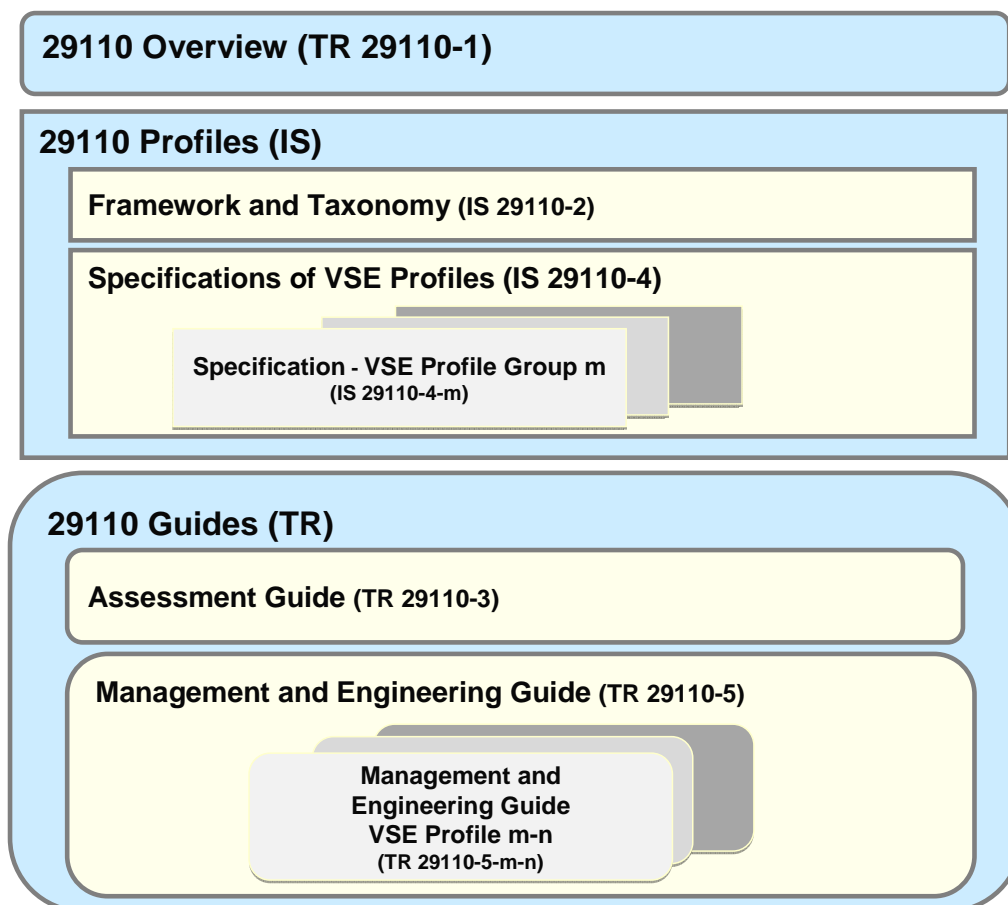


Figure 1 — ISO/IEC 29110 series

# Software engineering — Lifecycle profiles for Very Small Entities (VSEs) —

## Part 3: Assessment guide

### 1 Scope

#### 1.1 Fields of application

This part of ISO/IEC 29110 defines the process assessment guidelines and conformance requirements needed to meet the purpose of defined VSE Profiles. It is applicable to all VSE Profiles and is compatible with ISO/IEC 15504-2.

The possible uses of this part of ISO/IEC 29110 are as follows.

- a) Assessment to evaluate the process capabilities. This is when an organization wants an assessment execution in order to obtain a process profile of the implemented processes.
- b) Provider's capability assessment. This is when a customer asks for a third party to conduct an assessment in order to obtain a process profile of the implemented process by the software development and maintenance provider. The customer chooses the processes to be assessed depending on the services to be contracted.

#### 1.2 Target audience

The target audience of this part of ISO/IEC 29110 is primarily those who perform process assessments for VSEs. This part of ISO/IEC 29110 also contains information that can be useful to developers of assessment methods and assessment tools.

This part of ISO/IEC 29110 is addressed to people who have a direct relation with the assessment process based on the VSE Profiles, e.g. the assessor and the sponsor of the assessment, who need guidance on ensuring that the requirements for performing an assessment have been met.

It is intended that ISO/IEC TR 29110-1 and ISO/IEC 29110-2 be read first when initially exploring VSE Profile documents.

### 2 Normative references

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO/IEC TR 29110-1, *Software engineering — Lifecycle profiles for Very Small Entities (VSEs) — Part 1: Overview*

### 3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in ISO/IEC TR 29110-1 apply.

### 4 Conventions and abbreviated terms

#### 4.1 Naming, diagramming and definition conventions

None.

#### 4.2 Abbreviations

VSE Very Small Entity

VSEs Very Small Entities

### 5 Assessment framework

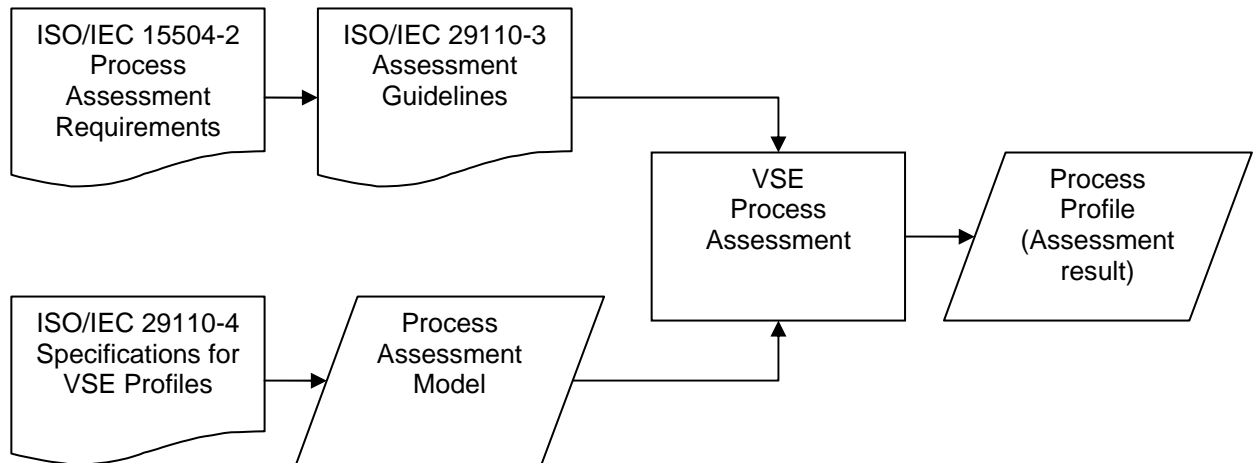
These guidelines apply to VSE Process Assessments. The assessment, as defined in this part of ISO/IEC 29110 and in the Standardized Profiles for VSE, has two purposes:

- 1) To evaluate the process capability based on a two dimensional assessment model containing a process dimension and a capability dimension. The process dimension refers to the processes defined in each VSE Profile which are provided by an external Process Reference Model. The capability dimension consists of a Measurement Framework comprising six Process Capability Levels and their associated Process Attributes.
- 2) To evaluate whether an organization achieves the targeted VSE Profile based on the evaluated capabilities for the processes.

For any official recognition, the assessments should be carried out following an assessment process satisfying the requirements of ISO/IEC 15504-2 and described in Clause 6 of this part of ISO/IEC 29110. For self-assessments emphasizing identification of process improvements, other approaches can be applied (additional information can be found in ISO/IEC 29110-5).

According to ISO/IEC 15504-2, a process assessment is a disciplined evaluation of an organizational unit's processes against a Process Assessment Model. In this context, the Process Assessment Model consists of a subset of process purposes and outcomes of a Process Reference Model, and the process attributes that are defined in ISO/IEC 15504-2:2003. A Process Reference Model is, for instance, ISO/IEC 12207:2008 and the applicable subset is defined in a Specification of a VSE Profile, for instance, ISO/IEC 29110-4-1. The applied Process Assessment Model needs to be conformant to ISO/IEC 15504-2. The result of a process assessment is represented as a set of process attribute ratings, i.e. a process profile. Figure 2 illustrates the relevant documents and data for a process applicable to VSE process assessment.





**Figure 2 — Elements of VSE process assessment**

ISO/IEC 15504-2 sets out the minimum requirements for performing an assessment that ensure consistency and repeatability of the ratings. The requirements help to ensure that the assessment output is self-consistent and provides evidence to substantiate the ratings and to verify conformance with the requirements. Detailed guidance on performing an assessment is available in ISO/IEC 15504-3:2003.

Self-assessments are typically performed to identify process improvement opportunities or to check current status of the organization's performance. Self-assessments in VSEs are outside the scope of this part of ISO/IEC 29110.

## 6 VSE process assessment

### 6.1 Performing an assessment

#### 6.1.1 Introduction

In performing an assessment based on ISO/IEC 29110, the requirements expressed in ISO/IEC 15504-2 are intended to be satisfied in full. The assessors should be familiar with the intent of these requirements and the guidance provided in ISO/IEC 15504-3. This clause of ISO/IEC 29110-3 provides additional guidance related specifically to the process assessment in VSEs.

An assessment is conducted according to a documented process that is capable of meeting the assessment purpose. The key elements of a documented assessment process are closely tied to the requirements for performing an assessment, defined in Clause 4 of ISO/IEC 15504-2:2003. The documented assessment process is the set of instructions for conducting the assessment. A documented assessment process addresses the following aspects of the conduct of an assessment:

- defining the inputs to an assessment such as purpose, scope, constraints and the identity of the conformant Process Assessment Model to be used;
- defining key roles and responsibilities;
- providing guidance for planning, data collection, data validation, process attributes rating and reporting of assessment results;
- recording of assessment outputs.

### **6.1.2 Assessment inputs**

Assessment inputs as specified in ISO/IEC 15504-2:2003, 4.4 are to be defined. In conducting assessments of VSEs based on ISO/IEC 29110, the following issues are of importance:

- The process scope of the assessment [ISO/IEC 15504-2, 4.4.2 (c) (1, 2)] is determined by the VSE Profile specified for the assessment.
- The organizational scope of the assessment [ISO/IEC 15504-2, 4.4.2 (c) (3)] will typically be the entire VSE; however, where the VSE deploys a small number of clearly distinct projects or functions, the scope may be limited to a single project or function.
- In defining the assessment context [ISO/IEC 15504-2, 4.4.2 (c) (4)], the assessment plan should take into account the VSE business and engineering context and be affordable to a VSE.
- In defining the assessment constraints [ISO/IEC 15504-2, 4.4.2 (e)], the specific nature of the VSE should be explored to establish constraints on availability of resources or data that might affect the reliability of the assessment.

### **6.1.3 Roles and responsibilities**

Typically, the assessment team for VSE assessment process consists of at least one competent assessor or a competent assessor with other assessors. The assessors should be familiar with the VSE characteristics.

### **6.1.4 The assessment process**

The activities to be performed will be determined by the chosen documented assessment process tailored as necessary. The documented process for the assessment of a VSE should address all of the required activities defined in ISO/IEC 15504-2:2003, 4.2.2.

Specific concerns of relevance to assessment of VSEs include the following:

#### **Planning**

Typically, the schedule for assessment of a VSE will need to take account of the availability of key resources. The level of resources required for the assessment should be determined according to the resources available to the VSE.

#### **Data collection**

The strategy for data collection should take account of the nature of the work performed within the VSE, and of the nature of the items of objective evidence that will typically be available. Often assessments in VSEs rely heavily on testimony from performers of the processes; however, to the best extent possible, the assessors should endeavour to obtain other supporting objective evidence drawn from the VSE work products.

#### **Data validation**

The key issue in data validation in assessment of a VSE is ensuring that the data collected is representative of the normal operations of the enterprise.

#### **Process attribute rating**

In conducting process attribute rating, the assessors should focus on the extent to which the evidence obtained addresses the processes and process attributes being rated. The requirement for traceability between the rating and the evidence employed [ISO/IEC 15504-2:2003, 4.2.2 d) 4)] is relevant here.

## Reporting

The assessors should ensure that the report to the sponsor of the assessment covers the full scope of the VSE Profile employed in the assessment.

### 6.2 Use of the assessment results

The assessment results may be used to:

- a) Evaluate the process capabilities of an organization,
- b) Determine the improvement opportunities, in order to enhance the organization's ability to meet its business goals by improving efficiency and quality of its software products and services. The findings can be used as a base to perform the improvement plan,
- c) Benchmark the process capabilities with other organizations in the market,
- d) Select a provider based on the provider's capability assessment.

### 6.3 Achievement of a VSE Profile

This section provides guidance on how to determine whether an organization has achieved a VSE Profile. The determination is based on the evaluated capabilities for the processes in each VSE Profile. ISO/IEC 29110-4 Clause 2.2 defines the conformance requirements.

The requirements for the achievement of VSE Profiles can be derived from the respective parts of ISO/IEC 29110-4 and ISO/IEC 29110-5. At minimum, all mandatory elements of the VSE Profile, as defined in ISO/IEC 29110-4, need to be considered in the assessment.

To achieve, for example, the Basic VSE Profile the assessed processes need to achieve capability level one as defined in ISO/IEC 15504-2. This means that the implemented process achieves its process purpose and its defined outcomes. The applicable process purposes are documented in ISO/IEC 29110-5-1-2:2011:

- Project Management process purpose in clause 6.1 PM Purpose, and
- Software Implementation process purpose in clause 7.1 SI Purpose.

The related outcomes of the Process Reference Model ISO/IEC 12207 are documented in ISO/IEC 29110-5-1-2 under the process specific Objectives. A detailed mapping of the Basic VSE Profile process elements to ISO/IEC 12207 and other Base Documents is provided for in Clause 8 of ISO/IEC 29110-4-1:2011.

### 6.4 Application of process assessment models

Use of ISO/IEC 15504-2 compliant Process Assessment Model (PAM) ensures that the assessment results are comparable, reliable and repeatable. The assessor should confirm that the applied PAM is suitable for assessing the process capability in the context of VSEs.

The applied Process Assessment Model should have a set of indicators that address the process purpose and outcomes, and demonstrate the achievement of the required capability level.

ISO/IEC 29110-4 Specifications for VSE Profiles document a detailed mapping of process elements between part 5 of ISO/IEC 29110 and the Process Reference Models.

ISO/IEC 15504-5 is an Exemplar Process Assessment Model based on ISO/IEC 12207 Process Reference Model and it can be applied to assess the capability of the VSE Profiles. ISO/IEC 15504-5 has a complete mapping of the assessment indicators to the ISO/IEC 12207 process outcomes. A VSE specific PAM can be derived by selecting those assessment indicators relevant to the corresponding process outcomes defined in ISO/IEC 29110-4.

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