

Chapter 2.5

Considerations and Methodology for Designing a Virtual World: Solution for a Large Corporation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter centers on a publically traded Fortune 500 Pharmaceutical company based in the United States. With over 100,000 employees spread across many countries, physical separation of the workforce is an everyday reality. In the author's case, it was not the goal to attempt to unite the entire company; rather, it was the author's goal to provide a means to overcome the obstacles that present themselves when physically disparate coworkers must perform seamlessly to complete a business process.

In the following case study, the author determined that although users were open minded to trying Virtual Worlds and other types of Immer-

sive technologies, the solutions delivered needed to provide task oriented functionality that was directly in line with everyday business process. Using this basic requirement, the author developed a Virtual Corporate Environment Business Tool (VCEBT[®]) box.

The VCEBT[®] philosophy is grounded on the principal that business process is accomplished by following a set of business methods each performed using a set of business tools. While it may sound like a rigid and inflexible way to describe a knowledge-worker environment, the author finds that the process-method-tools definition applies to most environments quite well. The goal is to introduce new tools that increase the effectiveness of this process in terms of its ability to meet clearly defined business objectives.

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The VCEBT[®] framework does not attempt to change people or the work that they do. VCEBT[®]'s do augment the business tool box, providing highly efficient tools designed to solve real world challenges that can restrict a business's ability to maximize business performance.

INTRODUCTION

What is Virtual Reality(VR)?

Some will tell you that it is an unreal environment that has no firm connection to "real life". Merriam Webster (2009), for example, defines Virtual Reality as "an artificial environment which is experienced through sensory stimuli (as sights and sounds) provided by a computer and in which one's actions partially determine what happens in the environment". In other words, what happens there stays there, and there are no real consequences for actions. Others will tell you that if someone is fully engaged and immersed in Virtual Reality, then it *is* the only reality that is "happening" to them while they are experiencing it. In the movie "The Matrix" the subjects are forced to choose between "realities" that are both very "real". The choice between which reality to "exist" in becomes very philosophical and grounded on fuzzy concepts like faith, and beliefs. Is this a challenge that we want to confront in 2009 in the workplace? Or is there a more elegant way to introduce Immersive technologies?

According to Winifred Gallagher (2009), author of the recently published "Rapt", we constantly make decisions determining what we are going to pay attention to. Any events, experiences, and activities not within the scope of our chosen interest will not exist to us as we immerse ourselves in our selected targets of concentration and focus. What we choose to concentrate on defines our state of consciousness and becomes our Reality.

The fact that our mind and body may be "in two different places at the same time" is not a unique

characteristic of Virtual Reality, and does not therefore create the need to refer to this immersive technology as "Virtual Reality". If we are deep within our own thoughts, and no longer mindful of our physical surroundings, are we in "virtual reality"? If we are reading a news article on a website, and are so engrossed that we forget that we are late for a meeting, do we say that "virtual reality" interfered with "physical reality"?

The power of "Virtual Reality" software is in its ability to emancipate the mind from the body, making physical "reality" a minor element of our Federated Reality. Federated Reality has two parts: Consciousness and Physical Existence. For our purposes, we will always need to address the requirements of Physical Existence and Consciousness. However, it is our objective to relegate Physical Existence to nothing more than a set of requirements for accessing a medium that will manipulate the Consciousness away from Physical Existence. In other words, people have bodies: eyes, hands, etc. We must build software that provides convenient physical access. But after that, the vast majority of our attention will be turned to capturing the full attention of the user. We use "federated" to mean that the two parts of Reality have a partnership, but are not so close as to be synonymous. They are individually self-sustaining. We assert that there is only one relevant reality, and it is defined as: *A context of stimulation that acutely focuses awareness and defines our state of consciousness.*

Virtual Reality as a Tool for Business

The newest VR technology provides a fully immersive 3D experience in which the user of the technology adopts the persona of a character (avatar) that exists in a software based "world" designed to have the look and feel of a physical office or learning institution. The users of Virtual Reality technology operate in the 3D space and see objects and people from the Point of View of

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