Chapter 17
Andragogical Leaders Immersing Into the Metaverse

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ABSTRACT

An effective and impactful andragogical leader must have many key characteristics and competencies. They must be open to immersing into the Metaverse with the spirit of optimism, have the ability to adapt to change, and know that innovation and creativity in organizations are pivotal to survival as human activities fuse with technological domains. These leaders will use wisdom, experiences, intellectual insights, and curiosity to drive actions to achieve the future of their institutions. They need to be capable of leading their organizations through times of uncertainty, being self-confident during the Metaverse disruption, and doing so to be courageous action drivers as well as strategic thinkers. Be the action strategist, prehistorically known as the Allosaurus.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will not go into the principles of andragogy, as this author assumes the readers of this book collectively know more about andragogy than one single author could include in a chapter. What this chapter will do, however, is to interpret progress, direction, and current research on the immersion of Metaverse into organizations and the impact it will have, and is having, on andragogical leaders.

The Metaverse is the post-reality universe, a perpetual and persistent multiuser environment merging physical reality with digital virtuality. It is based on the convergence of technologies that enable multisensory interactions with virtual environments, digital objects, and people such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). Hence, the Metaverse is an interconnected web of social, networked immersive environments in persistent multiuser platforms. It enables seamless embodied user communication in real-time and dynamic interactions with digital artifacts (Mystakidis, 2022).

Significant investments in the Metaverse by leading technology companies indicate that humanity's next emerging global trend is here (Pritchard, 2022). It is intended to be a quantum leap toward virtual and augmented reality (VR and AR), supported by all existing technologies such as blockchain, 5G,

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and AI. The evolutionary progress of both hardware and software will offer a new experience that will be called a progression of virtual worlds as a replacement or substitution for direct reality, which is an ongoing trend (Feezell, 2018; Richter, 2020).

Current and emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, represented by NFT (digital objects), sensory-rich environments, virtual reality headsets, and brain-computer interfaces, are envisioned to be embedded in the foundations of the Metaverse (Musk, 2019; Zuckerberg, 2021). Ongoing global wars, dreadful pandemics, ecological challenges, and economic regrouping may also be in line with the development of the Metaverse, which could provide answers to some of these issues (Saxon et al., 2004; Smith, 2021). For example, decreasing public transportation and the use of personal vehicles can help deal with climate change. The same can be said for the spread of viruses, which are seen as a threat in the future as well (Smith, 2021).

Tools in the Metaverse are "rapidly becoming as infrastructural as electricity," (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016, p. 350). The essential AI technologies that will serve as the basis for the Metaverse include visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and language translation. Through learning from humans and their digital footprints for the last 30 years, AI algorithms have acquired the knowledge needed for the Metaverse to be set up. Examples of these are Google's question-and-answer algorithm based on its search engine, as most human beings are unconscious volunteers through their trillions of searches (Soricut & Brill, 2006). Some platforms currently offer Metaverse-like experiences, mainly in the realm of video games, which are combined with virtual economies (cryptocurrencies), enabling some of the users to make a living by taking part in these virtual realities including Axie Infinity, a play-to-earn games, Second Life, where users socialize, learn, and do business and Decentraland, a digital world that merges social life with cryptocurrencies, NFTs, and virtual real estate.

The potential popularity of the Metaverse can be envisioned by the number of people using VR games and apps that can be considered predecessors to the Metaverse. For example, there are 150 million Roblox monthly active users. A large portion of this is children, 2/3 of them aged 9-12 in the USA, and 1/3 of them under 16 (Meier et al., 2020).

Central claims made about the Metaverse are (1) richer ways of self-expression, (2) better immersion, (3) better socializing, (4) symmetric relation of physical and virtual spaces, (5) independent markets (via NFTs), (6) better user interfaces, and (7) high demands for regulation and governance (Bojic, 2022). The next platform is seen as even more immersive (Pritchard, 2022). Screens cannot convey realistic experiences, as much as the Metaverse technology will be capable of doing. Metaverse will generate embodied technology in which the user is inside the experience, not just looking at it. The feeling of presence is a major defining quality of the Metaverse, according to Zuckerberg, because one will be able to really feel being there with other people through facial expressions, gestures, and photo-realistic visual experiences (Zuckerberg, 2021). The Metaverse will provide better user interfaces when compared to existing communication technologies, Interacting with devices and people in the Metaverse will also be more natural, so instead of tapping or typing, one will be able to interact by gestures with hand movements, through speech, and even thoughts. This means the new technology will have features and subtle ways of communicating that cannot be delivered by existing solutions, for example, smartphones.

Numerous emerging technologies play important roles in the development and leading and learning processes. In the context of these developments, learning becomes the main axis in the organization of the educational process. Virtual worlds, Metaverses, and 3D virtual environments are now demonstrating huge potential for educational purposes because they enable analogical environments and processes to be recreated with a high degree of realism and where physical and communicative interactions closely