



UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS: INTERACTIVE 3D SIMULATIONS HELP EXECS MASTER DIFFICULT DISCOURSE

By Merilee Kern, MBA

Given the power and efficacy of simulation-based training, this novel approach is being employed across a myriad of industries far beyond aerospace and military, where it initially gained ground. These include everything from manufacturing and retail to healthcare, fitness, fashion and hospitality, reports indicate. No longer an exclusive tool for behemoth corporations, businesses of every size and scope can benefit from highly-optimized, interactive cyber-training innovations.

Short-burst microlearning 3D simulations have become as accessible as they are effective, proffering brief, easy-to-digest content that learners can access on their own time — and with immediate benefits. For one, modern 3D simulation remote training methods can instantly teach employees how to effectively navigate difficult conversations and communicate in a way that drives optimal outcomes and enriches relationships. Plus, this training can be conducted wherever that employee is based.

Interactive microlearning technology, which complements any in-person training initiatives, is helping businesses large and small rapidly improve internal and external communication skills relating to sensitive subject matter and operational mandates. This includes reducing customer confusion, rectifying unconscious bias to create a more inclusive culture, stemming micro-aggressions, promoting conflict resolution and de-escalation, conveying appropriate and consistent responses to crises like COVID-19, driving feedback conversations that enhance employee relations, empowering employees to constructively escalate issues that aren't discussed outside of "water cooler whispers" and more.

So potent is this approach, Allied Market Research indicates the virtual training and simulation

market size, currently valued at \$204.41 billion, is projected to more than double and reach \$579.44 billion by 2027. This and other such forecasts reflect the extent to which companies are now requiring their executives and managers to participate in virtual training and simulation to become better prepared for real-life situations. This is not surprising, given the several points of substantiation. For one, global consulting firm Accenture underscores that "experiential learning has long been argued as the most effective way to learn, and studies have shown that learning through experience increases learning quality by up to 75%." As one case in point, it notes that major retailers like Walmart leverage the technology to train managers to prepare for key events like Black Friday — with potential benefits including an 80% savings in training time.

The escalation of this technology and its potential to hugely impact training protocols in the post-pandemic era prompted me to query field expert Ed Beltran. As CEO of Fierce Conversations, Beltran spearheads customized simulation solutions that teach employees how to handle difficult customer conversations like those relating to the coronavirus pandemic, diversity and inclusion and other notorious, angst-inducing points of contention. Here's what he had to say.

MK: Can you provide a brief overview of the overarching benefits for interactive microlearning technology?

EB: 3D simulations help companies provide employees with interactive, bite-sized learning sessions that provide a quick and easy way to engage in real-world scenarios, explore emotional responses and receive immediate feedback so they can reflect on their own performance — all in a safe, virtual environment. This kind of training can address and resolve veritably any on-the-job challenge.

MK: What are some of the unique benefits and attributes of this kind of immersive virtual training?

EB: The benefits of simulation-based training are indisputable and innumerable. The overarching goal of microlearning immersion is to help employees become expert conversationalists

by knowing what to talk about, how to talk about it and why it matters for the bottom line of the specific employer. This is why the most effective 3D simulations are those that are "bite-sized" — as in 15 minutes or less — and also fully customized for each business and situation. In this way, businesses can efficiently address several critical issues via interactive real-world situations, all with the look and feel of your own location, organization and audiences. Personalized avatars are also used to recreate scenarios and build empathy, and immediate feedback helps employees learn and improve with each session.

MK: Do you have any data substantiations as to the efficacy of this approach?

EB: Learn and improve they do, as gamification capabilities are shown to maximize learner engagement and knowledge retention. In fact, interactive learning is not only shown to boost learning engagement by 50%, but it also enhances knowledge retention by more than 20%. It also scales cost effectively per learner so employers can mitigate training expenses. Duration is also key. According to Software Advice, most employees (58%) would more likely use online learning courses if they were broken into "multiple, shorter lessons," which creates more than 50% higher engagement. Additional metrics indicate microlearning in segments of three to seven minutes matches the memory capacity and attention spans of most humans.

So, next time you need to address internal complications or generally enhance operations, consider opting for interactive 3D simulations rather than those long, boring training videos. Such customized, 3D, real-world microlearning, practiced virtually, can get to the heart of challenges that employees are facing today with immediacy. The result will be conversations that make a real, meaningful and measurable impact.

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