The Metaverse: a new frontier for learning?

The metaverse is here. While the future direction of the metaverse is still being hotly debated – much like the internet was in its formative years – its concept is taking shape and is undoubtedly going to play a significant role in our lives.

For some, the metaverse offers the future of social interaction, for others it will be all about gaming and entertainment, but we should all be paying more attention to its potential to transform learning.

The metaverse has been described in many different ways, but broadly speaking it is defined as an expansive network of shared, persistent simulations that can be used to create identities, objects, history, transactions, and can be experienced synchronously by many (or even unlimited) users at the same time.

So how does learning fit into this visionary future? The metaverse will blur the boundaries between the physical and digital taking traditional interactions such as a business meeting or attending a lesson – into a new dimension. There are simple ways to imagine what a fully realised learning experience in the metaverse could one day look like: take car mechanic training for instance.

The metaverse could digitally transport students into a virtual garage, let them interact with an endless supply of vehicles, parts and tools and receive instruction from teachers, no matter where in the world they are. Not only would this circumvent the need for students to travel to specific locations to

learn and bypass limited access to resources, but it would also enable the student to interact with objects of their learning they would normally have difficulty accessing, perhaps due to their value or their location.

However, flashy product launches or multiplayer gaming experiences are still for the most part stealing the headlines and dominating the discussion around the metaverse. These capture the imagination, but there is an exciting world of opportunity in the building of virtual learning assets: these will not only help create a more holistic experience, but also create a more meritocratic and democratic learning environment that centres on the learner and their individual needs.

Enabling Learning 3.0

Many technological innovations have already been applied to learning, but the metaverse will take things up a notch and truly empower the learner to take control of the learning experience.

We know multimodal learning to be the most effective way to learn, combining visual, auditory and textual resources. In the metaverse, applying this approach is all the more potent – a Classical civilisation course, for example, could use a range of sensory dimensions, where the learner could speak to Socrates or see Plato's Allegory of the Cave brought to life. The fuller the learning experiences we have, the more senses that are stimulated – the better we learn.

By immersing the learner in a universe like this, a much greater sense of autonomy for their own learning is stimulated, moving away from the static, one-size-fits-all approach that has held learners back from achieving their full potential. The same applies to those using the metaverse to teach: no longer bound by rigid curricula or textbooks, we empower those educating in the metaverse, arming them with a truly immersive toolkit of resources.

Learning in virtual environments is also not just about educating younger people. It can also play a crucial role for adult learners, the largest group in education – whether they are onboarding to a new job or taking proactive steps to upskill or re-skill in a particular field. Take for instance emergency services training, where learners could develop their skills by practising virtual treatments. Not only would this help learners to practise more frequently but it would allow them to practise real-life skills in safe environments. These scenarios can be tailored to the needs of the learner in a cost-effective and efficient way that is scalable in situations where teams may need to practise together.

Ushering in a new breed of qualification

The metaverse will open the doors for learning to take on a more granular approach to recording skills. Implementing a truly immersive experience that could show a range of skills, in a range of disciplines, with a much higher guarantee that we actually understand the things we've learned.

Rather than the tell-and-test and click through methods which form the basis of most online learning experiences and lack engagement and efficiency, the metaverse can create significantly more transparent accreditation methods by creating, atomic, digital units of learning (a skill record of sorts).

Knowledge will be recorded on a more granular level and test the learner on skills acquired, resulting in the learner being credited with units learnt that offer better insights into the level of competency – an iterative map of skills – rather than accreditation for assumed knowledge.

For too long learning has been reduced to binary results, in which learners fail or pass. We can break this archaic cycle, by allowing for the skillset and individual needs to become the driving force for learning.

Degrees will run out of road

Online learning will make degrees obsolete, with learners learning more from experts within the chosen field, whilst avoiding the rising costs and time-commitment of a degree that doesn't equip the learner with workplace skills. The concept of a lifelong learner is only going to become more widely recognised as upskilling and reskilling become a greater part of our personal and professional lives, particularly as automation is set to radically transform the working world. Skills being recorded in the traditional sense will become less relevant, as we come to accept that in today's world the amount of information that we need to consume and internalise is part of a continuous journey, not a one-stop shop.

As the metaverse becomes more accessible we will begin to realise a more decentralised and democratic way of learning, where a system of granular skills recording demonstrates the learner's knowledge. For individuals inclined with the motivation and desire for self-improvement – where access to wealth or resources are not the determining factors – learning goals can be achieved faster, more effectively and by many more of us.

Joshua Wöhle is CEO and cofounder of *Mindstone*.

Article by JOSHUA WÖHLE