VIRTUAL REALITY TRAINING

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN MERCK AND SIFY

Hiring managers experience unconscious bias, and gain empathy and better understanding in virtual interviews.

sify

MERCK
INVENTING FOR LIFE

Background

Everyone is influenced by hidden or unconscious bias. Most of us form opinions and make decisions based on our intrinsic framework of societal stereotypes, personal experience, and backgrounds—often without realising it. Organisations today are convinced about increase diversity in their work force. Unchecked, unconscious bias can lead to discrimination, legal penalties, brand decline, and loss of productivity, morale, and revenue. Merck made diversity and inclusion at all levels in the company the hallmark of its corporate culture. Recently, the company introduced a one-day unconscious bias training curriculum for first-line managers. The goal was to consciously practice mitigating unconscious bias. The training at Merck was designed to complement the existing instructor-led training (ILT). Participants are encouraged to experience the VR solution before they participate in the role-playing exercise in the ILT.

Solution

Virtual reality environment and scenarios designed to create compelling trainings for first-line hiring managers at Merck to detect and mitigate unconscious bias in hiring

Customer

Merck & Company, Department of Training and Development

Users

100 hiring managers a year undergoing unconscious bias training

Results

Acceptance of the technology, and near unanimous praise for the ability to gain greater empathy via a virtual world experience.

An Expanding Relationship

Sify and Merck's relationship started in the year 2010 when Sify was working on designing and developing digital learning courses. Over the years, Sify's service offerings have matured to include technology-driven solutions such as virtual reality, augmented reality, micro learning, animation, interactive PDF, and 3D to clients, including Merck.

This transition within Sify's service offering coincided well with Merck's 2020 vision of focusing more on the use of technology and innovation. So, Sify was invited to present their innovative learning solutions to an Executive Leadership team within Merck's Learning and Development department.

As a result of the presentation from Sify, Merck came with a proposal to work together in October 2017. The scope was to design and create a Virtual Reality solution to strength their existing ILT training on Unconscious Bias for Hiring Managers. Sify's proposal included a virtual environment where each participant was provided a choice to share basic personal information to start. Post that, the participant chose an avatar and experienced an array of hiring-related scenarios comprising different ethnicities.

The virtual reality-based solution used HTC Vive where the participants could use the HTC controller to register biases and thereby be open to discussions on unconscious bias in the ILT session.

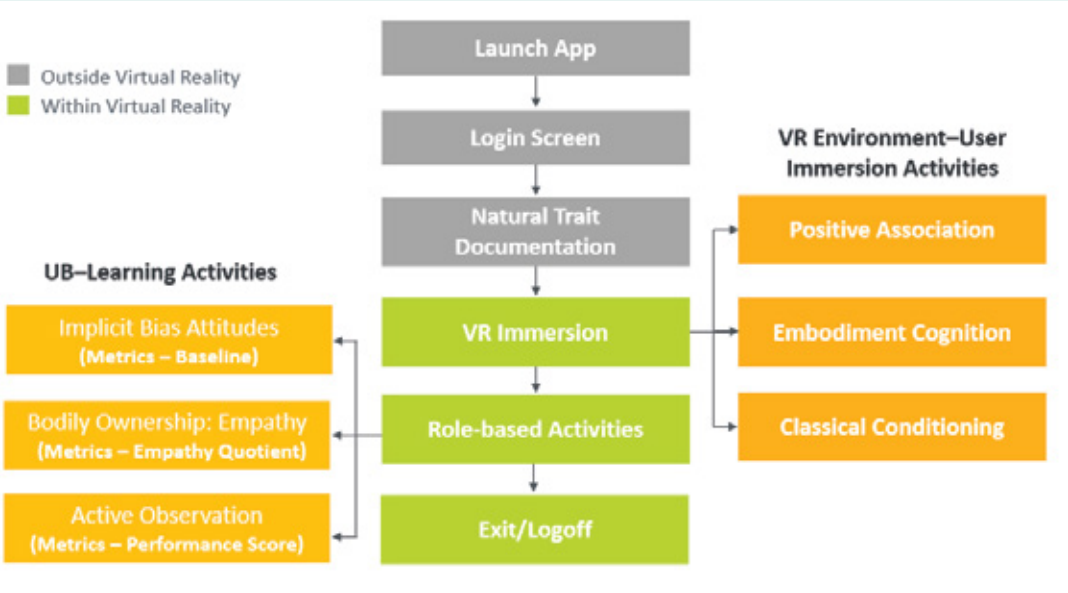
A Unique Application of VR

Using Virtual Reality for behaviour change is a quite a challenge both in terms of design and implement. It took about eight weeks for the instructional designers to design the avatars with different ethnicities, script the scenarios, and design the solution to elicit empathy. The avatars mirrored physical body movements with six degrees of freedom (6DoF) enacted by the participant. The Avatars could also depict facial expressions and were able to move through virtual office space, change direction, and move their hands and head, controlled by the participants.

Using this environment, participants guide their avatars through the interview process. The participants assume the role of an interviewer and/or candidate and learn how to recognise unconscious bias that can influence the decision-making process of a hiring manager.

Merck had requested the Virtual Reality setup to be at their Upper Gwynedd office. In addition, Merck wanted Sify to train the trainer for future demos. Next, the Virtual Reality module was added as an experiment to the course. By the end of the year, 40 users of the 100 yearly managers scheduled to take the course had used it. Surveys showed that nearly everyone either "liked it" or "thought it was awesome".

Components of the VR-based Learning Program and Learning Path for Participants

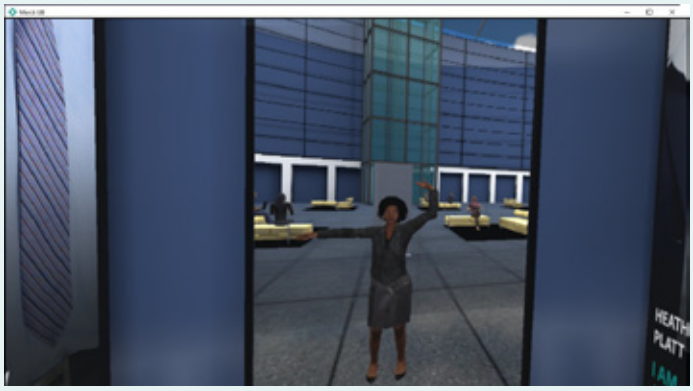


Description of the Solution Components

To make the users forget about the real physical world identities and to provide an absolute immersion in the virtual reality world, immersion techniques were adopted.

Introduction to Your Avatar
VR Activities to build
Positive Association

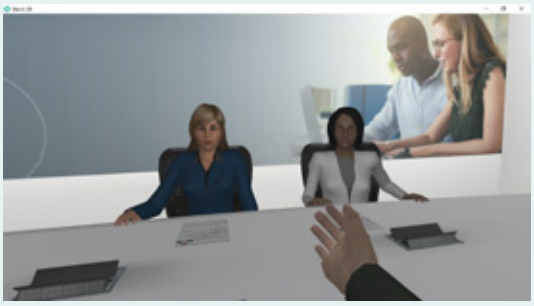
Registration with ID
VR Activities to Elicit
Embodiment
Cognition



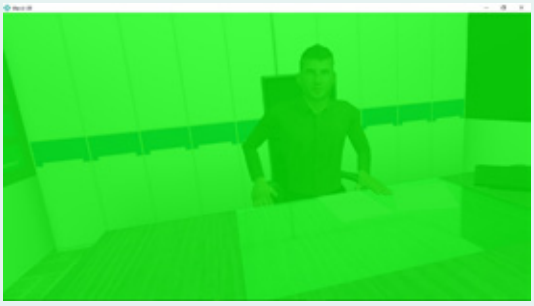
Your Avatar's Reflection
VR Activities to Enable
Classical Conditioning
for Complete Immersion

Unconscious bias mitigation learning activities

After participants complete the VR immersion activity, they are directed to the learning activities in the virtual reality environment. The module comprises of learning activities, which use an immersive VR environment, a diverse collection of avatars, and sample scenarios to give participants interview exchanges where bias is demonstrated and understood. In these learning activities, the participants role plays as interviewer, interviewee and observer to complete set of activities as part of the virtual hiring situations.



Interview Scenario
Learning Activities for for Bodily Ownership & Empathy – Interviewee Role Plays



Green Flash
Feedback for Unconscious Bias Identification during Role Plays - Green Flashes-Correct Responses

Red Flash
Feedback for Unconscious Bias Identification during Role Plays - Red Flashes-Incorrect Responses

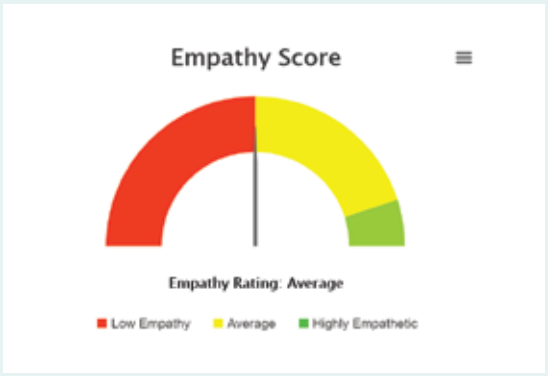
Question Pannel
Scenario-based Assessment Questions

xAPI Driven Learner Metrics

A web-based admin tool with reporting features was developed that silently runs in the background is responsible to store all the user data, question banks and xAPI generated reports persistently. The admin panel was connected to the Sify LRS to constantly pull out analytics to display the xAPI generated reports based on actions being performed by the users within the VR application. See Figures 9 & 10 on the features on the Admin tool.

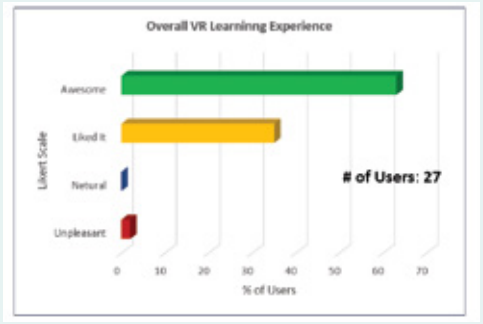
Admin Tool to Manage Content and Reporting

xAPI Driven Reporting and Learning Analytics for Users

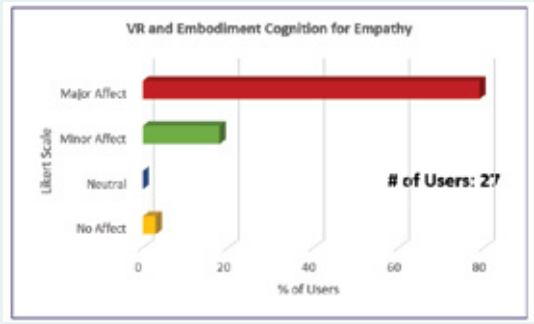


Empathy - User Report

Blind Spots – User Report.png



Learning Experience in VR Environment



VR Impact on Embodiment Cognition and Empathy

More VR Modules to Come

"The VR training that Sify developed is a really nice addition to our curriculum on unconscious bias," believes Izetta Phillips, a training manager in U.S. Commercial Learning at Merck. "Talking about developing empathy and identifying bias is one thing but experiencing it is quite another. And that's what VR enables our hiring managers to do now."

While long-term user surveys will reveal more accurate metrics on the effectiveness of the training, Merck is committed to not only train its people on how to identify and mitigate unconscious bias, but also to apply the lessons learned in their work.

Meanwhile, Merck anticipates developing more Soft Skills training using virtual reality, for coaching, and for other leadership Soft Skills areas.