

Metaverse: A Radically New Take on the Workplace

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ABSTRACT

The recent rebrand of Facebook as Meta received worldwide coverage. But the bigger question is whether this event will be just another rebrand or are the major technology companies increasingly recognising the emergence of a new concept called the Metaverse. Another area which needs to be looked into is whether the Metaverse is just a new term or has it been in existence always and is merely something which has bounced on to the center stage of the discussions surrounding the direction the workplaces of the future are taking and by extension, the resultant workplace environment. But, before any headway is made into understanding what effects this new concept is going to have on the workplaces, first the metaverse itself needs to be better understood. It will also be interesting to see what role the existing infrastructure plays in the fruition of this concept. Will the existing infrastructure be a foundation upon which the Metaverse will stand or will an alternate course be so that the existing infrastructure will have to be reoriented into its new role as something assisting the Metaverse. The next area which needs to be looked into is the element of continuity. Since this new concept is radical, therefore there will exist a probability where there may come to exist a disjoint between the metaverse and how prepared the HR of today are to embrace it. This paper intends to contribute towards a structured understanding of the metaverse and its effects on the workplace environment.

Keywords:- Technology, Metaverse, HR, Workplace

1. INTRODUCTION

Technology plays a crucial role today in all spheres of life with industries being no exception. One of the most fundamental manifestations which technology bore in this field was the currently ubiquitous internet. The internet has come to serve as the foundation upon which the various forms of communication stand; providing an ever-efficient tool to better manage the various workflows we come across today in the modern world so that we can stay ahead of our work commitments both in our personal as well as professional lives. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the internet as a backbone of the communication infrastructure was a significant milestone in how we approach our workflow.

But since then, a few very fundamental shifts have taken place in the field of technology which stand to have a direct bearing upon our lives in general and our professional workflows, our workspaces and the resultant workplace environment in specific. The most recent of such shifts is the Metaverse. If the intent is to gain a better understanding of the effects the metaverse would have on the workplaces in the near future, then first the concept of Metaverse itself needs to be seen whether is it just a new term or has the metaverse been something in the making for quite some time.

The immediate next sub-structure upon which the metaverse stands is what is currently known as the internet of things. The conservative school of thought which holds the opinion that the metaverse is merely a fancy new term for the internet of things is narrow in its perception. This situation is similar to when the Internet of Things was taking birth. At that stage, even the Internet of Things was being rejected as being merely a

gimmick. But these days, it is becoming increasingly pervasive. Any such view which would look at something to be a finality would be proven wrong in time. This is because in the view of time, there are stages and not finalities of technology, management approaches or any sphere for that matter. Therefore, the first thing which is of consequence is the understanding that the metaverse is not something of a finality but it is better understood as the next stage with the immediately previous stage being that of the Internet of Things. Another school of thought exists which contends that the metaverse is just some users who mistook the field of augmented reality that is the A.R.; combined it with the existing IoT infrastructure and coined a new term metaverse. While in effect, the field of augmented reality is one of the sub-fields which serve as tools to the Metaverse. Therefore, the Metaverse is a field made elaborate and fed in to by multiple other sub-fields which is itself something of interest to anyone who intends to perceive the direction which would be taken by our lives in general and yes towards better, more efficient management of various resources we have at our disposal, most importantly in the sense of the industrial workplaces. Remaining aware of the direction the industrial workplaces are taking is of crucial significance because the workplace is the venue and provides the background in which the human resource element of a company comes into play. The subsequent bearing upon the workplace environment is in itself an area of interest towards which this paper intends to contribute in to developing a structured understanding of the metaverse and the direction the metaverse would take the workplace towards in the near future.

1.1. Metaverse – The Preceding Phases

Broadly, there have been three phases in this journey so far, with the first phase being when the internet created a foundation upon which the very capable communication networks of today stand and work towards providing the very necessary streamlining of the workflows which is crucial for any industrial workplace to function to its utmost potential. Such networks reduce the paperwork, keep the emails etc. in process so that the other more financially significant operations can be thought through with the required seriousness.

The second phase, was the birth of the Internet of Things. This phase was interesting because this phase is not very dissimilar from what we are faced with today. In its initial years, even the Internet of Things or the IoT as it is now fondly called, was but rejected as just being something of a gimmick. But, slowly but surely, the then new concept of the IoT took its place among the increasingly more pervasive technologies of today. The Internet of Things was the second shift the industrial workplaces witnessed and continue to witness. The companies were relatively relieved of their burden of centralised device management, something which required serious finance. It is not to say that this concern has been eradicated. But the advent of the Internet of Things went to great lengths to mitigate this issue to relatively more manageable levels. It so happened because instead of relying on provisioning the infrastructure locally on the premises of the company, employees could then embrace such then recent trends as what was famously known as the BYOD trend that is the Bring Your Own Devices trend.

Another aspect, in which this second phase proved of consequence was that automation which was previously limited to the communication channels in the sense of better managing information and its flow for example automated replies to emails. But now in this second phase, thanks to the internet of things, automation came to a greater number of devices as can be seen today with its most recent bearing being that the Internet of Things gave rise to such never before possible things like smart workplaces, smart homes with smart home in itself becoming an increasingly lucrative market for any interested companies. The most visible manifestation of how deeply this phase two has begun shaping both our personal spaces as well as our professional workspaces is the advent of voice assistants like Alexa and a whole slew of compatible devices which ensure that our work flow remains lean. This second phase, however, has not yet become as foundational as the one previous to it that is the emergence of the internet, has come to be. The Internet of Things phase is as of now more like an undercurrent gradually but surely taking its place in the foundational infrastructure for the metaverse.

1.2. Metaverse – The Hindrances

The most visible hindrance towards the metaverse phase is that the internet of things is highly fragmented and as things stand, increasingly more factors which contribute towards the said fragmentation are continuously emerging. One such factor is that this internet of things lacks any regulation capable of classifying it let alone demarcating it. This leads to a situation where the current state of this phase is very raw

with raw having the meaning that yes, the internet of things has the materials to be contributing as a foundation upon which the metaverse should stand but currently it is visualised as disjointed fragments. It is not to say that the said fragmentation is not manageable. It is manageable. But certain players in the market whose vested interests lie in letting this phase remain fragmented use their leverage in a status quoist sense.

The factor which compounds this situation is the uneven nature of any attempts at regulation. For example, regulations like the GDPR are implemented in their true sense while an uncomfortable realisation will be that in developing countries, read India, the implementation of any regulations is lax and at the pity of power brokers in this field. A very plausible way of dealing with any such situations would be to have honest attempts towards this and not toothless regulations.

Another issue directly flowing from this process of thought will be that any such regulations must also materialise themselves on the ground which is another area where the executive comes into play leading to such situations where legalities are implemented for fun rather than the ideal state where the powerful and the citizenry must be equally punishable in the eyes of the law. Another factor is the lack of any central agency monitoring how the various such IoT products are allowed to let in to the shores of the country in the name of big firms. For example, under the GDPR, any products entering the European Union have to first undergo a process called rationalisation, a process absent in countries like India.

Such processes keep the EU in a more regulated state and thereby it reaps the fruits of a better regulated IoT infrastructure in the European Region. This immediately manifests itself as better workplace environment in which the human resources of any firms operating on European soil be able to strive towards better, more efficient methods of managing their workflows. Taking care of their electronic infrastructure in time put the EU in a position where as things are currently, most firms in the EU are already beyond the wireless phase. It is only natural that the metaverse has begun to shape the workplaces there. These firms are swiftly moving themselves towards a situation where they are equipping their workforce with AR gear among other things. Realising the potential of WFH or Work from home, the said firms are increasingly coming at ease with their workforce working remotely from their homes as long as the results of the firms are improving, they do not bother with much else, a situation which falls prey to the paperwork bottlenecks as they exist in the developing countries. It keeps the realisation of the metaverse in an Indian context at a greater distance in comparison to say the EU where the metaverse is no longer a fancy term but has begun materialising.

1.3. Metaverse – The Vision

The vision the EU is silently pursuant of is the same vision that the offshoot company now distinct from One Plus, the company named – Nothing. The CEO of Nothing said that Nothing visualises the creation of workplace environments where the infrastructure fades in to the background and merely facilitates the workforce in getting things done. He visualised a central hum and nothing more but an empty room where the workers utilise and work in augmented reality, immediately reducing the number of electronics you require to – one. This simplifies your room – and your life – grants peace of mind, then you can enjoy your work. This, is his vision.

The up side is that he is closer to his vision than is immediately visible because the thing which comes to the fore is that there is only one raw material, he needs to materialise this vision of his and that technology is already commercially viable and booming – the field and paraphernalia of Augmented Reality. The currently present generation of the workforce will need to be trained. But the immediately next generation of employees will be natural users of AR, immediately materialising the metaverse.

Then, metaverse will begin to serve as the third phase of workplace environment. Therefore, any schools of thought which currently dismiss the metaverse as merely a fancy term cannot be more misinformed in their stance. Resistance to nay new ideas has always been a part and parcel of how we as human approach things. But resistance should be constructive. However, in this case, that is in the case of the metaverse, the resistance appears to be an irrational opposition of not something which is to come, but something which is already taking shape. A better way forward would be to provide valid criticisms so that they can be handled.

A few attempts of acquiring the first mover advantage in the metaverse have been by Mark Zuckerberg, he intends to monopolise the metaverse infrastructure market so that any firms which intend to move towards this newer better form of the workplaces should see Mark Zuckerberg and his company Meta – formerly Facebook as the central provider. However, Meta should see heavy resistance from the other behemoths, most capable of them being Microsoft under its CEO Satya Nadella. These tech behemoths under leadership by some of the brightest on the planet have begun their fight for penetrating the nascent market of what will come to serve as the infrastructure responsible for effecting the metaverse.

Currently, these firms are more interested in laying the groundwork. But they will increasingly be looking into how to monopolise and monetise this new area. Their outlooks are different. Facebook for example will try to approach the metaverse with its vision of the metaverse being a social network and thus the re-brand to Meta. Microsoft will approach the metaverse under its vision of the metaverse being an operating system. And so on and so forth. The difference of opinions, visions, etc. should drive the metaverse towards only a better researched however currently nascent area.

2. METHODS USED

The secondary data has been used sourced from the official online locations of some of the most relevant service providers in the areas of HRM, Social Media and Technology Industries analysing the examples of how the emerging concept of the Metaverse is changing how the employees and teams handle their work and how ultimately, the Metaverse is giving shape to the radical new form of the workplace environment transforming the entire workplace of any industry which is willing to embrace this new form of workflow.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Metaverse and the Workplace - The Implications

The area which most directly stands to benefit from this R and D in to the Metaverse is the workplace environment. This is so because being a concept driven by Augmented Reality, the Metaverse would require a venue to manifest itself. The most direct bearing in the field of management therefore, would be how the Metaverse interplays and remodels the workplace environment. In its simplest form, one may visualise workplaces to reach such a stage where there is merely one central hub required to keep the entire workflow streamlined, immediately cutting down maintenance headaches and reducing the number of personnel required in maintenance positions. The metaverse should also relieve the workforce to be necessarily present on the premises as long as the work proceeds at a breakneck speed. This provides the employees flexibility to be out and about their business at hand rather than being bogged down locked in the premises. Metaverse should further towards the goal of flattened organisations which are no longer reliant on specific locations to remain on duty. The employee can be anywhere and still can continue to do that what is fruitful for the company as a whole. It also relieves of time barrier. The employees may be spread across even entire time zones and yet even if their timings of working are no longer required to be in sync but still the required workflow proceeds as it should. It also works towards at least mitigating one of the most visible problems employees are faced with that is their balance with their life around those near and dear to them. Metaverse ensures that the employees can remain among those who matter to them and still go about their work. The early adopters of the metaverse have begun seeing these advantages helping their company report better results than they were seeing before they embraced this new form of work. Rightly so. The companies embracing this workflow are relieved of keeping track of things irrelevant towards the efficiency-related questions. It is immediately a peace of mind. Objectives are met when they should be met. The remainder of time becomes a non-concern immediately. It should also keep the firms under better shape which should be an ever-necessary competitive advantage against any rival firms.

4. CONCLUSION

In the background provided by the Internet as a foundation and the IoT framework as a facilitator, the next fundamental shift which would drive innovation in the field of workplaces in the near future and any associated workplace environment is the Metaverse. Utilising Augmented Reality but not limited to it, the Metaverse stands to give rise to workplace environments where the firms embracing this workflow no longer need to bother as they had to before with one single central hub being enough to take care of the entire premises immediately bearing such benefits as reduced maintenance costs and a reduced number of personnel required to man any such positions. This will in very near future conclude in a newer ever leaner form of workplace environment where the employees can be their best.

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