

Immersive Technologies in Human Resources

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ABSTRACT

Immersive technology is emerging as a game-changer for businesses across industries and in human resources (HR) in particular. It is no longer a futuristic concept but a present-day reality transforming the way we approach HR training and development. Immersive technology in HR aims to bridge the gap between the physical world and the digital, creating unique experiences that are easily accessible and highly engaging.

Its ability to offer immersive, interactive, and personalized learning experiences presents a unique opportunity for organizations to enhance their training programs and elevate employee engagement. By leveraging this technology, we can create immersive modules intentionally crafted as alternative experiential learning methods that simulate the workplace. This paper seeks to explore the growing intersection between HR and immersive technologies.

KEYWORDS: *virtual reality, VR, augmented reality, AR, mixed reality, MR, extended reality, XR, immersive technologies, human resources, HR, human resource management, HRM.*

INTRODUCTION

Humans learn better when they are genuinely engaged in an activity. Traditional training methods are often costly and ineffective. The adoption of immersive technology by HR professionals promises to create immersive learning experiences that are more engaging, transformational, and interactive compared to traditional methods. Immersive learning through VR offers a powerful alternative.

Virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and mixed reality (MR) are no longer science fiction; they are becoming integral tools for enhancing productivity, collaboration, and learning in the workplace. The immersive technology serves as a comprehensive environment that merges physical and digital realities to offer a rich, enduring multi-user experience. Immersion not only sustains the learner's attention but also creates a sense of presence that traditional training methods struggle to replicate, thereby increasing the likelihood of real-world application and retention of skills learned during training [1].

The immersive technology is reshaping the modern workplace and transforming how organizations manage human capital. One of the most significant advantages of immersive technology is its ability to create a sense of presence, which is essential in today's increasingly remote work environment [2]. Figure 1 shows a representation of immersive technology [3].

WHAT ARE IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGIES?

The first step in understanding how to use immersive technologies is to learn the differences between various forms. In their simplest form, immersive technologies consist in adding virtual objects to the real world. There are four types of digital realities leading to different types of immersive technologies [4,5]:

- *Augmented reality (AR)*- designed to add digital elements over real-world views with limited interaction.
- *Virtual reality (VR)*- immersive experiences helping to isolate users from the real world,

How to cite this paper: Matthew N. O. Sadiku | Paul A. Adekunle | Janet O. Sadiku "Immersive Technologies in Human Resources" Published in International

Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-10 | Issue-1, February 2026, pp.1194-1204,

URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd100209.pdf



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usually via a headset device and headphones designed for such activities.

- *Mixed reality (MR)*- combining AR and VR elements so that digital objects can interact with the real world means businesses can design elements anchored within a real environment.
- *Extended reality (XR)*- covering all types of technologies that enhance our senses, including the three types previously mentioned.

These devices also enable new user interactions including spatially tracked 3D controllers, voice inputs, gaze tracking, and hand gesture controls.

Extended reality (XR) is the overarching term used to describe employing technology to blend real life and the digital world. It includes all the machine-human interfaces beyond the physical realm (reality) such as augmented reality (AR), mixed reality (MR), assisted reality (aR), and virtual reality (VR), as illustrated in Figure 2 [6]. Figure 3 shows the XR spectrum [7]. Immersive technologies reside along a continuous scale ranging between the completely real and the completely virtual world. At one end, the real environment refers to the actual physical space, objects, and people that exist in the tangible world around us. At the other end, the virtual environment represents a completely computer-generated and immersive digital space, distinct from the physical reality. The space in the middle is called mixed reality, which is a blend of the real and virtual environments, where digital and physical elements coexist and interact in real time. A range of devices makes up XR, and these are used by consumers and in many industries for entertainment, safety, training, or productivity purposes.

1. **VIRTUAL REALITY:** Virtual reality (VR) is XR at its most extreme. It completely immerses the user in a digital world, often using a computer-generated environment with scenes and objects that appear to be real. The term “virtual reality” essentially means “near-reality.” Virtual reality is the key technology for experiencing sensations of sight, hearing, and touch of the past, present, and future. VR is a fully immersive technology where users wear a head-mounted display and experience a simulated world of imagery and sounds. VR enables active learning. The terms, “virtual reality” and “cyberspace” are often used interchangeably. A cyberspace may be regarded as a networked virtual reality. A person using virtual reality can look around an artificial world, move around it, and interact with virtual features or items. This effect is commonly created by virtual reality headsets. Head-mounted displays

immerse the user in a virtual environment. Virtual reality is a simulated experience that can be similar to or different from the real world. It is a computer-generated, 3D environment that completely immerses the senses of sight, sound, and touch. The complete immersion of the senses overwhelms users engrossing them in the action. Virtual reality technology includes multiple components divided into two main groups: hardware and software components [8].

➤ *Hardware Components:* The hardware components include a computer workstation, sensory displays, a tracking system, wearable devices, and input devices. Sensory displays are used to display the simulated virtual worlds to the user. The most common type is the head-mounted displays (HMDs), which is used in combination with tracking systems. Head-mounted displays are shown in Figure 4 [9]. Users interact with the simulated environment through some wearable devices. VR depends on special responses such as raising hands, turning the head, or swinging the body. A wearable device is important in making these effects realistic. Special input devices are required to interact with the virtual world. These include the 3D mouse, the wired glove, motion controllers, and optical tracking sensors. These devices are used to stimulate our senses together to create the illusion of reality.

➤ *Software Components:* Besides the hardware, the underlying software plays an important role. It is responsible for the managing of I/O devices and time-critical applications. The software components are 3D modeling software, 2D graphics software, digital sound editing software, and VR simulation software. VR technology has been designed to ensure visual comfort and ergonomic usage.

2. **AUGMENTED REALITY:** Augmented reality (AR) is a technology that combines real-world environments with computer-generated generated information such as images, text, videos, animations, and sound. It can record and analyze the environment in real-time. In augmented reality, the user typically experiences the real world through a device such as a smartphone, tablet, smart glasses, or head-mounted display. For example, AR allows consumers to visualize a product in more detail before they purchase it. This feature enhances consumer interaction and helps them never to repurchase the wrong item. The key objective of AR is to bring computer-

generated objects into the real world and allows the user only to see them. In other words, we use AR to track the position and orientation of the user's head to enhance/augment their perception of the world. Augmented reality falls into two categories: 2D information overlays and 3D presentations, like those used with games. AR blends the virtual and real worlds by overlaying digital objects and information onto the users' view of the physical world.

To obtain a sufficiently accurate representation of reality, AR needs the following five components [10]:

- *Sensors:* AR needs suitable sensors in the environment and possibly on a user, including fine-grained geolocation and image recognition. These are activating elements that trigger the display of virtual information.
 - *Image augmentation:* This requires techniques such as image processing and face recognition.
 - *Head-mounted Display:* HMDs are used to view the augmented world where the virtual computer-generated information is properly aligned with the real world. Display technologies are of two types: video display and optical see-through display.
 - *User Interface:* This includes technologies for input modalities that include gaze tracking, touch, and gesture. AR is a user interface technology in which a camera-recorded view of the real world is augmented with computer-generated content such as graphics, animations, and 2D or 3D models.
 - *Information infrastructure:* AR requires significant computing and communications infrastructure undergirding all these technologies. The infrastructure determines what real-world components to augment, with what, and when.
3. **MIXED REALITY:** Mixed reality (MR) is a term used to describe the merging of a real-world environment and a computer-generated one. Physical and virtual objects may co-exist in mixed reality environments and interact in real time. This is an extension of AR that allows real and virtual elements to interact in an environment. MR liberates us from screen-bound experiences by offering instinctual interactions with data in our living spaces and with our friends. Online explorers, in hundreds of millions around the world, have experienced mixed reality through their handheld devices. Mixed reality is a blend of physical and digital worlds, unlocking natural and intuitive 3D human, computer, and environmental interactions, as shown in Figure 5 [11] and Figure 6 [12]. This new reality is based on advancements in computer vision, graphical processing, display

technologies, input systems, and cloud computing. Mixed reality has been used in applications across fields including design, education, entertainment, military training, healthcare, product content management, and human-in-the-loop operation of robots [13].

4. **ASSISTED REALITY:** Like mixed reality, assisted reality (aR) is an extension of augmented reality, with a few notable differences to both. One of these differences is that aR is primarily hands-free through the wearing of a headset, whereas AR usually requires the holding of a device such as a mobile phone. While MR is a digital-first, real-world second reality, aR is a real-world first system. It combines software and a head-mounted display. It is best experienced using smart glasses or other wearable technology. The aR market is growing rapidly and promises to be the next great leap to boost workers' productivity. A worker wearing an aR device is shown in Figure 7 [14].
5. **EXTENDED REALITY:** The term "extended reality" (XR) has recently gained favor as an umbrella term that encompasses all of AR, VR, and MR. The primary user inputs for XR devices are described as follows. Voice interfaces are now ubiquitous thanks to mobile devices and standalone smart speakers. Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, Google's Assistant, and Microsoft's Cortana are all voice-driven software interfaces that are continuously gaining new capabilities. Many XR devices enable user control with handheld controllers, which have capabilities beyond button press inputs. Both voice-driven interfaces and human-computer interactions have been developed specifically for XR devices, including gaze and gesture controls [15]. Figure 8 compares conventional computing with extended reality [15].

IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN HUMAN RESOURCES

For decades, HR is stuck in its self-created world of complacency. It is clear that the industry needs to be shaken up, and employers need to find ways to stand out from the get-go. As with many other sectors, HR has begun to incorporate emerging technologies into its practices. HR departments need to implement immersive tech in their onboarding and training process as a form of more profound connection with their employees. Figure 9 shows some HR team [16].

Extended Reality (XR) is a paradigm shift in user interfaces, merging the physical and digital worlds, offering a new modality of interaction between technology and information. XR tools are pivotal in bridging the physical distance in remote work

environments. XR in HR redefines employee experiences, offering immersive training environments, enhancing remote collaboration, and adding depth to talent acquisition and onboarding processes. It enables an engaging, efficient, and connected workplace, irrespective of physical locations. XR's integration into HR practices has an impact on traditional methods, and offers innovative solutions to upgrade multiple HR functions.

APPLICATIONS OF IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN HUMAN RESOURCES

The immersive technology can be leveraged for a range of HR activities, including virtual meetings, recruitment and hiring interviews, onboarding, employee engagement, and seamless communication across locations. Common applications of immersive tech in HR include the following [17,18]:

- *Employee Onboarding:* A better onboarding experience can lead to happier and more efficient employees. Companies implementing immersive tech in their hiring and onboarding procedures are looking for ways to connect with staff, gaining higher retention rates and employee happiness in the process. The user can access workplace simulations and complete onboarding modules through devices available at home, such as an iPhone or laptop, ensuring a smooth and easy training process at the click of the "send" button. In busy and notoriously understaffed industries such as hospitality, onboarding modules can immerse new hires in a dynamic environment before experiencing the real-life equivalent. New hires can use VR to virtually tour office spaces, meet their teams, and familiarize themselves with workflows, all before their first day on the job.
- *Employee Engagement:* Employee engagement and job satisfaction are key drivers of productivity and retention. Engagement, defined as the learner's active involvement and emotional investment in the training process, has been consistently linked to improved training outcomes. VR and AR can make training more enjoyable and relevant, positively impacting employees' perception of their jobs and employers. When combined with VR's capacity for full sensory immersion, engagement enhances the learning experience by making it more realistic and memorable. XR training is rapidly transforming workforce development, boasting remarkable benefits in employee confidence, proficiency, and engagement. XR offers unique, engaging experiences for employees, boosting morale and job satisfaction. For example, gamified employee training can be used to host

virtual team-building exercises and social events, especially valuable in today's increasingly remote and distributed work environments.

- *Technical Training:* XR's application in training and development is particularly noteworthy, because it enables employees to acquire and refine skills in a controlled, and realistic virtual setting. VR HR can enable immersive training experiences, allowing employees to learn new skills in simulated environments. VR and AR show strong potential for technical training. They are already being widely used in high-stakes jobs where mistakes can be hazardous, such as the aviation, defense, oil and gas, and chemical industries. They are also a good fit for situations where on-site training might be very difficult to arrange and expensive, such as on oil platforms. Figure 10 shows an employee at an electronics manufacturer using an augmented reality training application [18]. This training will be improved once early tools are replaced by new headsets that are capable of cognitive load measurement.
- *Immersive Learning:* Unlike traditional training methods that rely on passive learning, VR enables employees to step into simulated scenarios that closely resemble real-world situations. This immersion fosters deeper engagement and helps learners better understand and apply concepts in a context that feels tangible and relevant. Through VR, employees can actively participate in their learning process rather than merely observing or reading about it. This interactivity can include role-playing, decision-making exercises, and real-time feedback, all of which enhance the learning experience and promote skill development.

BENEFITS

Virtual reality in HR can improve a variety of processes in recruitment, hiring, onboarding, and employee training. VR has immense potential to improve the candidate and employee experience. A key benefit of VR training is learners are immersed in the experience and not distracted. Industrial companies are using VR and AR to improve workforce efficiency, improve quality and yield, and reduce waste caused by human error. Beyond its educational advantages, immersive technology offers significant cost savings and environmental benefits. Through these immersive platforms, candidates can explore company cultures and refine their interview techniques. Other benefits include the following [19,20]:

- *Cost Savings:* Despite the high initial investment, the immersive technology is expected to provide cost savings over time by need for physical office

space. It minimizes other operational costs associated with traditional workspaces. Conventional offices incur ongoing costs for renting space, purchasing equipment, and maintaining office supplies. Organizations should conduct a detailed cost-benefit analysis to determine the potential return on investment (ROI) from implementing an immersive platform environment for HR functions.

- *Remote Collaboration:* While remote work has provided employees with the flexibility to work from home, it has also highlighted the limitations of traditional office environments. Remote work is exponentially on the rise, and XR is a main tool, playing a crucial role in bridging the gap between physical distance and collaboration. VR meeting rooms are used for virtual meetings, and the same can be applied for any type of get-together, whether it is a job interview, evaluation meetings, a presentation or a tour.
- *Personalization:* Immersive technologies allow for tailored training experiences, catering to individual learning needs. Applying AI in conjunction with XR is instrumental in building personalized interactive experiences. Leveraging the strengths of both technologies, interaction can be redefined by learning from user actions on the platform. Personalization is achieved through algorithms that process user interactions, preferences, and performance within the XR environment. Combined with XR's immersive training environments, employees can get benefits from personalized learning journeys, which are designed to address specific developmental needs, acquisition of new skills and improve existing ones in an interactive manner.
- *Knowledge Retention:* Research has shown that immersive and interactive learning experiences lead to better knowledge retention compared to traditional methods. VR's ability to engage multiple senses and provide realistic practice scenarios helps reinforce learning and ensures that employees retain information more effectively. The immersive nature of VR enhances their ability to recall and act on critical information. Immersive technology facilitates knowledge transfer during transitions, such as retirements or departures, by creating engaging and interactive repositories of experienced employees' expertise.
- *Skill Development:* By simulating complex tasks and scenarios, VR allows employees to practice and refine their abilities in a controlled setting. This hands-on approach enables them to gain practical experience and build confidence in their

skills. VR training modules can be customized to address specific learning goals, performance gaps, or skill requirements, ensuring that each employee receives targeted instruction that aligns with their development needs.

CHALLENGES

HR practices will need to address emerging challenges related to digital identity, privacy, and security within the metaverse, ensuring that employees feel secure and confident in their virtual interactions. Organizations must navigate several challenges, including policy and safety concerns, generational resistance, technological expertise requirements, technical limitations, and the need for physical presence in certain roles. In addressing these challenges, organizations can better navigate the integration of metaverse technologies into HR practices. Other challenges include [1,20-22]:

- *High Cost:* Implementing immersive platforms for HR functions presents both opportunities and challenges from a cost perspective. While the initial investment may be substantial, the potential long-term benefits could outweigh the upfront expenses. Implementing VR training programs may involve significant initial investment. Organizations will need to carefully assess the cost-benefit ratio and consider long-term ROI to justify the expenditure. Despite the high initial investment required for metaverse technologies, the long-term benefits-including cost savings on physical office space, increased productivity, and enhanced collaboration- present a compelling case for adoption.
- *Accessibility:* Ensuring that VR and AR training is accessible to all employees, including those with disabilities, aligns with principles of diversity and inclusivity, which are increasingly vital in today's workplace.
- *Ethical Concerns:* As with any technology, ethical and privacy concerns must be addressed. A thorough study can identify potential ethical dilemmas and privacy issues associated with VR and AR training, ensuring responsible and ethical use.
- *Technical Requirements:* VR training solutions require specific hardware and software infrastructure. Ensuring that the necessary technology is in place and maintaining it will be essential for successful VR training implementation. Tackling challenges related to connectivity, bandwidth, and latency that may affect the overall user experience.

- **Resistance:** Addressing the resistance from employees who are accustomed to conventional work settings is essential. It is vital to implement extensive training programs and foster cultural shifts to embrace and support new technologies. Organizations resistant to change may struggle to realize VR's full potential, as employees in such environments may exhibit lower receptivity to new training methodologies.
- **Organizational Culture:** Organizational culture plays a critical role by fostering a supportive environment that encourages employees to utilize VR's immersive qualities effectively. The significant moderating effect of organizational culture on VR training outcomes, particularly in enhancing engagement and immersion, highlights the importance of contextual factors in technology adoption. Investigating the organizational factors that enable or hinder VR adoption could offer strategies for fostering innovation-friendly cultures.
- **Contextual Training:** Organizations that successfully leverage VR and AR for training can gain a competitive edge by offering more effective and engaging learning experiences, attracting top talent, and retaining skilled employees. Identifying emerging trends and innovations in VR and AR for training can assist organizations in staying at the forefront of employee development, preparing their workforce for the challenges of tomorrow. For VR training to be effective, employees must be comfortable and willing to engage with the technology. Organizations should invest in user training and support to ensure the smooth adoption and integration of VR into their training programs. Figure 11 shows the use of immersive technology in training [23].
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Compliance with industry regulations and standards is of paramount importance. The study can identify how VR and AR can assist in meeting these compliance requirements and adhering to ethical and legal guidelines.

CONCLUSION

AR augments the real world with digital overlays, whereas VR produces totally synthetic surroundings. VR and AR need to become more mainstream in the public domain so that potential candidates and employees fully embrace them in their work environment. Improvements in VR and AR will undoubtedly help. However, HR teams will have to experiment to figure out how to make VR content stand out. As VR becomes more sophisticated and

accessible, its role in HR training is expected to expand, offering even more innovative solutions for employee development and organizational growth.

HR professionals can utilize these technologies to create immersive training experiences, allowing employees to develop and refine skills in a controlled, risk-free virtual setting. For businesses looking to stay competitive in this rapidly changing landscape, now is the time to explore and implement immersive technologies. As we look ahead, the adoption of immersive technologies is set to accelerate. The immersive technology is growing in importance and shaping the future of work. More information about immersive technologies in human resources can be found in the books [24,25] and this related journal: *International Journal of Research in Human Resource Management*.

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Figure 1 A representation of immersive technology [3].

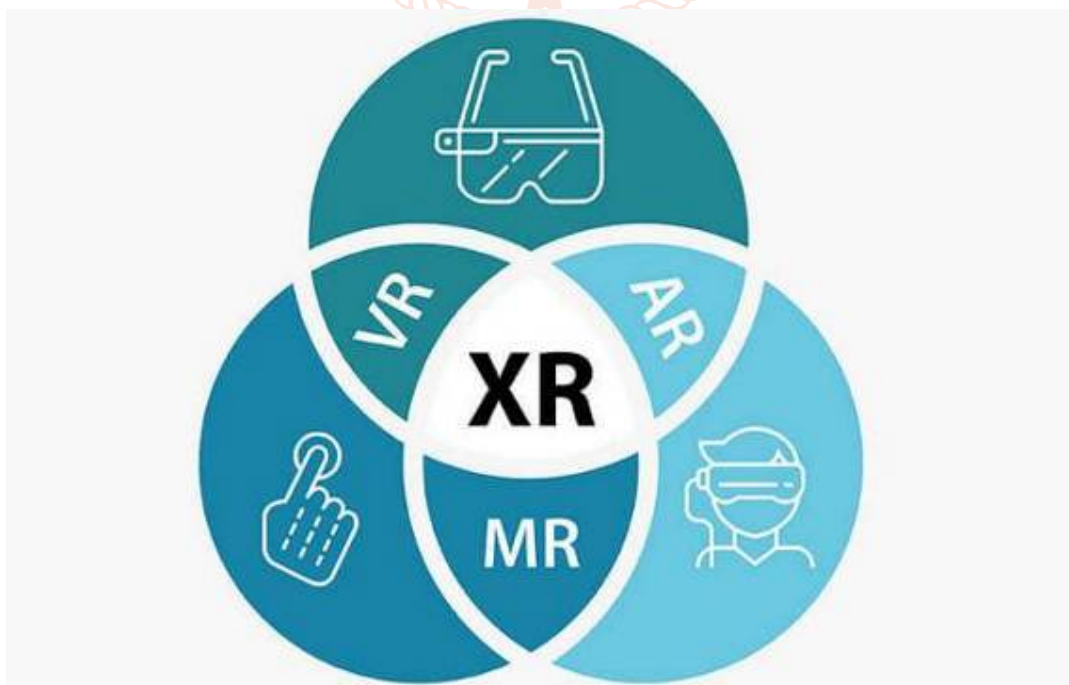


Figure 2 Extended reality (XR) includes AR, MR, and VR [6].

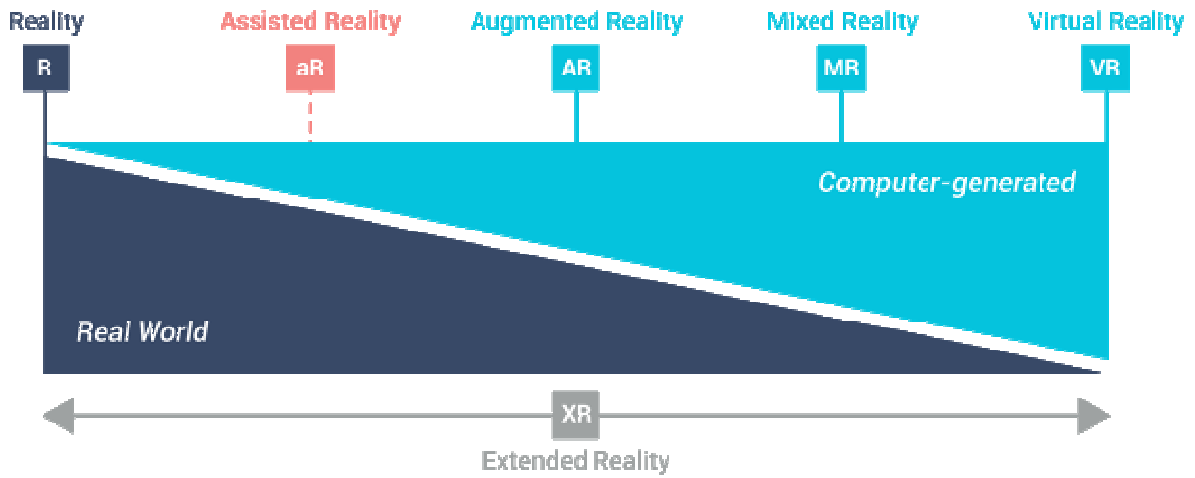


Figure 3 The XR spectrum [7].



Figure 4 Head-mounted displays [9].

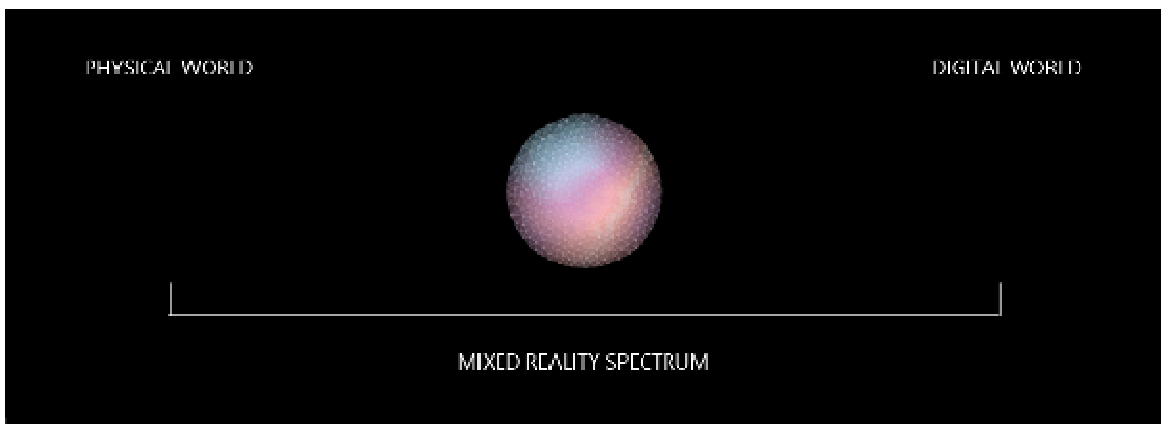


Figure 5 Mixed reality is a blend of physical and digital worlds [11].

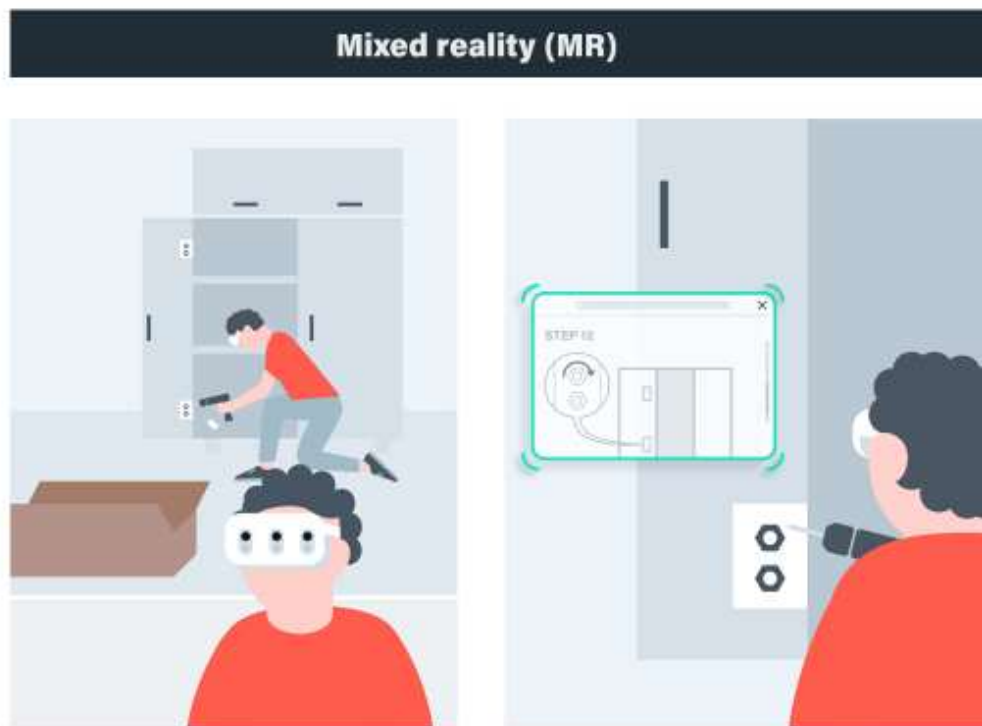
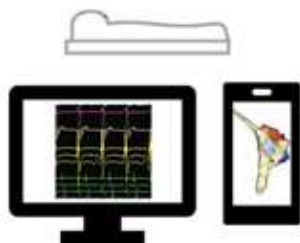


Figure 6 Mixed reality [12].



Figure 7 A worker wearing an assisted reality device [14].

Conventional Computing



Extended Reality (XR)

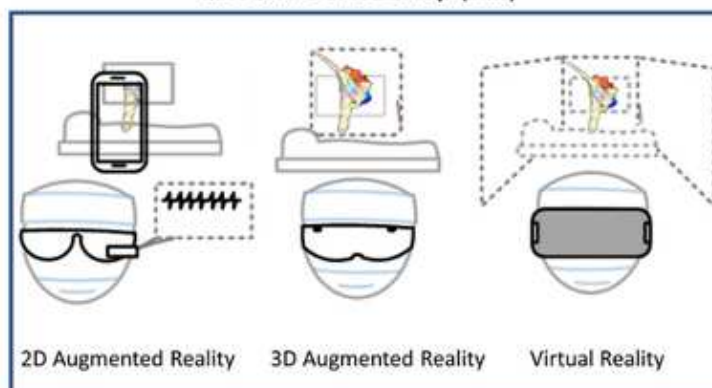


Figure 8 Comparing conventional computing with extended reality [15].



Figure 9 Some HR team [16].



Figure 10 An employee at an electronics manufacturer using an augmented reality training application [18].



Figure 11 Use of immersive technology in training [23].