

Part 3: Reflections and the Road Ahead for Virtual Reality in Accounting Pedagogy and Practice

The Rutgers 64th World Continuous Auditing and Reporting Symposium (WCARS64) set ambitious goals: to foster collaboration across borders, showcase cutting-edge virtual reality (VR) technologies and encourage participants to engage with the potential of VR in accounting education and practice. With approximately 100 registrants from 21 countries, the event was a bold experiment in blending traditional conferencing with immersive digital tools. While the immediate outcomes may not have fully met expectations, the lessons learned and opportunities identified highlight a promising future.

Setting the Stage

The conference aimed to demonstrate how VR can transform accounting pedagogy and practice, enabling richer, more interactive learning experiences and enhancing professional collaboration.

I welcomed the participants with a light-hearted riddle about "a pirate's favorite technologies," setting, I hoped, an engaging tone for the event. The meeting agenda, shared via a Rutgers link, received positive reactions from attendees, underscoring the excitement for the day ahead.

The agenda included presentations from educators using platforms like VictoryXR, discussions on the accessibility of VR environments and breakout sessions intended to spark dialogue on critical questions about the profession's readiness for such technologies. Additionally, attendees explored examples like ABBA Voyage, a live VR concert, and Lex Fridman's interview with Mark Zuckerberg as VR avatars, which highlighted VR's potential for immersive interaction and communication.

Lessons Learned

Several challenges emerged during the event:

- **Limited Participant Familiarity:** Many attendees were unfamiliar with VR technology, which may have contributed to the lack of engagement. While some participants shared experiences with devices such as Meta Quest and Apple Vision Pro, others reported challenges, such as difficulties operating VR tools or discomfort from extended use.
- **Logistical Barriers:** The global nature of the conference brought time zone challenges, affecting participants' ability to engage fully. While virtual events eliminate travel costs, they do not solve the issue of synchronizing participation across continents.
- **Technology Gaps:** The availability of compatible equipment was another hurdle. Many participants lacked up-to-date VR devices, and some faced usability issues related to physical abilities or accessibility, such as limited inter-pupillary distance adjustments in headsets. Discussions also touched on physical discomforts like neck strain and eye dryness, with suggestions to improve ergonomic designs and session duration limits.

Despite these challenges, the conference succeeded in bringing together a diverse group of professionals and academics to explore the potential of VR—a necessary first step in any transformative endeavor.

The Silent Takeaway

Although participant engagement was lower than I may have hoped, the conference achieved something significant: it highlighted the accounting profession's starting point on the journey toward integrating VR. By exposing gaps in knowledge, resources and readiness, #64 WCARS has provided a clearer picture of where efforts need to be focused.

For example, the event revealed that many professionals have not yet considered how VR might reshape their work. This lack of awareness is an opportunity for thought leaders and educators to bridge the gap through targeted training, pilot projects and research initiatives.

Unanswered Questions, Unexplored Potential

Prior to the event, participants were provided with a series of thought-provoking questions about the role of VR in accounting. These questions addressed themes such as immersive learning, accessibility, enhanced data visualization and the profession's readiness for VR adoption. While these questions largely went unanswered during the conference, they remain highly relevant.

Discussions highlighted potential use cases for VR, including logistics, manufacturing, auditing workflows and client interviews. Participants explored VR's strengths, such as immersive data visualization, and its limitations, such as data capacity and cost concerns. These discussions underscored the need for further exploration of VR's applications in real-world accounting scenarios.

Opportunities for the Future

The insights gained from #64 WCARS point to several actionable steps for moving forward:

- ***Incremental Adoption:*** VR adoption need not be an all-or-nothing proposition. Educational institutions and firms can begin with small-scale pilot projects to evaluate VR's effectiveness in specific scenarios, such as training or data visualization.
- ***Development of Standards:*** The lack of existing guidelines for VR in accounting highlights the need for collaborative efforts to establish standards and best practices. These should address technical, ethical and pedagogical considerations.
- ***Collaboration with VR Providers:*** Partnerships with specialized VR solution providers, such as those used by Florida State University's Geoffrey Adams, can ensure that the technology meets the unique needs of the accounting profession.
- ***Increased Awareness and Training:*** To bridge the knowledge gap, professional organizations and academic institutions should invest in workshops, conferences and other educational initiatives that familiarize accountants with VR's potential.

Concluding Thoughts

The journey to integrate VR into accounting pedagogy and practice is just beginning. The #64 WCARS conference may not have delivered immediate breakthroughs, but it has laid a critical foundation. By identifying the profession's current readiness and sparking initial conversations, the event has created momentum for future exploration.

As we move forward, it is essential to remain curious and adaptive. VR's potential to reshape accounting education and practice is immense, but realizing this potential will require

commitment, collaboration and a willingness to experiment. The road ahead is long, but the destination – a more immersive, inclusive and innovative accounting profession – is well worth pursuing.