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ANWAR GARGASH
DIPLOMATIC
ACADEMY

Amplifying diplomacy with the Metaverse





Foreword

Accenture

Disruption is not a new global phenomenon. What is different today is that it's impacting organizations—both private and public—from all directions. Accenture's research shows that during the period from 2017-2022 the level of macroeconomic, social, geopolitical, climate, consumer and technological disruption increased by 200%.*

We believe that five key forces—[Total Enterprise Reinvention](#), talent, sustainability, the Metaverse continuum and the ongoing technology revolution—if harnessed well will help businesses and governments to transform these disruptions into destinies of markets, economies, and societies.

Interestingly, the Metaverse continuum—Accenture's distinct perspective on the Metaverse, where immersive technologies and new types of ownership combine to bring about the next era of our digital lives—is a unique force, as it can be an enabler for many of the above-mentioned forces.

The Metaverse Continuum can help increase the speed at which enterprises can reinvent themselves by accelerating the speed of collaboration across stakeholders. People can explore destinations in the Metaverse before booking their holiday. A fully immersive experience can help speed up the pace of learning and improve retention of even some complex concepts within talent pools at scale.

We partnered with the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy to explore how these benefits which are accruing in the Metaverse, can benefit the world of diplomacy.

Together, we deployed a use-case approach to show how Metaverse and web3 technologies (such as blockchain) can make different forms of diplomacy (such as consular diplomacy, public diplomacy amongst others) more efficient, inclusive, and climate friendly.

We recognize that initiating such transformational initiatives is challenging. To help the diplomatic community, governments and other key stakeholders embark on their journeys of 'Amplifying Diplomacy in the Metaverse', in this report, we have outlined five key actions.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the research and marketing teams across both institutions for building this very timely and actionable research.

Looking forward to our collective and collaborative journey in the Metaverse!

Nadya Kamali

UAE Country Managing Director, Accenture Middle East

*For more read: [Total Enterprise Reinvention, Accenture, 2023](#) Based on Accenture's proprietary Global Disruption Index, a composite measure that covers economic, social, geopolitical, climate, consumer, and technology disruption. We created an overall measure of disruption to assess the level of volatility and change in the external business environment. The index is based on the average of six sub-components, that cover the economic, social, geopolitical, environmental, consumer and technological spheres. Each of the sub-components is based on a set of indexed scores for a range of indicators.

The Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA)

For centuries, diplomacy has enabled and maintained peace and prosperity amongst nations.

Technology has had a significant impact on diplomacy, largely in terms of how diplomatic interactions are conducted and in the types of issues to be addressed by diplomats, governments and stakeholders including people.

Advances in communication technologies have increased the speed and efficiency of diplomacy. The rise of the internet and social media brought diplomacy closer to people, at scale. And during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was digital technologies that came to the rescue.

At the same time, the growing influence of technologies on national incomes, trade and investment flows as well as international relations brought to the fore issues around cyber security and artificial intelligence, to name a few.

The good news is that diplomatic communities and relevant stakeholders are becoming increasingly open to tech-facilitated diplomacy. Studies show that diplomats want to leverage technology to make diplomacy more interactive, immersive, and imaginative.

His Excellency Nickolay Mladenov

Director-General of AGDA

We believe that diplomacy in the Metaverse, built on the foundations of web3 technologies (such as blockchain), will help diplomats achieve these goals.

This Insight, jointly developed by Accenture and Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, deploys a use-case approach to show how greater cooperation across nations and cross-border movement of talent can be promoted with the Metaverse making diplomacy more inclusive, efficient and climate friendly. The report shares insights into how Metaverse-readiness can help diplomats continually sharpen their strategic skills and facilitate administrative tasks in the Metaverse.

We recognize the challenges associated with Metaverse Diplomacy—largely around infrastructure readiness, technical barriers, security, and privacy. But we are sure that these challenges can be easily surmounted with collective will and constant collaboration between nations.

Before signing-off, let me extend our deepest thanks to the research and marketing teams across both institutions for delivering this thought-provoking point of view, and at such an opportune time.

Looking forward to meeting you in the Metaverse!

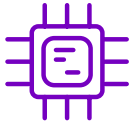
When the Foreign Minister of Tuvalu began his virtual speech at COP27 in November 2022 against a backdrop of clear blue sky and endless sands, it looked as if he was streaming from one of the nation's nine islands in the South Pacific.

He was, from a virtual 3D representation of the island in the Metaverse. His climate diplomacy was intended to show how rising sea levels were threatening the existence of the nation. But it also showed the power of Metaverse Diplomacy. Created in a mere six weeks, the Metaverse

statecraft represented a paradigm shift in form and function—a real time virtual diplomatic effort as effective as a traditional one or even better to push for policy solutions and encourage activism.¹

The Metaverse helped Tuvalu effectively showcase what the world is losing because of climate change. It became a mirror for the world to evaluate its collective (mis)deeds.

Clearly, Metaverse and web3 technologies have the potential to make diplomacy more productive, people centric, and planet friendly. This Insight shares four use cases showing how this can be achieved.



Tech providing a human face to diplomacy

Starting with scrolls and steamers during the mercantile era, three centuries ago, technology has made diplomacy and its institutions—both national and international—more accessible. And timely.

In the early 1990s, at the height of the Bosnian conflict, Canada was able to establish a new embassy in Zagreb, Croatia, with nothing more than a few laptops, a dial tone and some diplomatic passports granting its diplomats a greater degree of operational effectiveness—something that would have taken months in the absence of information technology.²

More recently, we saw the positive impact of digital technologies on diplomacy, at scale, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the diplomatic community to conduct important meetings and international summits virtually. Over the last three years, Zoom, Teams and Webex Diplomacy has become a common extension of face-to-face diplomacy and these widely accessible virtual forms of communication are being used for convening high-level meetings between world leaders, such as the 75th United Nations General Assembly meeting in September 2020³ as well as the G20 summit a month later, which was conducted entirely online, with “vast savings in airfares and carbon emissions.”⁴

In 2020, the UAE and Greece hosted a virtual edition of their 2nd strategic cooperation forum. The forum included multiple tracks on different areas of collaboration and witnessed the signing of several bilateral agreements in the areas of international cooperation, small and medium-sized enterprises and innovation, digital cooperation, and cultural and creative industries.⁵





Gains and gaps with Digital Diplomacy

Bjola and Manor (2022)⁶, surveyed 105 diplomats from 30 countries and found that regardless of the goal of the virtual meetings they attended, diplomats expressed relatively high levels of satisfaction with the use of video-conference platforms.

In fact, the more immersed diplomats felt during such interactions, the more positive the views they developed about the work they accomplished online. Overall, respondents were seen to strongly support the use of such meetings to continue routine diplomatic work (e.g., weekly meetings), intra-organizational decision-making (e.g., information-sharing), and policy formulation via small working groups. Many junior diplomats participating in their survey favored the creation of a more stimulating and immersive environment through the possible use of virtual reality apps, such as 360-degree virtual spaces or even 3D holograms.

Bjola and Manor's research also identified gaps vital to be bridged to make diplomats feel at home with digital diplomacy. Respondents noted that when participants blocked their cameras, their reactions could no longer be gauged and hence it was unclear how they felt about the issues being discussed. By creating fewer opportunities for diplomats to engage in unofficial talks via 'corridor conversations' or 'closed door discussions' such calls constrained their ability to creatively explore shared ways of resolving pressing issues—an approach particularly relevant in high-level multilateral discussions.

Diplomats expressed relatively high levels of satisfaction with the use of video-conference platforms.



The era of Metaverse Diplomacy

Metaverse Diplomacy promises to multiply gains of digital diplomacy and bridge gaps being experienced by diplomats.

So, what is Metaverse Diplomacy?

Let's begin with the first term—the Metaverse. As defined by Accenture in its latest report titled Metaverse: evolution, then revolution, Metaverse is a continuum spanning the spectrum of digitally enhanced worlds, realities and business models. It applies across all aspects of organizations, from consumer to worker and across the entire enterprise; from reality to virtual and back; from 2D to 3D. This continuum is powered by virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), extended reality (XR) apps, edge computing driving new experiences, design tools and digital assets, all underpinned by connective technologies such as 5G and cloud.

Diplomacy—which is largely about maintaining relations across nations—can be conducted in four ways: consular diplomacy (linked to issuance of visas, certification of documents); public diplomacy: (includes public outreach activities & nation branding); economic diplomacy (driving trade & promoting Investment); and core diplomatic tasks (such as negotiation & reporting).

Metaverse Diplomacy is therefore about exploring how different forms of diplomacy can be better facilitated in the Metaverse with web3 technologies.

Many of these foundational technologies enabling Metaverse Diplomacy such as VR are not new to the diplomatic community. For example, since 2015, a coordinated effort between the UN SDG Action Campaign and the United Nations Virtual

Reality Series has been bringing the world's most pressing challenges home to decision makers and global citizens using VR technology.⁷

But what's unique, is how they have come together to achieve distinctive form and function. Advancements in XR provide experiences that are captivating. Blockchain is making experiences functional, and ownership real. And this is all underpinned by Artificial Intelligence (AI), 5G and cloud infrastructure.

Using this confluence, the World Economic Forum (WEF), Accenture and Microsoft have built a Global Collaboration Village in Davos to provide immersive spaces where stakeholders can convene, create, and act on the world's most pressing challenges. The Global Collaboration Village brings together key global stakeholders – international organizations, governments, partner companies and civil society organizations. Inclusive and responsible by design, it is a creative space to imagine alternative futures, explore ideas and systems transparently and safely. This Village allows envisioning what the future of engaging multistakeholder collaboration is going to be. Eighty leading organizations have joined as Village Partners in the Forum's purpose-driven Metaverse to bolster more diverse global collaboration and large-scale action. For example: in this Village, people can “dive in” to an interactive ocean-experience with experts revealing the importance of safeguarding our ocean. Instead of simply narrating how important mangroves are for coastal ecosystems, these immersive environments invite the participant to witness and experience the power of restoration and conversation.⁸



The time is ripe

The need to deploy secure, safe, and immersive digital technologies towards establishing diplomatic missions is vital to delivering a range of diplomatic services friendly to people, the planet and our collective prosperity.

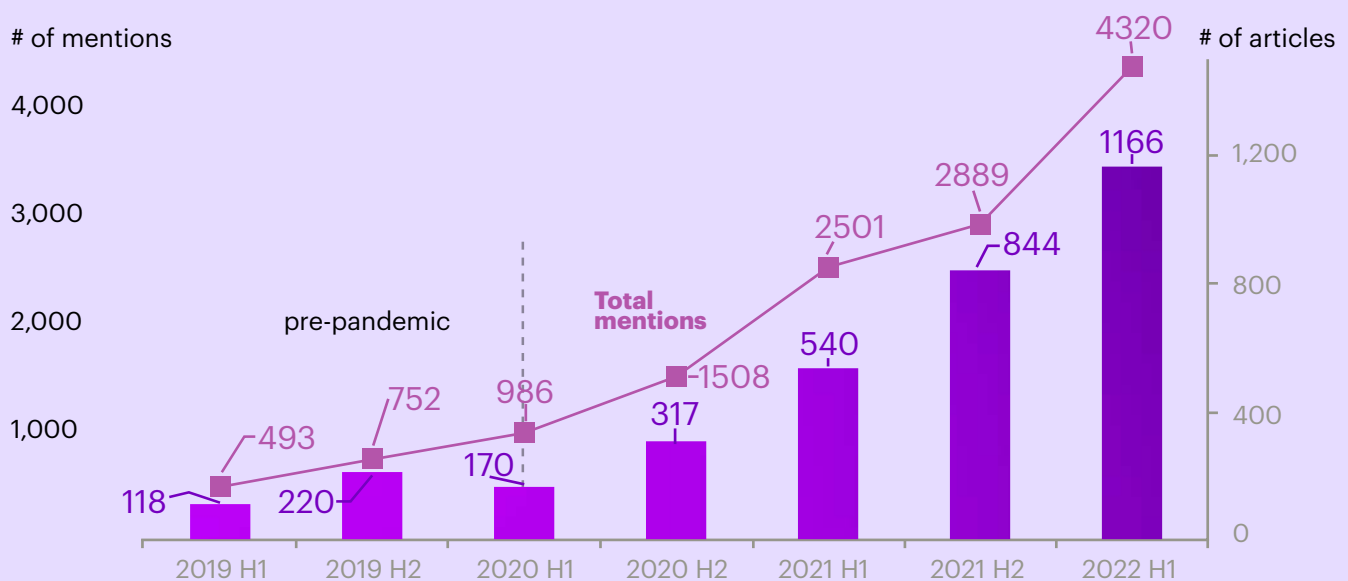
Countries such as UAE have articulated intent to build Metaverse economies. The Dubai Metaverse Strategy aims to turn Dubai into one of the world’s top 10 Metaverse economies as well as a global hub for the Metaverse community. The strategy aims to build on Dubai’s achievement of attracting more than 1,000 companies in the fields of blockchain and Metaverse. It also promotes Dubai’s ambitions to support more than 40,000 virtual jobs by 2030⁹. Dubai announced its Metaverse strategy focusing on four sectors: Government Services, Tourism, Education and Retail & Real Estate. Multiple UAE government agencies such as Dubai Electric and Water Agency (DEWA)¹⁰, the Ministry of Health and Prevention (MoHAP)¹¹ and the Ministry of Economy are planning to launch digital versions of their operations in the Metaverse.¹²

Nations such as the Maldives¹³ and Israel¹⁴ have established virtual embassies, and other nations such as Barbados¹⁵ are working hard to join this group.

Pressing concerns like climate change are seeing increasing diplomatic action. One example is the German Foreign Office that works with its European counterparts to garner support for sustainability and multilateralism through the annual European Sustainable Development Week.¹⁶

Metaverse Diplomacy is now being discussed actively in public domain. A review of over 20 million articles between 2019 and the first half of 2022 found that the number of articles mentioning a topic related to Metaverse Diplomacy have grown 10x. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1: Metaverse Diplomacy in the media

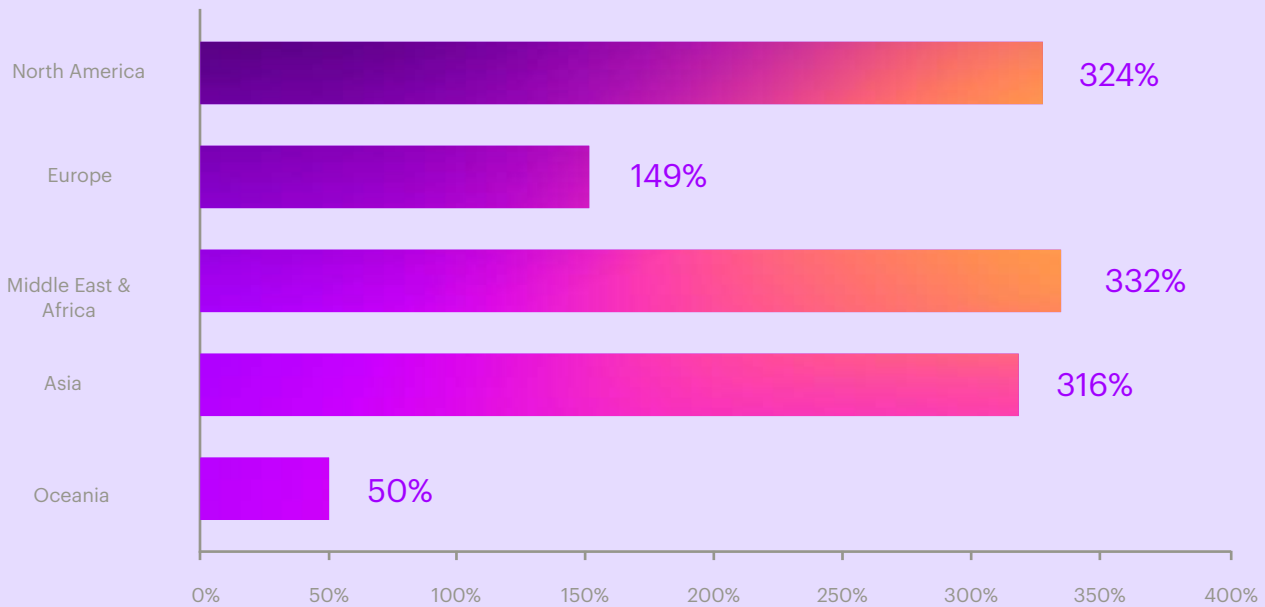


Source: Accenture Research analyses on Dow Jones Analytics data

Interestingly, the Middle East & Africa experienced the highest growth rate in the number of articles mentioning 'Metaverse' and 'diplomacy' over the years 2019-2021. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Metaverse Diplomacy in the media by region

Growth in number of articles, 2019-2021*



Source: Accenture Research analyses on Dow Jones Analytics data

* 2022 data was not used as we could only partially obtain relevant data.



Metaverse Diplomacy: Multiplying Gains and Bridging Gaps of Digital Diplomacy

We discuss four use cases



Use case 1: Investment, trade, cultural, scientific, and security cooperation

Current situation: Bilateral, plurilateral investment and trade negotiations (in the form of preferential or free trade and investment agreements) have been at the heart of driving of cross-border flows of goods, services, investments, and people over centuries. Such trade and investment agreements run through several rounds of negotiations, wherein negotiators from each side place their list of industries that they wish to fully, partially, or not open as a part of proposed agreements. After long, arduous negotiations and extensive economic modeling these lists are finalized.

On many occasions, governments penning such treaties are critiqued for lack of transparency or a consideration for the needs of the communities such agreements will impact. This leads to negotiations being sometimes delayed or at times, even cancelled.

Potential Metaverse/web3 technology based

solution: Governments use a variety of economic and analytical models to define negotiating outcomes, such as the list of goods to be put on zero-duty when a free trade agreement is signed. The digital versions of these outcomes can be shared in different local languages through existing government apps with an augmented reality (AR) overlay, explaining the impact of specific outcomes on communities and the nation at-large. Current capabilities within Microsoft's Teams platform, which integrates Microsoft translator allows participants to converse in several languages, providing simultaneous translation to the group in their preferred language.¹⁷

The participation of business communities and individuals keen to make their voices heard but unable to travel physically to organized public dialogues can be facilitated by building cloud-based forums. Through these virtual halls, business communities can share their views and collaborate in real-time with negotiating teams on improving the results of the proposed outcomes by working with them on simulations of possible negotiated outcomes.

These forums can be secured by creating private channels for confidential conversations and can be end-to-end encrypted, preventing any single party from holding all the information.

Such solutions designed for negotiations can easily be utilized to conduct larger stakeholder dialogues aimed at identifying investment, cultural and scientific opportunities for partnering nations. Imagine a meeting of project owners and investors across nations having a bilateral investment treaty taking place in a virtual reality environment wherein live discussions are happening using spatial audio facilitating close conversations without disturbing others in the room.

Non-resident ambassadors and non-resident diplomatic staff can now enjoy more immersive virtual exchanges with their stakeholders like cutting a ribbon at a new opening or hosting a trade delegation virtually in an authentic way that creates long-lasting connections and generates goodwill for the country's representation.

The participation of communities and individuals keen to make their voices heard but unable to travel physically to organized public dialogues can be facilitated by building cloud-based virtual forums.

Security cooperation within the United Nations is already headed in this direction. In January 2022, members of the United Nations Security Council went on a virtual field trip to Colombia, listening, watching, and getting insights into the peace process with the help of Virtual Reality (VR) technology.

This not only brought the Colombian peace process closer to negotiators in New York, but it also allowed for the Colombian voices on the ground to be heard.¹⁸

Anticipated benefits: Metaverse/web3 technology based solutions could bolster the ability of governments and the diplomatic community to make negotiations transparent and inclusive, in a cost-effective way. More importantly, greater inclusion through leaders of communities and negotiators sitting in their respective locations, makes such processes scalable and sustainable at the same time. Wider stakeholder participation will drive trust and predictability in signed treaties and will also trigger new ideation and experimentation to secure a better return on both time and resources that are invested in negotiations and dialogues.



Use case 2: Facilitating cross-border movement of talent

Current situation: The movement of people for leisure, study, business, and other purposes is a facet of our globalized world. As of 2020, tourism supported one in ten jobs globally, with 80 percent of the sector made up of small businesses, including family operations.¹⁹ In 2019, international students made up a staggering 5.5 percent of the total higher education population in the U.S., before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.²⁰

Visas are a vital part of ensuring secure and safe cross-border movement. Visa issuance is a time consuming, expensive process for all parties involved. On many occasions students, tourists and business executives are required to spend (scarce) monetary resources to make it to the nearest visa office for a personal interview and sometimes may even have to fly back to their home country to undertake the process. Above all, there is no guarantee their visa will even be granted.

Some nations have already responded to these challenges by executing an e-visa process. E-Visa allows the management of the visa application process to take place entirely in a virtual environment. Everything is done with the help of the Internet: the visa application and supporting documents are submitted online, the payment is made online and the decision on the application is communicated online.

The experience of the Moldovan e-visa service is a great case in point. When the Moldovan e-visas process was launched in late 2014, reportedly it took just 5 months for the Moldovan embassies to save between 20 to 24 working days' worth of time on administrative issues. Furthermore, they did not have to incur costs related to purchasing visa stickers resulting in substantive savings. As reported, in that year alone, Moldovan e-visa applicants saved at least 38,200 euros on transportation costs, since foreigners who obtained e-visas did not have to travel to a Moldovan embassy located in another country.²¹

However, only a few nations are seen to have embraced the e-visa initiative largely due to issues of identity theft, forgery of documents, and challenges to collect and save biometric data.²²

Potential Metaverse/web3 technology based solution: In collaboration with WEF and various other governmental and non-governmental partners, Accenture designed and developed the "Known Traveler Digital Identity" concept. Based on technologies that are foundational to the Metaverse—such as blockchain—along with cryptography, biometrics and mobile devices, the solution allows individuals to control their personal information and documents, granting access to governmental and private-sector players along the journey. These can include border control agencies, car rentals, hotels and airlines that would use such a solution for risk-profiling, verification and access.

Leveraging authentication through biometric verification and protected by distributed ledger technology and cryptography, the solution is one that is scalable and based on internationally accepted standards to ensure trust in the technology.

The distributed ledger on the blockchain creates an immutable record of each entry without storing any personally identifiable identity data – only pointers – an anonymized point of value stored in a computer's memory. Decentralized Identifiers (DIDs) will provide a standard way for individuals and organizations to create permanent, globally unique, cryptographically verifiable identifiers entirely under the identity owner's control. These pointers can then be accessed by parties granted permission, eliminating the need for people to ferry documents to different agencies. All of this can be achieved without the need to have personal data stored in one central database, which would pose too great a risk for stakeholders responsible for securely handling personal identity information. Moreover, blockchain technology, especially permissioned blockchains, do not require heavy computational power and can be deployed on any public or private cloud, including on edge computers. A working prototype of the concept demonstrating specific use cases was displayed at the 2018 WEF Annual Meeting.²³

Anticipated benefits: A trusted system between governments can facilitate great benefits for travelers as well as the workers who facilitate the current system, whose time and focus can be redirected to other tasks. The wastage that occurs in the time and financial costs expended to facilitate various visas obtained over one's lifetime can be recouped and redirected.

The Known Traveler Digital Identity concept is expected to “unlock an estimated potential value of \$150 billion through digitally enhancing travel security”.²⁴



Making diplomats ready

Such disruptive changes in conducting diplomacy will require a shift in practical capabilities as well as a fundamental shift in peoples' mindsets, throughout the diplomatic community. Beginning with the way in which briefs are created and providing ongoing learning for diplomats are being targeted to drive this shift.



Use case 3: Immersive briefs

Current situation: Up-to-date insights are essential for keeping the home nation aware of events happening in any host nation. Officials working in a diplomatic mission use diplomatic cables, or briefs, to “describe important meetings, analyze political trends in the countries where they are based, and make policy recommendations”.²⁵ The documents enclosed, now sometimes in emails, are routinely printed for a read and then need to be shredded for security reasons. Such briefs, largely prepared by individuals, remain disjointed from one another on many occasions. The chances of missing out on opportunities that lie at the intersection of the variety of issues being monitored are therefore high. On many occasions, the contents in briefs fail to build on insights collated in earlier editions largely because the prior ones are untraceable. Moreover, the content from these documents cannot be shared directly with relevant stakeholders, as its not engaging enough.

Potential Metaverse/web3 technology

based solution: Let's assume that diplomatic officials are to prepare a brief on the growing appetite for physical and social infrastructure in the nation hosting them. Instead of sharing a static note discussing the state of physical infrastructure growth in the host country, staff can think about combining the power of Big Data and augmented reality to create an interactive and immersive brief or even building three-dimensional presentations depicting growth trends as well as projecting future growth using economic modeling techniques. Such interactive presentations can be regularly updated and relayed to stakeholders back home to help them understand what relevant opportunities exist in other markets.

Anticipated benefits: The static analysis enshrined in the brief is now transformed into an immersive experience that can be better appreciated and actioned by relevant parties. This raises the chances of a return on the investment of the diplomatic mission to create such insights. It also builds bridges between the relevant officials in the missions and business back home, ensuring mutual areas of cooperation to be regularly pursued. Moreover, the host nation now stands to secure more diverse and competitive proposals for its projects.



Use case 4: Lifelong learning for diplomats

Current situation: Nations must keep skills of their diplomats up to date. More importantly, diplomats must continually learn of new evolving opportunities and situations from their diplomatic colleagues posted in other nations. Online trainings, skills development programs and video-based chat-sessions have been available for years. However, the experience at times can be jarring largely because such trainings are uni-directional, non-collaborative and fail at testing the skills of diplomats by making them go through engaging situations.

Potential Metaverse/web3 technology

based solution: Imagine a situation, wherein diplomats from one nation posted in different missions can come together, virtually, within a single experience. They can learn and collaborate, upskilling each other in the process in the Metaverse. Using a combination of VR and AR, real life situations can be simulated, and the skills being acquired by diplomats can be tested live. For example, a “VR Cybersecurity Adventure” course can provide a gamified experience that takes diplomats through an immersive journey set in both real and imagined environments. The training will compel diplomats to defend themselves against hackers, scammers, fraudsters and cyberbullies and put their knowledge of safe cybersecurity practices to the test using VR headsets.

Breakaway rooms can be created where side talks or several closed-door meetings can take place. Full-size avatars can extend the perceptibility of an interlocuter’s counterpart, increasing the visual cues important in diplomacy. The certifications acquired by the diplomats in their lifelong learning journeys can be stored on a secure blockchain. Moreover, Big Data and analytics can be combined with creative capabilities to integrate learnings from earlier trainings to improve.

Anticipated benefits: The use of VR allows for both the scale and the customization of immersive use cases. This can go beyond the normal coursework and extend to practical and important topics such as diversity and inclusion awareness, unconscious bias awareness and security training. Once developed, these can be flexibly modified and be shared with diplomats of other countries as a gesture of goodwill.

Research done by [Accenture](#)²⁶ on XR shows that individuals being trained with VR demonstrate, on average, higher accuracy and faster time to completion of tasks in comparison to those being trained with instructional videos.

The climate as well as the cost footprint of diplomatic communities will minimize substantively, as these trainings can be enjoyed by them from the comfort of their offices while being able to collaborate with colleagues throughout the world.



Way forward

It is beyond a doubt that the Metaverse has enormous potential to shape the present and future of diplomacy. Here's what diplomatic missions and governments can start doing:

1. Embrace the Metaverse-first approach

Governments and diplomatic missions of nations need to collaboratively figure out which treaties agreements, or even trips can be shifted onto the Metaverse for higher safety and better outcomes.

2. Start small and scale collectively

One can start with smaller diplomatic efforts to measure and demonstrate the value of the Metaverse (such as productivity gains from saved commute/travel, safety, reduced carbon emissions, transparency in transactions, etc.).

Gain traction with governments and public by widely sharing success(es) of these initiatives and share learnings to scale fast and collectively.

3. Establish rules of engagement

Designing participation and security protocols for diplomatic or simple discussions in the Metaverse are necessary for diplomatic parity. For example: If avatars, once regulated, are to vote on a proposal in lieu of their human selves, how should they do it? How should one ensure that a diplomat is not being misrepresented by an avatar? How can confidential agreement drafts be circulated and modified real-time in the Metaverse without being leaked?

4. Co-invest in Metaverse infrastructure and security to start beta testing

If interested in exploring Metaverse use-cases of common interest, join hands to build relevant digital infrastructure and security architecture to beta-test and then share results with those in the diplomatic community sitting on the fringes to encourage them to join the journey.

5. Push for Responsible Metaverse Diplomacy from day one

Instead of just focusing on productivity gains associated with the Metaverse, start investing in Metaverse Diplomacy initiatives that offer multi-dimensional value. That includes setting visible climate goals from replacing traditional diplomacy with Metaverse Diplomacy and making the process of negotiations more inclusive and participatory.

Authors

Bashar Kilani

Managing Director, Accenture

Dr. Seppe Verheyen

Senior Research Fellow, Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy

Tejas Patel

Managing Director, Growth Markets Business Lead for the Metaverse
Continuum Business Group, Accenture

Raghav Narsalay

Managing Director, Accenture Research Lead for the Metaverse
Continuum Business Group, Accenture

Carla Issa

Manager, Middle East Research Lead, Accenture

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following individuals from Accenture for their valuable contributions toward this report:

Asma Shabab

Corrine Lawson

Deepak Lalan

Gargi Chakrabarty

Jenna Jiang

Jennifer Brodie

Kristin McElderry

Katie Burke

Marc Appel

Natalie Zschech

Sandra Najem

Sunil Krishnan

Vedrana Savic

Vincenzo Palermo

Wendy O'Donnell

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