

Virtual Reality for the Study of Social Interactions at Work and Training of Interpersonal Skills

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Abstract

I study how people interact with others at work, in settings such as the job interview, when providing performance feedback, or in public speaking situations. Studying social interactions in virtual reality has several distinct advantages over traditional simulation approaches such as role-play: standardization of the social interaction partners (the virtual humans), the possibility to subtly manipulate attributes of the social environment and test its effects on outcomes, and the possibility to expose users to unlikely or dangerous situations which would not be possible in reality. I will demonstrate on concrete research examples how these advantages can be used to answer specific research questions. Moreover, I will discuss how interactions with virtual humans can be used for the training of interpersonal skills such as public speaking, self-presentation, and empathy. The presentation will be followed by a virtual reality demo, providing the opportunity to people attending the talk to experience first hand some of the scenarios we use for training.

Speaker Profile

Marianne Schmid Mast is full professor of Organizational Behavior at HEC at the University of Lausanne. After having received her PhD in Psychology from the University of Zurich, she pursued her research at Northeastern University in Boston (USA). She held positions as assistant professor in Social Psychology at the University of Fribourg and she was a full professor at the Department of Work and Organizational Psychology at the University of Neuchatel. Her research addresses how individuals in power hierarchies interact, perceive, and communicate (verbally and nonverbally), how first impressions affect interpersonal interactions and evaluations, how people form accurate impressions of others, and how physician communication affects patient outcomes. She uses immersive virtual environment technology to investigate interpersonal behavior and communication as well as computer-based automatic sensing to analyze nonverbal behavior in social interactions. She is currently an Associate Editor of the Journal of Nonverbal Behavior and in the Editorial Board of the journal Leadership Quarterly. Marianne Schmid Mast is a former member of the Swiss National Research Council and acted as president of the Swiss Psychological Society. She is a Society of Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) fellow and an American Psychological Association (APA), Division 8 fellow, honored for her extraordinary, distinctive, and longstanding contributions to the science of personality and social psychology. In 2018, she has been named one of the 50 most influential living psychologists.

