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## As Young Simulation Industry Matures, Now is Time to Define Ethical Standards

**By Eileen Smith**  
UCF Forum columnist  
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Today's simulation industry with its modern computing power has been around for several decades, and so in essence is approaching adolescence in its development.

And as our industry matures, how do we ensure that simulation design is done in a manner that stands on the most ethical foundation, that truly understands the effect simulations have on the audience, and how the creation processes are formed?

I lead a team at E2i Creative Studio, part of UCF's Institute for Simulation & Training, which designs and produces stories using simulations, and uses those stories to help people perform better, understand deeper or value something more as a result of engaging with that story.

My academic background in communications, sociology and theater prepared me to know how to approach telling these stories. I weave a story in order to bring the audience with me to a place I want them to go for a certain purpose – either to learn new things, to experience something unknown, or to train for a job or skill – well aware that everyone is coming to the story from their own unique background and with their own unique cognitive terrain.

It's essential that as an industry, simulation designers understand the concept of human individuality for several reasons. Their teams are made up of creative individuals bringing diverse experience to the table. Their audiences are looking to participate in order to improve their lives from either a knowledge, attitude or skill basis.

Internally, teams have diverse dynamics, different training, and varying levels of autonomy and support. How do team members interact with each other? What is the

training that occurs to ensure that new developers have the basis of interpersonal skills to succeed?

There needs to be a transparency of thought within development teams, where communication is open, diverse attitudes are respected, and debates are welcome – all to ensure that explicit discussions are held on the impact of the simulations under development and that there is clear understanding of the potential impact, both good and bad, of the project under development.

For the external audience, the key for developers in designing simulation scenarios comes straight from the Hippocratic Oath: “First do no harm.”

Simulations are designed to allow the participant to explore both positive and negative outcomes to their scenario. So there is an ethical responsibility for developers to understand where any individual in their audience might go. There is a cultural point of view that colors everyone’s experiences. There are a myriad of life experiences in audiences. Each person’s brain processes information based on these and in their own unique way.

From each person’s cultural background, to their life experiences, to the way their brain functions – these are key elements that simulation developers must understand as they create simulation scenarios to ensure that wrong conclusions aren’t reached.

Being adolescent in development, the simulation industry needs to understand that the time is ripe to declare ethical standards to become common practice, much like the genetics industry did years ago as it was developing. It is possible to design scenarios, through either naiveté or non-caring, that could lead someone down a path that is entirely wrong, and our industry needs to insulate itself from that danger.

There is not only intrinsic value in designing ethically; there also is economic value. Technology is all around us, but is sometimes looked upon with trepidation. Simulation technology makes some people pause, either through mistrust of the message or of the messenger, based on not really understanding the technology. Some simulations deal with situations such as military-combat training, where the phrase “baby killer” has been thrown at developers because people see combat training in a negative way. Some people are very wary of large simulation companies that are “in it for the money.”

Imagine being able to stand on a strategic position of ethical simulation development as the industry matures? The impact on the confidence in simulation training would be huge for industry as it wards off criticism of possible unintended consequences, and the development of quality new products. The impact on the confidence in university labs would be huge as they keep pushing the envelope developing new technologies, new techniques and new talent.

And wow, designing quality simulations that strengthen every participant so they get the most out of their experience – that makes a great story that I can't wait to help tell the world.

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