

## CUSTOMER CASE

# Equans Netherlands: over 300 employees in VR, twice as many reports of unsafe situations

*How a VR safety training at a technical service provider led to visibly different behaviour on the shop floor in a single week.*

| The case in brief |                                                                                                                                   |
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| Client            | Equans Netherlands, technical service provider and strategic partner in sustainability, around 5,500 employees in the Netherlands |
| Region            | Pilot in the South-West Netherlands regional business, followed by a roll-out to other regions                                    |
| Target group      | Mechanics, fitters, welders, scaffolders and service technicians, together with their supervisors                                 |
| Participants      | Over 300 employees, all taken through the training within one week                                                                |
| Format            | THF LIVE: mobile VR studio at a location in their own region                                                                      |
| Set-up            | Sessions with 10 participants at a time in the same virtual workplace, with a feedback moment and a wrap-up                       |
| Result            | The number of safety reports in the Equans safety app doubled in the six months after the training                                |
| Follow-up         | Exploring a broader roll-out within Equans Netherlands                                                                            |

## The challenge: safety training that sticks

At Equans, safety comes first. The question that goes with it is how you keep the subject alive. Toolbox talks, courses and presentations follow one another, and it is precisely that repetition that makes part of the workforce switch off. As regional director Paul Grinwis puts it in the webinar: how do you keep safety enjoyable and interesting instead of something people have to sit through yet again?

On top of that came two practical conditions. The teams consist largely of experienced craftspeople with an average age of almost fifty, so the solution had to work for people who are not busy with new technology every day. And with over 300 employees spread across projects and customer sites, travelling to a fixed training centre was not an option.

The objective was clear: **raise the power of observation**. Employees have to recognise risks faster, assess them correctly and actually act on them.

## The approach: together in the same virtual workplace

The Hazard Factory set up the mobile VR studio in Equans' own region. Bringing over 300 people to a fixed training centre was logistically unworkable, so the studio came to them. In one week the entire workforce went through the programme.

The crucial difference with individual VR: up to ten participants step into the same virtual workplace at the same time. They see each other, they hear each other and they point out to one another what they notice. That is why VR here is not an individual game but a conversation between colleagues about what can go wrong on their own site or installation.

*"You are standing on that edge in the harbour module and you are literally looking five or six metres down. You feel the butterflies in your stomach: I really must not fall off here. That makes you truly experience it, and that is why it sticks."*

Paul Grinwis, regional director South-West Netherlands at Equans

## How a session works

- **Introduction and objective.** A brief framing of why we are doing this and what happens with the results.
- **Half an hour in VR.** Participants explore a realistic working environment together and point out the hazardous situations they recognise.
- **Questions at every risk.** For each risk they find, they answer a short multiple-choice question, so that it becomes clear not only what they see, but also whether they know how to act.
- **Feedback moment, and then back in again.** A safety adviser discusses with the group what they have seen and done. Everyone then goes back into the environment, this time without the barrier of the technology, followed by a closing wrap-up.
- **The conversation about speaking up.** The debrief covers the blind spots of the group and the most difficult skill of all: addressing a colleague respectfully about unsafe behaviour.
- **A competitive element.** The best team and the best participant are announced. That turns safety into a shared achievement instead of an obligation.
- **Accessible to everyone.** The controls consist of a single button. Even participants who had never worn a VR headset before are up to speed within a minute.

## What the data revealed: blind spots nobody had predicted

Every observation by every participant is recorded. Not to assess individuals, but to see at group level where attention drops away. All data is anonymised and analysed only in aggregate. That gave Equans insights that no toolbox talk or incident list could have produced:

- **Site documents were almost completely overlooked.** Only 3 per cent of participants noticed that the health and safety plan had not been signed. Yet that is a mandatory step on arrival at the site and an internal process for it already existed.
- **Psychosocial risks remained invisible.** In the virtual environment, a colleague was visibly in difficulty. Almost nobody flagged that as a risk.

- **New rules are not yet new behaviour.** The chin strap for working at height, mandatory for the past eighteen months, was noticed by 27 per cent.
- **Fire and emergency procedures did score highly.** Classic themes that have been trained on for years are firmly in place. That confirms both that the measurement works and where the gains are still to be made.
- **Every business unit has a different profile.** The industrial teams saw different risks than the service technicians from the buildings division. The same training, different blind spots, and therefore a different follow-up per region.

From those results Equans distilled a number of themes that deserve extra attention, and linked them to the existing processes: the signing of site documents, the daily start-up meetings and the toolbox talks. In this way the VR session is not a stand-alone event but a starting point for targeted action.

### The result: the number of reports doubled

The most important indicator for Equans was not the number of accidents. Accidents are always reported and say little about the alertness of an organisation. The question was whether employees would more often report what they see on their own initiative: flagging an unsafe situation before something happens.

*"What we see after the sessions is that the number of observations reported to us in our safety app has doubled. That may be partly because people see more now that they have been stimulated, and partly because of the awareness that if we see something, we also have to report it."*

Paul Grinwis, regional director South-West Netherlands at Equans

In the six months after the training sessions the number of reports doubled. More reports does not mean poorer safety here, on the contrary: it means that people see risks and act on them. Precisely the behaviour the organisation wanted to unlock.

### From pilot to broader roll-out

What started as a session with a small group grew, through the management team, into a programme for the entire regional business. Equans is now looking at whether the approach will be set up more widely within Equans Netherlands. Together with the safety team, work is also under way on a repeat measurement: putting the same groups through a session again to see whether the blind spots really do become smaller.

That is exactly the shift The Hazard Factory wants to make with its clients: from a training you organise to an indicator you follow up.

## What other organisations can take from this

- **Experiencing works better than watching.** Safely experiencing a mistake once does more than ten slides about the same mistake.
- **Being in VR together opens up the conversation.** Ten colleagues in the same virtual workplace talk about risks in a way that rarely happens in a classroom.
- **The studio comes to you.** Bringing hundreds of people to a training centre is expensive and time-consuming. A mobile set-up in your own region takes that barrier away.
- **Age and digital skills are not a barrier.** One button is enough, even for teams with an average age of almost fifty.
- **Multilingualism is solved.** Participants choose their own language, which makes all the difference with mixed teams and subcontractors.
- **A competitive element works.** A team ranking and an award presented on the spot make safety a shared achievement.
- **Every session generates data.** Afterwards you know not only that training has taken place, but also where the attention of your organisation drops away.
- **Link the insights to existing processes.** Work permits, daily start-up meetings and toolbox talks become more concrete once you know which risk is being structurally missed.
- **Reports are a leading indicator.** Accidents look backwards, reports of unsafe situations predict what lies ahead.
- **Scalable across locations and business units.** The same format works at several sites, with reporting per region or department.
- **Repetition makes it measurable.** Only with a second measurement do you see whether behaviour really changes.

## See and hear

- [Our VR training for industry](#): an impression of the environments in which technical teams work every day.
- [The Equans customer case](#): the story behind the doubling of the number of reports.
- [Webinar with Paul Grinwis, regional director at Equans](#): from 27:52 he explains the approach and the results himself.

## The same journey for your organisation

Would you like to know how your teams score on the risks that matter to you? A first session at your own location gives you, within a single day, a picture of the blind spots in your organisation, and immediately also the conversation that goes with it.

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**Beyond compliance. Into behaviour.**