

A post-industrial era education model

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Rob Paddock, founder of GetSmarter digital learning platform, explains micro-credentialing and the need to provide a post-industrial era education model, which offers affordable, accessible and quality education to all.

We're living in a world of radical shift. And yet, our education system harks back to a bygone era. As part of its *Future of Education* series, the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (Saica) called on Rob Paddock, an expert who has educated more than 100,000 professionals, working with universities such as Harvard, Oxford and many South African institutions, to discuss the need to provide a post-industrial era education model. He believes not only that we are facing a great opportunity to change the way we learn, but in fact, that we also need to reimagine education completely, and see it as a process of learning, unlearning and relearning, throughout our professional lives.

"Until 1900, human knowledge or information was doubling every century," says Paddock. "After World War 2, knowledge was doubling every 25 years, by 2000, it was doubling every 12 months and that now, in 2020, it is doubling every single day."



Rob Paddock

"Think about that," he marvels.

“ The amount of information available to us to glean new insights, forge new connections and make new advancements in our understanding of how the world works is doubling every single day. ”

He contrasts that with the sharp contrast that, during this time, our education system hasn't evolved, and still follows an industrial-era educational model. "Back then, students were put into schools where they all learnt the same thing in order to prepare them effectively to be members of the industrial workforce," explains Paddock. "Some of them went on to tertiary education, and the expectation was that they'd work for the rest of their life with that base level of knowledge, which would allow them to do the job that they were employed to do."

Paddock uses his grandfather, who was a chartered accountant, as an example, explaining that he worked at Mobil Oil from his early 20s until the day he retired. "How many people do you know in this day and age that have done one job for their whole career?" he asks. "Personally, I have already been involved in 12 different jobs and businesses, and I think this is not only a reflection of where we are as a society, but also certainly a glimpse of where we're going in the future."

This example illustrates just how rapidly things are changing, and Paddock believes that if we don't adjust our personal learning strategies and engagement in order to match that rapid rate of change, we're going to find ourselves left behind and irrelevant. "For me, that's the real invitation," he says. "To move away from this industrial-era model of education, towards a more suitable education model for our times, one in which we learn, unlearn and relearn throughout our lives."

Micro credentials

These days, most people, who enter the workplace after completing their tertiary education, find themselves exposed to such a rapid rate of change that they have no option but to continuously learn.

With this being the case, the ideal scenario is to have your learning personalised in a way that makes sense for you. Which brings us to micro credentials. “The idea here is to break down a big, sometimes clunky degree, into its components, and then see the learning thereof as a lifelong journey,” explains Paddock. “It’s not something that happens once-off, but rather throughout your career, thus allowing you to consistently upskill yourself with the appropriate credentials, or micro credentials, that you need throughout your career.”

For Paddock, this new model of education is key, as we are moving into a time and space where learning is not just about knowledge retention. “What the world of work is calling for is to be able to collaborate, problem-solve and adapt effectively,” says Paddock, adding that Covid-19 has shown that to us in no uncertain terms.

Behaviour-based analytics

While typical credentials focus on retaining information for long enough so that you can write it down and repeat it back, the world of online education is moving towards tracking and monitoring a learner’s behaviour. Elements such as to what degree you initiate conversation or to what degree you consistently work at a problem are things that the online learning environment is able to track and monitor.

“In the future, when you present yourself to a prospective employer, you may be able to present some sort of digital portfolio of evidence,” explains Paddock. “This could include certificates from the past, certain behavioural analytics, references from your colleagues and more, making for a much richer view of your ability as a professional.”

For Paddock, this is particularly exciting, as he believes building a bridge between education institutions and the world of work is essential in providing easy signals to a prospective employer as to a candidate’s competence.

“At the moment, you complete your degree and get a certificate, sometimes with a transcript if you’re lucky,” says Paddock. “In our current world of big data analytics and tech infusing almost every aspect of our lives, this is completely insane, and we need a much higher level of granularity in our certification.”

He believes we should be building up these rich digital portfolios from high school, and that they shouldn’t simply report on grades and skills, but should also be about the behavioural analytics behind these. “If we want to shift the needle very substantially, we need to think of the full career trajectory of our students.”

Making education accessible for all

Paddock believes Covid-19 will lead to a surge of new online learning platforms, as we are all more likely to embark on a new course if we can do it from the comfort of our own home or office. Similarly, he sees great opportunity from the crisis to look at how we can make education more affordable. “When it comes to secondary education, there is opportunity to create blended learning environments, which will allow learners to have access to the best teachers in the country, while still receiving mentorship in a physical environment,” he explains. “The digital space can really help us to close the gap and make affordable and quality education available to a much broader spate of students in the future.”

Defining your own education path

If you’re considering some kind of educational platform, a question worth asking, according to Paddock, is what the certification looks like and what degree of granularity the institution is able to provide.

“We need to move away from the idea that education is about access to information so that you can learn it, and repeat it in an exam condition,” he reminds us. “We really need our professionals to be able to collaborate and problem-solve.”

For this reason, he recommends looking at the degree to which there is problem-based learning infused in an institution's

curriculum, and the degree to which you are put into small groups to collaborate effectively and to work on real-world scenarios. “This is the best way to ensure your education is relevant to our ever-changing world.”

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