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# Hyper-Customised Learning for Your Organisation



By [Chris Howells](#), Editor, INSEAD Knowledge

## **One-size-fits-all education might soon be a thing of the past.**

Most high school students can't stand physics. The subject's complexities and theories are difficult to understand and difficult for most to apply. This is pretty normal according to Phil Parker, INSEAD Chaired Professor of Management Science. Around 80 percent of 12-year-olds who take physics, just don't stay with it, he says.

But it's an essential discipline. It is central to our understanding of engineering, computers, cars, radio waves and much more. Understanding the laws of physics helps businesses to innovate.

How could this important discipline become interesting to all of us? The biggest challenge in its current form is that it can't be "seen". It's all formula, which is lost on more literal or visual individuals. But what if it could be customised to something you care about or are interested in? For the average 12-year-old, this could mean a sport, such as surfing or football or ballet.

Parker has been working on just such an innovation, customised learning platforms that can apply subjects to your individual situation. He calls it “hyperstrat”, but that’s just the project code name. It’s more aptly described as hyper-customisation.

### **For you and you alone**

With funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Parker has already been creating learning materials and 3D games that consolidate enormous amounts of highly localised data to help agricultural workers in some of the world’s poorest places to plant and cultivate their crops more efficiently. Parker’s games can identify everything from weather right down to soil quality to fit with even the most remote geographic location. More on this in his TEDx talk.[video:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrOPH73XQDE> width:400 height:275 align:none]

His computer algorithms have also been writing text books in barely known languages to help boost literacy in isolated places. Amazon also has 800,000 books on sale from his company. This YouTube video explains how his programmes work.

[video:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkS5PkHQphY#t=283> width:400 height:275 align:none]

“If you go to an American book store,” says Parker, “there’s is a massive self-help section, and there’s many books there. If you go to a book store in France there is the same section but it’s much smaller. You might think Americans need lots of help and the French are more centred but the truth is there are simply less people who speak French, therefore the economics of publishing in the French language are simply not good. You go to even smaller languages and there is simply no material available.”

This has massive implications for literacy levels in developing countries and goes a long way to explaining why there remains such a massive shortfall in childhood education in poor places. This is what he’s been working to fix and now he’s applying the same principles to executive education.

“The idea is that the materials we hand out in class should not only increase the interest of the participant in the subject being delivered but it increases their performance in the area they care most about. We hand out one case study and it’s the same to all participants. We have one lecture and it’s for them to extrapolate to themselves. Well we don’t need to. We could just

simply have the materials customised to their level in the organisation, their company, competitors and geography,” he adds.

## **Big data in class**

In the classroom, this takes the form of an online dashboard, where each participant can modify the content of the course to their particular situation. A HR person working in the pharmaceutical industry in South Africa would learn the same strategic planning methodologies as an oil executive from Canada, but would immediately be able to absorb it into their work and their unique situation.

“This is something we don’t currently do in business schools,” says Parker. He’s already put this platform to work with three different executive education programme clients at INSEAD and is offering it to future participants. So far the feedback has been good. He says for the first time his material ratings were as high as his teaching scores.

He and his team have taken all course materials available and put them into the dashboard, which can summarise around 250 textbooks on key business subjects. The data available can go to deep levels of very specific industries. The platform’s algorithms can also help participants do deep searches to find information on their companies, competitors and markets, beyond what Google can offer. The machine can even write summaries of what it’s found for an easy digest.

Parker also demonstrates customised templates which participants can use for portfolio planning, lifecycle modelling, perceptual modelling, value mapping and resource allocation modelling, which enable high-speed creation of presentation materials for participants to study or take straight back to the office to apply. “You can change it to any industry you want,” he says.

## **In the pipeline**

And it doesn’t end there. Parker is busy with other similar innovations such as virtual onboarding. Demonstrating a 3D interactive game, where the user tours a office, he says, “when a lot of people come to an organisation, they say, ‘here’s your office, here’s your desk, you should meet these people’ and there it is. You could instead give them virtual onboarding, where they enter a 3D space that’s actually identical to your office layout, you can walk through and actually meet people, then talk about what you’ve learned.”

His rectangular office, with whiteboards ceiling high on all walls is hot from the many computers sucking up cool air as they crunch data. It looks more like a lab squeezed into a small meeting room. His tech whizzes run in and out, tweaking code and software.

On top of it all, Parker is also developing an application that allows a high visibility of organisational learning, with HR able to see how people are learning and what's being done, almost like a command centre view of corporate education. "It's an organisation wishing to know in real time what kind of learning is taking place and what adjustments need to happen," says Parker.

Parker has a strong foundation for the next phase of his work, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and many ongoing projects with corporate and global institutions; he's excited about applying his already successful projects to the classrooms at INSEAD.



Phil Parker *is an INSEAD Professor of Marketing and the Chaired Professor of Management Science.*

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