

~~“agents of change rather than as mere objects of economic necessity”  
(Hilleole Group 1997). Is radical wisdom possible in the university  
setting?~~

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## RESEARCH REPORT

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### What is the moral imperative of workplace learning: Unlocking the DaVinci code of human resource development?

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In the course of my doctoral study, I am exploring the strategic linkages between learning activities in the modern workplace and the long-term success they bring to organisations. For many years, this challenge has been the Holy Grail of human resource development practitioners, who invest heavily on training and professional development projects each year but readily admit to their inadequacies when it comes to evaluating the full benefits. In the UK

alone, estimates for 2008 indicate that this expenditure will reach over 23 billion pounds sterling (Mann 2006:13).

Although the problem appears straightforward, the answer has proven to be more elusive. HR managers perpetually strive to quantify how workplace training contributes to the organisation's profitability or competitive advantage by monitoring how an individual changes their behaviour and adds value. After all, survival and growth are reported to be the two most compelling reasons driving change in today's enterprises (Boxall & Purcell 2003), so when training is found to contribute to the bottom line, it is guaranteed to attract the attention of senior managers, who are often more skeptical (Clarke 2005:9). This dilemma has been a key issue for HR professionals for decades, but new evidence is suggesting that the real measure of strategic success may be found in evaluating how *employee learning* can help organisations secure something much more sustainable and macro-economic than mere profit. I am referring to a concept that goes beyond the commercially convenient activities of corporate social responsibility towards a renewed notion of national identity that is deeply embedded in the ontological security of every individual employee (Field 2004); in other words, satisfying mutual concerns over long-term personal safety and knowing what can or should be done to make a meaningful contribution to society – and be recognised for it. During a recent interview about strategy and professional development within a major Australasian energy company, one senior executive said:

Many people only think about the company, but this organisation is different – we think about the country and what will be there for our kids in the longer term. The key question for our employees is – what can they do for New Zealand?

This highly successful organisation is currently engaging with its employees on the basis of a *moral imperative* and is doing so by deliberately aligning every aspect of its strategy to one over-riding

vision that it focused eighty years into the future. Furthermore, all employees are included in the planning process through an intricate and interwoven system of communications that recognises the value of people's capabilities. In an industry beset with talent shortages, this process enables the employees to share both explicit and tacit knowledge in a way which adds value, not just to the employer but also to broader communities and their families. For individual staff, the combination of a compelling long-term vision and inclusive approach to learning may be adding new dimensions to the psychological contract such as citizenship, spiritual fulfilment and a sense of meaning – putting daily mundane chores into context and adding personal identity to the work.

Interestingly, commentators on post modernism have reported on the extent to which the forces of globalisation, particularly large multi-national organisations, have impacted on historical, societal and national boundaries (Usher, Bryant & Johnson 1997; Monbiot 2004). Critics reject these developments as damaging, with values deeply embedded in relativism and they argue for a renewed sense of unity towards patriotism and national identity (Monbiot 2004). In parallel, *complexity theorists* believe that detailed long-term strategic planning has become a futile activity in today's globalised economy (Rosenhead 2006). Here is one organisation that appears to have embraced some of these ideas by simplifying its strategy towards one unifying goal – and in doing so, may have inadvertently cracked the DaVinci code of human resource development.

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## **BOOK REVIEW**

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### **Creative writing: education, culture and community**

Rebecca O'Rourke

Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2005

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In the introduction to *Creative writing: Education, culture and community*, UK writer, journalist and adult educator Rebecca O'Rourke states that her book is 'a testament to the influential role played by university departments of continuing education both in developing creative writing as an academic discipline and facilitating its contribution to social and cultural change' (p. viii). Against this background, O'Rourke's significant and timely contribution maps adult education in creative writing in the UK by focusing on an important question: whether the British cultural and educational policy of recent decades has resulted in an inclusive and democratic approach to literature and writing in that nation. Underlying this question is the understanding that such policy has shifted from encouraging the relatively passive consumption of literature