

What skill? Whose knowing?: Futures for CBT

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It has become commonplace to argue that current trends in the economy, most particularly the global economy, have placed greater emphasis on the needs of the workforce to be able to change their skills. While some work now appears to be quite knowledge-intensive, the skill demands of other work may be in decline. This paper reports on a national evaluation study of competency-based training which was conducted in enterprises in 1998. Findings from this study suggest that distinctively different discourses of competency are developing among different industry sectors and between different workforce groups. Thus, the competency required of operational, technical and trade staff is commonly conceived as 'specific skills for specific jobs'. And, the competency required of managerial and professional staff is commonly conceived more broadly. Various consequences of these different discourses of competence for the contemporary workforce will be explored and some implications for VET policy and practice drawn. Overall, the paper will address the following three questions: (i) what role is CBT playing in skilling the Australian workforce?; (ii) what contribution is it making to the changing character of work, including the creation of the 'knowing worker'; (iii) what contribution is it making to the 'high road' for reform - the formation of a high-skill workforce where opportunities for all to become more knowledgeable are provided?

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