



# Out of Our Minds

Ken Robinson

Reviewed by David Hanlon.

Sir Ken Robinson is known and revered by Human Resource professionals world-wide. His keynote presentation at the Australian Human Resources Institute's national conference brought home to us, what an intellect this man is and how many of his ideas are plain commonsense.

"Our best resource is to cultivate our singular abilities of imagination, creativity and innovation. As the world spins faster and faster, organisations everywhere say they need people who can think creatively, communicate and work in teams: people who are flexible, and quick to adapt."

These people are hard to find. It's not that we grow out of creativity. Robinson says we're educated out of it.

"To realise our true creative potential — in our organisations, in our schools and in our communities — we need to think differently about ourselves and to act differently towards each other," says Robinson. "We must learn to be creative."

*Sir Ken Robinson PhD* is an internationally recognised leader in the development of creativity, innovation and human resources. He speaks to audiences throughout the world on the creative challenges facing business and education in the new global economies. His renowned talks at the annual TED conference (2006 and 2010) continued to be viewed online by many millions of people around the world. In 2005 he was named as one of Time/Fortune/CNN's Principal Voices. He is also the author of New York Times bestseller "*The Element: How finding your passion changes everything*".

"*Out of our Minds: Learning to be Creative*", came out in 2001, and represented Robinson's long, hard-slogging battle to make the English educational system more flexible and creative. Given its age, many have ignored this book on the premise there is "newer" material out there. That is a pity as we run the risk of overlooking hidden treasures such as those found in this book.

## The structure of the book

1. Out of our minds
2. Facing the revolution
3. The trouble with education
4. The academic illusion
5. Knowing your mind
6. Being creative
7. Feeling better
8. You are not alone
9. Being a creative leader
10. Learning to be creative

## Forward, not backward looking

The argument in *Out of our Minds* is by now a familiar one. Despite the fact that Howard Gardiner and others have shown there are multiple intelligences, schools tend to favour the rather narrow fact- and logic-based kinds of intellectual development, that damages our creativity and especially in children who have other kinds of intelligence (kinesthetic, spatial, artistic, emotional) and grow up thinking they're no good or at least not very smart. Astonishing numbers of these kids, according to Robinson, go on to become successes in interesting walks of life.

Businesses too are guilty of looking backwards. Robinson argued that healthy companies, like plants, are those that "live in synergy with their environment." What businesses need now are people who are flexible and adaptable to change. The remarkable thing about *Out of our Minds* is the way in which Robinson stresses the interdependent relationship between business and the world's education systems. They are "intertwined." Both educators and employers have a responsibility to nurture creativity and imagination.

How then, asked Robinson, "do you create a culture where creativity and innovation are reliable, routine and systematic?" We must, of course, start with people, as it is people who have ideas. "The role of a creative leader is to create a culture in which everybody has ideas," suggested Robinson. Diversity is subsequently vital to idea generation in organisations; a successful leader is able to form creative groups from the right people, for the right length of time and set them to the right task.

Robinson suggests that people don't lose their creativity or creative ability, rather they lose their "confidence" in these abilities. Many adults are also out of the habit of using their creativeness. As Robinson suggests, "this waste stems partly from an obsession with certain types of academic ability (eg. rote memorisation, early academic success rather than lasting academic interest, etc.) and from a preoccupation with standardised testing. The waste of talent is not deliberate. Most educators have a deep commitment to helping students do their best...."

"The waste of talent may not be deliberate but it is systemic. It is systemic, because public education is a system, and it is based on deep-seated assumptions that are no longer true."

The challenge is that given this systemic, structural reality in our educational models, the time for reform is past. "The challenge now is to transform them."

Robinson adds: "As Thomas Friedman, author of *The World is Flat*, puts it, 'Those who are waiting for this recession to end so someone can again hand them work, could have a long wait.... Those who have the ability to imagine new services and new opportunities and new ways to recruit work...are the new Untouchables. Those with the imagination to invent smarter ways to do old jobs, energy-saving ways to provide new services, new ways to attract old customers or new ways to combine existing technologies will thrive....'"

He wants us to understand just how much creative ability we have in our souls, and he wants us to access it. He wants corporations to slow down in their path of creating corporate armies, and instead to become creative organisations where a whole new set of conditions will exist. These conditions will foster people in their attempt to flourish, and as he says, to promote a creative revolution in this country.

## Creating the space for creativity

In an innovative society, schooling can't stop after 16-20 years of school. That's obsolete with the Industrial Age. Robinson provides a good example of how companies can provide continuing education such as Pixar's university of 100 courses for employees. It's a brilliant prototype on how to provide ongoing life-long learning, which is indispensable in this new Innovation Age. In order to attract and retain quality animators, the company founded Pixar University, which conducts three-month long courses for new and existing animators. When I look at companies with many "clever" and "intelligent" people, I see very little re-investment to the extent that Pixar or Google do for example. There is a sense that this should be left to R&D or to those selected to take a sabbatical.

While many of the references are to the UK and its schools, some of the references may occasionally seem a little puzzling. But overall, this is a strong book full of compelling arguments for taking a more holistic view of education and (at least) putting study of the arts back into public education. The only weak point of the book is at the end, when Robinson gives a few recommendations for making bureaucracies, whether in schools or businesses, more creative. These strike me as unduly tentative and they fail to show how we can transform bureaucracies everywhere. But as a call to action, *Out of Our Minds* is wonderful.

## In summary

For anyone who wants to explore the way in which we should look at creativity, this book is a great refresher. Robinson is a genius who addresses why we insist on sustaining an education system that is narrow, partial, entirely inappropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and deeply destructive of human potential when human beings have so much latent creative ability to offer.

*Out of Our Minds* is available in good bookstores, Amazon and also in audible form. ([www.audible.com](http://www.audible.com)).

**David Hanlon** is the Founder of the Right Mind International Pty Ltd. He conducts his consulting and training activities globally. A developer of numerous public and in-house training programs, he is the principle developer of Conversations for Growth® and 7/8ths Selling®.