Current Journal of Human Resource Management
Volume.10, Number 6; November-December, 2024;
ISSN: 2836-8207 | Impact Factor: 6.62
https://zapjournals.com/Journals/index.php/cjhrm/
Published By: Zendo Academic Publishing

ARE HUMAN RESOURCES THE MOST VALUED ASSET IN BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS? INTERACTIVE GROUPS BRAINSTORMING APPROACH

[1]Charity Abraham, [2]Nancy Oduro-Asabere and [3*]Nana Yaw Oppong
Email: charity.abraham@ucc.edu.gh/ nancy.oduro@ucc.edu.gh/ noppong@ucc.edu.gh

Article Info
Keywords: human resources, focus groups, intra- inter-groups analysis, business organizations, valued asset

DOI
10.5281/zenodo.14265203

Abstract
The authors explore the statement, "human resources are the most valued asset in every business organization". The interactive focus group approach was adopted, where 35 MBA students were placed into five focus groups to brainstorm the statement. The statement was explored using intra- and inter-group analytical tools. Under the guidance of the researchers, each group discussed the statement to generate their outcomes (intra-group analysis) before the outcomes from the five groups were analyzed (inter-groups analysis) to generate the findings of the study. It emerged that human resources are the most valued asset because without them, other assets will lie idle. However, the 'most valued asset' accolade is without criticism, for which suggested solutions are offered. The study contributes to the debate by diving deeper into the meaning of human resources; confirming human resources as an asset; revealing why it is an asset, and offering suggestions to render them more valuable.

1. Introduction

It is common knowledge that the success of every business organization depends on a number of factors, including materials, machinery, money, methods, and human resources (Smith & Hawkins, 2004). Each of these individual factors has a unique role to play in ensuring that the organization achieves its objectives. In many instances, a combination of two or more of these factors is essential for achieving even profound objectives. While all of these individual factors are beneficial to a business organization, it is believed that human resources occupy a rather significant and incontestable position among all of these factors (Emmerich, 2016) in that materials, money, machinery, and methods alone cannot make any significant contribution without human resources. Some schools of thought have even argued that the success of any enterprise is initiated and largely determined by its human resources, and all the others are unproductive except for human efforts and the directions of all the management tasks (Sharma, 2018). This article attempts to contribute to the debate by diving deep into this general statement.

[1] SRC Hall, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana
[2] College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana
[3] Department of Human Resource Management, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section presents the literature review, followed by how the study was conducted and the debate on human resources as the most valued asset in business organizations. The authors then present the contributing factors to and criticisms of human resources as the most valued asset. This is followed by a section that summarizes the key findings before concluding the article with suggestions for the way forward.

2. Literature Review

Some schools of thought recognize human resources as an asset of business organizations (Sharma, 2018). Asset refers to any resource owned or controlled by a business or economic entity. In other words, a property of a business that can be used to generate economic wealth. This corroborates the definition of human resources presented by Ployhart (2014) that an asset should be of economic value and should exchange its output capabilities for compensation. This means the property should be of ownership value that can be converted into cash and for the owner. By implication, it can be any item that provides current or future economic benefits to an individual or entity.

Ployhart (2014) implied that for human resources to be recognized as an asset, they must be valued in financial terms and recognized in the books of accounts of the business organization in its cash equivalent. From an accounting perspective, human resources cannot be recognized as an asset due to provisions that must be fulfilled under various financial accounting standards. These regulations recognize current assets as follows:

a. It is expected to be realized in or intended for sale or consumption in the entity's normal operating cycle;
b. It is mostly held for trading. It is expected to be realized within 12 months from the balance sheet date: or
c. It is cash or cash equivalent, unless it is restricted from being exchanged or used to settle a liability for at least 12 months after the balance sheet date.

The above standards suggest that for any resource to be recognized as an asset, it must be held for trade and used within the normal operating cycle of a business organization. It, therefore, suggests that human resources cannot be recognized as an asset since they do not satisfy the conditions that a resource must satisfy to be recognized as an asset of a business organization. Supporting these standards, assets are resources with economic value that a corporation owns or controls with the expectation that it will provide a future benefit (Schuler & Jackson, 2014). Assets, which could be tangible or intangible, are reported on a company's balance sheet and are bought or created to increase a firm's value or benefit the firm's operations. Assets of a company are recorded in the company's final books and are sometimes written off due to depreciation.

Regardless of most accounting standards, these standards regard an asset as a resource controlled by the entity as a result of past events and from which future economic benefits are expected to flow to the business organization. To this end, human resources qualify to be classified as assets because they are also controlled by the business organization as a result of past contractual transactions of the business organization through which future economic benefits are expected to flow into the organization. Immediately human resources are engaged by a business organization, be it verbally or written, legally, there comes into existence a fiduciary relationship between the human resource and the business organization such that the business organization owns and controls the human resource and it becomes the duty of the human resource not to intentionally act in a manner that will be injurious to the business organization but rather act and perform such that economic benefits will flow to the organization.

Even without this aspect of the accounting standards that provide a clear path to human resources being an asset, human resource management (HRM) has its own standards to comply with. Based on the opinion of Payton (2018), the human capital agenda needs to be part of board-level decision making, integrating human capital metrics with financial and operational measurements. It is, however, suggested from the shareholder's perspective that organizations should place equal emphasis and transparency regarding investment in and returns from human capital. Efforts to introduce robust measures of human capital into financial reporting have accelerated in recent years because there is a clear and growing market interest in understanding how companies manage and measure human capital to uphold the principles of stakeholder capitalism (Pedrini, 2018).

Fulmer and Ployhart (2014) postulated that most organizations consider employees as their most valuable asset. Implicit in this characterization is the idea that collective human capital embodied in the workforce represents an economic resource of the organization in the sense that is expected to generate current and future income streams. To this end, this set of capital (skills, knowledge, abilities, and experience) is used to control and organize the available assets now and in the future for the benefit of the organization (Greer, 2021). Added to this, human resources are the only asset that businesses can derive competitive advantages from. Although all assets are used in production or are important in business, human resources combine these different assets to achieve efficiency and growth.

As part of accounting standards, every asset has a useful life during which it wears out. Under the identified accounting standards, an asset depreciates in value after every year of use. This depreciation must be calculated and recognized, and subtracted from the future value of the asset in the books of accounts to arrive at the disposable income of the asset at the end of its useful life. At times, it is only scrap value that can be obtained when a business decides to dispose of an asset. However, business organizations cannot calculate the depreciation of human resources. Rather, human resources are retrenched, retired, retrained and are mostly sent off with disengagement packages. In effect, human resources cannot be reduced into objects, recorded assets, or disposed of at scrap value. Rather, human resources, in most instances, are appreciated over time, and their disposal becomes costly for the employing organizations. Appreciation may be due to training and development interventions and/or experience gained over a time on the job. It is common to read job advertisements demanding many years of experience, which go with a commensurate compensation package. This is an example of human resources appreciation over time. As such, human resources are distinct from and superior to other business assets.

3. Study Methods

To explore whether human resources are the most valued asset in every business organization for informed outcomes, data needed to be collected and analyzed/discussed. This section presents the methods used in the study.

3.1 Methodology

The interactive brainstorming group approach was employed by the authors. By this methodology, group members work interactively while following rules to generate ideas (Oppong, 2017a). Developed by Alex Osborn in 1953 and used by Oppong (2017a), interactive brainstorming groups are an interactive technique for idea generation in groups in which members produce conflicting ideas, and these ideas are debated/discussed until they reach a compromise, which becomes an idea of the group but not the individual members. The methodology was deemed suitable for the study because the social interaction of peers motivated the individual students to be creative in generating an array of ideas that the group could further discuss to answer the research questions. The authors further believed that engaging students in interactive brainstorming activities would enhance the originality of the ideas to be generated. According to Henningsen and Henningsen (2013), the methodology continues to be considered an effective way of increasing creativity. Highlighting its acceptability and, therefore, its relevance to this study, Miller (2009) asserted that the methodology is widely accepted for its potential for idea generation.

3.2 Participants

Participants were master of business administration (MBA) students with a specialization in HRM from the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The students (N = 35) were placed into five groups of seven students each, selected at random to participate in the study and without any prior knowledge of their group members. Students participated in the exercise for course credit in the Strategic HRM module. Being mature students, most of whom had considerable years of industry experience, the participants had knowledge of the role of human resources in business organizations. Initially, all the students were informed about the statement that the class was going to brainstorm. They were given one week to conduct their independent research without being informed of the form that the exercise was to take.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The individual groups interacted to brainstorm the statement, which was broken into three questions: 1) is human resource an asset? 2) is human resource the most valued asset? and 3) are there any criticisms of the statement? The groups were tasked to brainstorm the three research questions to achieve the research objectives. The researchers instructed the participants to interact and share ideas that came to mind, regardless of how mediocre or undesirable they appeared to be. The researchers also directed the group members to collaborate on the study questions, the final responses/ideas to which became those of the group. A group member was tasked with recording the generated ideas/responses on a group idea-generation form, which is an important tenet of interactive brainstorming exercises (Henningsen & Henningsen, 2013). Each group generated its unified responses/ideas to the questions on a summary sheet, which they developed into the group's final report. The main interactive brainstorming exercise/data generation expanded over 6 hours (a double period of 3 hours each).

The statement was explored using intra- and inter-group analytical tools. Each group discussed the statement to generate their outcomes (intra-group analysis) before the outcomes from the five groups were analyzed (inter-groups analysis) to generate the key findings of the study. The inter-group analysis, which formed the main source of data, expended over 4 hours. The inter-group analysis, which took two hours, solicited responses to the study questions from the groups, referred to as Interactive Groups (and used in this study as IG1, IG2, IG3, IG4, and IG5). To answer each question, the researchers introduced it, and the groups contributed based on their reports, which had been agreed upon by all members. The generated key findings were therefore attributed to all participants in the study (the MBA cohort).

4. Human resources: What is it?

This section determines what are human resources. IG2 defines human resources as an individual or a group of people within a company or an organization's overall workforce, where each person lends their skills and talents to the organization to help it succeed (Hiltrop, 1996). Any person willing to trade their labor, knowledge, or time for compensation to improve the organization is a human resource.

Human resources refer not only to the people that make up the workforce of the business organization but it also includes the skills, Knowledge, abilities and other valuable attributes, both inherent or acquired, that are possessed by the workforce that they exert with an effort to result in productivity and goal congruence for the organization. Human resources are sometimes referred to as "human capital". Like capital, some schools of thought recognize human resources as assets of business organizations (IG1). IG5 mentioned three organizational needs that serve as resources for the survival of every organization which include financial, material and human resources. According to the group, human resources are touted as the most important, influential, and impactful asset of an organization.

This fundamentally implies that human resources are the greatest asset of every organization because they represent a critical success factor in every organization and in every field of human endeavor. Thus, it has to be effectively managed if an organization is to achieve its maximum potential and goals. Using the skills elements, IG4 defined human resources as the skills, knowledge, experience, and expertise of people who work for the organization (Rouse, 2014). The Group added that the concept of human resources is not attributed only to people but also to the skills, knowledge, abilities, and emotions of employees. To IG3, human resource is a term used to denote capabilities such as skills, knowledge, and attributes of people who make up an organization's labor force (Chelladurai & Kim (2022). These human resource capabilities make people critical for creating a sustainable competitive advantage.

5. Are human resources the most valuable asset?

It has now been revealed that human resources qualify as an organizational asset than not being regarded as such. The article explores whether or not it is the most valued asset in business organizations.

IG1 strongly agreed when Armstrong and Taylor (2023) defined HRM as a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization's most valued asset. This reveals that human resources bring on board a special ability that is natural to the human ability to think, care, create, combine, and seek perfection and success in all that they do. This human nature has resulted in the creative thinking, and management of human resources such that they have become more valued than other resources. Human resources as assets refer to a reasonable knowledge workforce equipped with competencies, skills, knowledge, and abilities that drive achievement of the goals of a business organization. Therefore, human capital is not the people in an organization; rather, it is what those people bring and contribute to organizational success.

In recent times, many business organizations have deployed powerful computers and automated machines that work faster and better than human beings. However, these computers and machines have not attained self-awareness (artificial intelligence). It is the same human resource that must program and tune these artificially intelligent computers for it to work properly and efficiently. In effect, the so-called supercomputers and automated machines that business organizations invest in are simply a reproduction of the information that human resources have fed into these computers as revealed by IG4. Therefore, being effective is a reflection of the human resource efforts invested in them. Impliedly, it is the only human resource that brings life and value to the other resources that a business possesses.

On its part, IG5 reports that a resource is the most important element in determining the success or failure of an organization. The Group believes that human resource refers to having the right people possessing the right skills at the right time. It is considered the best resource because humans can make the best use of resources if they have the knowledge, education, and technology to do so. IG1 continued that in the closing years of the twentieth century, management has come to accept that people, not products, markets, cash, buildings, or equipment, are the critical differentiators of a business enterprise. All the assets of an organization, other than people, are inert. These are passive resources that require human application to generate value. It is against this background that human resources are viewed as a valuable asset to every business organization.

In its presentation on the value of human resources, IG3 cited Bowen (2016), who found that in 1975, physical assets accounted for 83% of the enterprise value of companies in the S&P 500, most notably property, plant, and equipment. The remaining 17% came from intangible assets, particularly human capital. By 2018, the ratio had inverted, with human capital accounting for 84% of value creation and tangible assets accounting for only 16%. The group continued that an organization's human resources are of strategic relevance because employees' cognition, accomplishment, abilities, behaviors, and interactions can influence organizational public appearance.

Citing Porter and Kramer (2019), Group opined that the most important asset an organization can have is its employees' knowledge and productivity. They added that all intangible assets such as patents, copyrights, intellectual property, brands, trademarks, and research and development (R&D) are created by people. Therefore, people matter most to businesses. They are the most essential contributors to profits and shareholder value. In today's continuously changing business world, human assets, not fixed or tangible assets, differentiate an organization from its competitors.

IG2 presented the notion that human resources are the most valuable assets of every business organization and has been championed by many scholars. Their works have demonstrated that, while machines, materials, and policies have proven useful in the advancement of a business corporation, nothing meaningful can be accomplished without the participation of human resources. This assertion is, however, consistent with the findings of Sharma (2018), whose study revealed human capital as the biggest asset for any organization. The author remarked that in today's vibrant and uninterruptedly changing business world, it is the human asset and not the other assets that differentiate an organization from its competitors.

Today's knowledge economy distinguishes one organization from another by the most important and powerful factor, the human resource or human asset, and not necessarily the organization's assets like machinery, policies, and materials used for production. IG4 also arrived at a similar opinion that human resources as an important asset of an organization or business show that employees are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and difficult to substitute (Fey, & Björkman, 2017). This is because they consider labor an important asset that activates other assets. Without human resources, the other assets of an organization will lie idle, which may reduce productivity (Fukugawa, 2018) and increase costs.

The foregoing supports IG1's revelation that human resources are something much more than the resources that are classified as assets of a business organization. This view of the group is strengthened by Berisha, Qehaja and Kutllovci (2015), who observed that human resources are the most important asset since organizations record all assets on their balance sheet but do not include human resources. This implies that HRM has standards and methods for recording volume, requirements, and value that are distinct from accounting standards and, therefore, should not be compared. HRM departments/units may use specialized software to create and maintain employee databases; manage manpower budgets and audits; and keep track of talent that may leave an organization for possible re-hiring. Due to the HRM standards, human resources are considered assets.

6. Human Resources as the Most Valued Assets of Business Organizations: Supporting Factors

From the brainstorming activities and the resultant reports from the groups, it has been a common notion that human resources are the most valued assets of business organizations. This section considers some factors presented by the various focus groups (directly or implied) as influencing the 'most-valued asset' status of human resources. Four factors were identified, and these are presented in the ensuing sections.

6.1 Management abilities of human resources

Building on the view-point of Hargreaves and Javis (1998), IG1 came up with the management ability of human resource as a factor that contributes to its being the most valued asset. The Group mentioned that a business organization may have several resources at its disposal. Some may be naturally occurring, such as mineral deposits, land, and even human beings (labor). Other materials may be man-made or created through manufacturing activities, such as vehicles, airplanes, railway lines, and power generation units. It is supported by IG5 that it is the process of human resource effectively combining these resources that produces economic wealth for business organizations and their owners, making it more valuable than the others since it becomes a 'player-manager' while the others are just 'players'. Management ability means that it is the only asset that has the natural ability to combine other resources of a business organization in such a way that it can result in the production of a useful product that other human beings may want to use to derive satisfaction from it (IG1). In effect, all other resources, no matter how valuable they are, cannot combine themselves into a product that each other needs or wants without the management ability of human resources.

6.2 Resource that is concerned about organizational success

Almost all the other resources of a business organization are animate objects. This factor was revealed by IG1, IG3 and IG4. Although super-intelligent computers form part of the assets of business organizations, even these super-computers are yet to attain artificial intelligence such that they will have the prime concern of any business organization at heart (Hargreaves & Javis, 1998). The primary aim or concern of any business organization is to create wealth for its owners. In other words, every business organization exists to make profit. Even non-profit organizations exist to make some form of profit, which they naturally rename surplus or reserves.

The question that arises is, what importance is an asset such as a vehicle or mineral reserve if the owners do not benefit from it? Is it important to use inanimate objects if their owners do not succeed? On the other hand, this same question is essential to every human resource of any business organization for survival. Even the least reasonable human resource, such as a laborer in any business organization, will recognize that if the organization does not succeed, create wealth or make profit, they will not be rewarded for their efforts as their continuous rewards for their efforts hinge on the success and sustainability of the employing business organization. No other resource in any business organization has the same nature of concern for success as human resources, making them more valuable than any other organizational asset.

6.3 Learning abilities of human resources

It is natural for human resources to learn new and improved ways of doing things including business operations. It is in this nature of human resources that they have created other resources such as computers and computer-automated machines, vehicles, and power generation units that are used as assets to create other products (IG2, IG4). Learning refers to employees (human resources) acquiring knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes, or behaviors that are not acquired for their own benefit but to contribute to the business organization's competitive advantage. This is achieved through improving employee performance, supporting the business strategy (such as growing the business), and contributing positively to business outcomes, such as quality, productivity, development of new products, and retention of key employees. Through informal learning, human resources can learn, even on the job, new and better ways of doing things. From a business organization's perspective, what employees learn contributes to the development of intangible assets, such as human capital, and the development of other assets, which make human resources a very valuable asset compared to other assets of a business organization.

There are two kinds of Knowledge that human resources have the ability to learn to improve upon its value to any business organization. They are explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge refers to knowledge that is well documented, articulated, and easily transferred from one person to another. Examples of explicit knowledge include processes, checklists, flowcharts, formulas, and definitions. Explicit knowledge is the primary focus of formal training and employee development (IG2, IG3). This refers to personal knowledge derived from individual experiences that is difficult to codify. It is here that the value of human resource is noticed in any business organization. This personal knowledge, if the right systems are put in place by the human resource department/unit be transferred to other workers, will improve productivity in such a way that no other asset of the business organization can do.

6.4 Goodwill of human resources

Goodwill was described by IG1 as an intangible asset related to the purchase price of a business entity. It is an intangible added advantage in the minds of customers that will make them return to the business organization again for economic transactions for popularity and recognition in the business sector than its competitors. IG4 supports that it is only the human resource of a business organization that brings goodwill. Because of how valuable the human resource is, the organization is profitable, and with that, it gains a name, a good brand and a certain level of respect among its competitors. The organization's competitors follow them closely to know what to do to also keep their organizations in the light, which results in increased profitability.

Goodwill is included in the accounting valuation of business organizations because it is a portion of the purchase price that exceeds the sum of the net fair value of the asset acquired and liabilities assumed (IG1). Goodwill helps organizations gain a great number of customers and earn a great profit. Organizations getting a lot of customers do not lose their old ones since they are seen as having high prestige, and everyone would love to associate with them. In effect, the organization increases its profits. Goodwill differs from other intangible assets because it has an indefinite life, whereas most other intangible assets have a finite usefulness. Examples of goodwill include intellectual property, brand recognition, and proprietaries, which mostly result from human resource activities.

7. Critiquing the 'Most Valuable Asset' Status of Human Resources

The various groups identified criticism of human resources as the most valued asset of business organizations. Despite the relevance of the role of human resources to an organization, many perplexities hover around its true contribution, which necessitates a deeper understanding of the area. There has been a lot of debate regarding whether human resources actually contribute toward organizational performance (Katou, 2017). It is true that many organizations are unable to effectively capitalize on their human resources and frequently question the investments made in their human resources practices. This doubt about the value of human resources, IG2 revealed, degenerates into organizations that make little investment in their human assets.

IG4 found that despite managers' claims that their organization's human resource is their most important asset, few can confidently state the financial value of that resource or quantify in financial terms how changes in management practices, culture, or workforce composition affect the value of that resource. Scholars of strategic human resource management face similar situations. Therefore, management relies more on inferences about human resource value than on its empirical measures (IG5). Such inferences make it difficult to value human resource contributions in financial terms and equally difficult to quantify them. Therefore, there is a need to tackle this challenge if the value of human resources can be fully realized. However, Emmerich (2016) accepts that human resource is certainly an asset, but it is one of those "non-value added" activities that businesses perform. Essentially, it becomes a liability if done poorly, but it is necessary for organizations to function properly as human resources add some benefits that help employees be as productive as possible.

Another challenge is the retention of human resources. It is difficult to restrict talented people from leaving the organization after developing them. These investments are not only valuable assets to the company but also costly investments that may be mobile (Oppong, 2013). In this regard, Cappelli (2008) warned that retention should be well managed and should be a pivot of managing organization's most valued assets. The current authors equally believe that a bunch of talented human resources has become an expensive inventory these days – an inventory that can walk through the door, and mostly the recently developed that do so in order to use their upgraded skills to negotiate for improved rewards. Therefore, although they are the most valuable asset, they will turn out to be the least valuable and costliest of all assets if their retention is not properly managed. This downside of human resources, in turn, makes investments in their training and development equally challenging.

Criticizing the term 'asset' linked to employees, IG4 reported that the term "human asset" degenerates lack of clarity (Oppong, 2017b), and further argued against treating people as assets on ethical grounds. People are clearly not controlled by a company, but assets are (Guragai et. al., 2017). The term has the connotation of ownership (Andriesen, 2004) but, unlike the other assets, employees are not owned by their employing companies.

McGuire and Brenner (2015) contended that the old adage "people are the most important asset" is wrong. Not all employees are the most important asset, but the right people are. This is because, individually, all employees are not the same. Human resources differ in terms of personality, competence, and performance. Of course, competent, motivated, committed, and engaged employees are always indispensable for the organization. Higher performers are always on target to be retained by their organizations. Employees who are not valuable, not rare, not difficult to imitate, and not difficult to substitute are not treated as unique or the most important. Two features of a job are job essentiality and job exclusivity that could determine the value of human resources. Essentiality refers to how important or critical the job is to the overall success of the organization. The job becomes so essential that the job holder is valued. On the other hand, job exclusivity refers to how difficult it is to replace a single individual (McGuire & Brenner, 2015). These two features of a job determine the degree of power the job holder wields in the organization. Employees who perform jobs that have low job essentiality and job exclusivity are not considered most valuable because their roles are not deemed important and they can also be easily substituted.

Supported by the assertion of Delery and Roumpi (2017), IG3 revealed that human resources cannot boast of being the most important asset because of several uncertainties. These uncertainties may make it difficult for human resources, other than physical assets, to be relied upon. Forms of these uncertainties include uncertainty about the future value of human resources as an asset. For example, the performance of employees may go down over time, or job responsibilities may change, causing a misfit between the person and the job, which Cascio (2014) termed as uncertainty of returns. In addition, the number of employees required may fluctuate according to market conditions, making business owners uncertain about their manpower budgets, which is an uncertainty in volume (Cascio, 2014).

IG2 comparing human resources to the foundation of a building states that every organization’s human resources are its strong base. Therefore, if the base of a building is not strong enough, it is always at risk of falling into an unexpected critical situation. The same goes for an organization. The employees manage the organization, whether they are at the middle or senior level, so their strength, commitment, dedication, and emotional connection with the organization are determined by the organization’s value determination. However, these cannot be judged or assessed in monetary terms, making them invaluable and intangible assets for organizations.

8. Summary of Findings

The statement, ‘human resource is the most valued asset in every business organization’ has been evaluated through intra- and inter-interactive group analysis. The analysis reveals that human resources are assets and that they are the most valuable of all business assets. However, the statement has evoked criticism, and many stakeholders have argued against treating people as an organizational asset and the most valued among all the business resources.

Summing the for and against human resources as the most valued assets of business organizations reflects the clarification by Drucker (1999) that "The most valuable assets of a 20th-century company were its production equipment. The most valuable asset of a 21st-century institution, whether business or non-business, will be its knowledge workers and their productivity." (p.116). This implies that human resources did not used to be the most valued assets of organizations before the 21st century, but they are now due to the immense shift from the secondary sector to mostly tertiary/service economies. This shift renders other factors (especially for production) less valuable than human resources. Relatedly, the outcomes from the brainstorming exercise tilts the argument more toward being the most valuable asset. This implies that those who hold opposite views might advance the pre-21st-century debate. In today's knowledge economy, all intangible assets, be they patents, copyrights, intellectual property, brands, trademarks, and research and development, are created by human assets, rendering them the most essential contributors to profits and shareholder value.

The argument that human resources are the most valuable asset is based on the premise that performance and business success depend more on the effective utilization of human resources than physical assets. This is explained by the fact that technological and other material resources are generated by the industrious and creative efforts of people, whose ingenuity ensures that these resources are effectively deployed (Oppong, 2016). However, the caliber of human resources is critical because not all categories of employees are most valued.

9. The Way Forward

Outcomes from the groups' brainstorming activities have revealed that human resources are an asset and are considered the most valued resources of business organizations. However, human resources, being the most valued asset, has attracted criticisms. The criticisms roughly sum up to 1) organizations' inability to retain their valuable asset; and 2) not all human resources should be considered the most valuable of the business asset, but only talents. There should be a way forward to tackle these challenges if the 'most valued asset' accolade is to be fully realized.

As valuable assets, organizations must institute appropriate measures to retain them. To tackle the issue of retention, human resources need to be trained and motivated. Without strategies for their retention, their value will be short-lived as they may be pulled by competing organizations that provide what they are looking for or they will be pushed from their employing organization by provisions that are lacking. Training is crucial for improving performance, simplifying jobs, promoting satisfaction and enhancing familiarity with work processes and organizational cultures. To realize the benefits of human resources as valuable asset, organizations should consciously replace the term "training cost" with human resource investment, showing human resources as a strategic long-term asset of the organization. Investments in employee learning should be aimed at progressively upgrading skills to increase an organization's potential to efficiently achieve its goals. It is therefore suggested that training and development interventions should be an integral part of the management of human resources to provide the required benefits as the most valued assets.

In addition to training, employees should also be motivated to stay. Moreover, employees need to be fully involved in discussions on motivation packages. Because of a lack of such important communication, there is a telling difference between the views of employers on what motivate and the views of employees about the most motivating elements, as revealed by a survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (see CIPD, 2010). For instance, when the employer believed that base pay had a 19% chance of motivating employees, the employees rated it at 40%. On the other hand, when employers rated bonus at 35%, employees rated it at only 18%. The findings suggest that many companies have no idea about what motivates their employees. Apart from the communication to discuss motivation packages, organizations should also align such rewards with overall company strategies. After all, employees are not only motivated to stay but also to improve organizational outcomes.

Regarding the second challenge, businesses must be able to identify the most talented individuals and develop them for long-term retention and optimal benefits. To tackle the challenge of knowing the human resources who are talents to reap their benefits as assets, talent identification, development, and retention are critical to an organization's ability to be successful (Oppong, 2016; Wirtenberg, Abrams, and Carolyn, 2004), implying that an organization's talents contribute to its success. With the looming talent shortage, McCauley and Wakefield (2006) suggested that effective talent management will become even more important as many experienced and high-performing individuals retire, resulting in companies worldwide competing for a smaller pool of talents. We develop talents to retain them for their significant contributions, not just to develop them for the sake of developing them. In this light, business organizations must be smart to identify, select, develop, and retain the talented employees in order to maintain their organizational productivity (Oppong, 2016; Mwema, & Gachunga, 2014).

10. Conclusions and Contributions

The authors set out to investigate the truth of the popular statement that human resources are the most valued asset in every business organization. The aim of this research has been achieved to a great extent. Not only has it been established that this statement is true in the 21st century, albeit the few challenges that need to be tackled to realize the full value of the asset to business organizations. This study went further to establish what a human resource is and define it as an asset. As a result, the study contributes to existing literature on the topic by delving deeper into the meaning of human resource; clarifies human resource as an asset; argues why it is an asset; identify challenges; and suggests the next steps to render the asset more valuable to business organizations. It also offers practical implications to business organizations as regards the need to identify their talents as assets, train and motivate them to make significant contributions that other assets cannot offer.

Authors' Biographies

Charity Abraham is an Assistant Registrar at the University of Cape Coast with extensive experience in higher education administration and human resource practice. Charity holds an M.Com (HRM) and is currently pursuing a PhD. She has contributed to the University's operational improvements and has authored varied papers and memos to that effect. She has served on varied boards in and outside the University, and is currently the Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the University's Cooperative Credit Union Ltd. and a Board Observer on the World Council of Credit Unions. This article adds to her research contribution to the human resource management discipline.

Nancy Oduro-Asabere is an Assistant Registrar in the College of Distance Education of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. She holds an M.Com. in Human Resource Management and a Post-graduate Diploma in Organisational Development. She has contributed immensely in the area of higher education administration. Her research interests include strategic planning, succession management, organisational cultures and facilitation. She has authored a number of memos, reports and journal articles in the areas of administration and human resource practice. This article adds to her publications in human resource management.

Nana Yaw Oppong is an Associate Professor of talent/skills development and the head of the Department of Human Resource Management, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. He has also taught at universities in the UK, Germany, and Senegal. He is a chartered human resource practitioner and an Erasmus+ scholar. Nana's research interests include talent/skills development, management and leadership development, and indigenous research. He has published many journal articles, book chapters and books covering these areas, the outcomes of which have been shared through international conference presentations in Ghana, Greece, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Hong Kong, and the United States of America. Nana is also a consultant in human resource management and development.

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