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## Utilisation of 'IEPA' graduates in sectors of the Ghanaian economy: insights from a nation-wide tracer study

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### ABSTRACT

This article reports on a nation-wide tracer study conducted by the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA), which examined how her graduates were utilised by employers in sectors of the Ghanaian economy. Considering the nature of the research context and the dearth of information regarding placement and utilisation of IEPA graduates in the labour market, the concurrent mixed methods design was employed, whereby qualitative data in the form of insights from semi-structured open-ended interviews with 16 employers was elicited for analysis. This was complemented by quantitative data derived from self-administered questionnaires distributed to 407 IEPA graduates employees on the purpose of the study. The data from these two sources were analysed using a thematic approach and descriptive statistics, respectively, to allow for key lessons, observations and conclusions to be drawn to the context of the study. The findings show that IEPA graduates were engaged in leadership, management, administrative and planning roles/tasks in their respective posts. The findings suggest, however, that although IEPA graduates performed these roles frequently, they were utilised in other 'supplementary tasks/roles' different from those they had received professional training and/or qualifications to perform. Against the backdrop of the findings, the article concludes that IEPA needs to revise its curricula and modes of training and course delivery to ensure that she churns out graduates who meet the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands and aspirations of her clientele.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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### KEYWORDS

Employee utilisation; IEPA graduates; employee engagement; employee involvement; tracer study

## Introduction

There is a general agreement amongst human capital development theorists (for example, Becker 1964; Nübler 1997; Schultz 1993) that in the 'corporate world', after a graduate attains the necessary academic and/or professional training and qualifications, the next steps are for the person to be recruited (through appropriate job selection processes), placed, inducted and utilised by employers in ways that enable such individual to begin to contribute his/her quota towards the attainment of the goals of the organisation in which he/she is engaged. In this respect, theoretical evidence from human resource development literature (for example, Armstrong 2009; Chester and Baudin 1996; DeBolt 1991; Drummond, Grimes, and Terell 1990; Grossman and Thompson 2004; Rebore 2007; Wood and Payne 1998) places enormous emphasis and attention on not only the training and developmental needs of prospective employees but also on employee effective

utilisation. That is, of how employees are involved, engaged and used effectively and efficiently towards the attainment of organisational goals. Consequently, human resource training and development institutions in recent times are called upon to show interest in how their graduates are utilised in workplaces.

In spite of this admonition, however, a review of the human resource utilisation literature and practice suggests, in rather stark terms, the disinterest and lack of commitment of human resource training and development institutions<sup>1</sup> towards issues of employee recruitment, placement and utilisation. To put it rather succinctly, the relationship that exists between human resource training and development institutions and employment agencies could best be described as 'episodic' rather than 'processual' (Fullan, cited in Nudzor 2013). Human resource training and development institutions have over the years preoccupied themselves only with churning out graduates and have until recently underestimated the problems associated with employee recruitment and utilisation. This has placed them and employment organisations in entirely different worlds, to the extent that each side is ignorant of the 'subjective' world of the other, and thus creating a knowledge gap regarding the interdependency of the two sides.

It is against this background that the nation-wide tracer study on which this article is based was conducted. The tracer study sought essentially to examine how graduates of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA)<sup>2</sup> were placed and utilised by their employers, and how efficient and effective they were in their respective schedules and places of work. This was undertaken deliberately and against the backdrop of a dearth of information concerning how her graduates are placed and utilised effectively in the 21<sup>st</sup> century labour market to enable them to contribute their quota towards Ghana's developmental agenda. For us, investigating these issues was considered needful in helping the IEPA to identify gaps and/or lapses in the knowledge, skills and expertise of her graduates that may require revision of her curricula and general modes of training and course delivery to make them relevant to the needs of her clientele.

This current article reports on an aspect of this nation-wide tracer study of IEPA's alumni. Essentially, the focus of the article is on examining how IEPA graduates were utilised by their employers; the tasks/roles they performed; the frequency with which they were made to perform these tasks; and their effectiveness and efficiency in their respective schedules and places of work. In line with the general purpose of the article, our overarching research question is: 'How were IEPA graduate employees utilised in various sectors of the Ghanaian economy?' Based on this overarching research question, the following three sub-research questions were answered:

- (1) What professional tasks/roles did IEPA graduates perform in their respective posts/workplaces?
- (2) How frequent were IEPA graduates engaged in leadership, managerial, administrative and/or planning roles/tasks?
- (3) How efficient and effective were IEPA graduates in their respective places of work?

Thus, in this article, we present the views of both employers of IEPA graduates and the graduates themselves to gain a better insight into how the graduates are utilised in sectors of the Ghanaian economy. To ensure that this was achieved, we operationalize some keywords in the context of the article as follows. First, we conceptualise 'employee utilisation' to mean fully engaging and involving IEPA graduate employees of an organisation in the efficient and effective performance and achievement of tasks that are aligned to the degree/professional qualifications they had acquired from IEPA. Second, we define an 'employer' as any chief executive officer or a representative of a key organisations in which IEPA graduates are employed. Third, we refer to 'IEPA graduate' in context to mean any employee of an organisation who had pursued and obtained academic/professional qualifications in any of IEPA's programmes of study, namely MA, MEd, MPhil and PhD and is employed in any organisation in Ghana. Finally, in our efforts to remain focused on the overriding purpose of the study, and considering the theoretical framework we

adopted as a conceptual lens for our study on which this article draws, we conceptualise 'efficiency' simply to refer to the ability of an employee to perform or function in the best possible manner with the least waste of time, effort and resources, whilst we conceive 'effectiveness' to mean an employee's ability to accomplish and/or produce the intended or expected result. In other words, we view effectiveness to be about doing the right things, whilst efficiency is about doing things right. For this reason, and for purposes of succinctness, we put these two notions (i.e. efficiency and effectiveness) together as denoting 'fitness for purpose'.

The rest of the article is organised as follows. The section following the introduction explores the research context, where issues concerning IEPA's history of establishment, mandates and exploits are outlined crisply. This is followed by a brief review of literature to conceptualise and set in context issues surrounding employee utilisation. Then comes the description of the theoretical resources adopted as a conceptual lens for the study and the research methods employed, respectively. Thereafter, the findings to the research questions posed are presented and discussed before the conclusions.

## Context of the study

The IEPA was established in August 1975 based on a joint agreement between Ghana Government and UNESCO/UNDP, to train educational planners, administrators and other specialists in the field of education. IEPA's mandate, among others, was to generate empirical knowledge to inform education policy and practice and provide education and training aimed at improving planning, leadership and management capabilities of personnel in the education sector (Owusu and Dzinyela 1994).

Since her establishment, the IEPA has assumed a leading role in the preparation of graduates for careers within the Ghanaian educational sector and other sectors of the general economy. In addition to being the 'hub' for the training of educational planners and administrators of the nation, IEPA plays a leading role in international-funded capacity strengthening projects in educational leadership and planning throughout the country. For example, IEPA has developed strong working relations with the International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP) of UNESCO and had recently partnered the IIEP in delivering a distance education programme in Educational Sector Planning in Ghana. The IEPA also collaborated with Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam (i.e. between 2004 and 2010) to undertake a Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation (NUFFIC) funded research project that enhanced leadership and management capacities of Lecturers of Ghana Polytechnics. Again, IEPA was also involved deeply in the recent past in DFID-sponsored 'EDQual' research partnership with the University of Bristol and the University of Dar es Salaam which researched into educational leadership and quality issues in Ghana and Tanzania. Most recently, IEPA has collaborated with UNESCO, Ghana Commission in designing and conducting sensitisation workshops on Education 2030 Agenda in the Brong Ahafo, Ashanti and Central Regions of Ghana.

In terms of the academic courses she offers, the IEPA currently runs leadership, management and administration oriented graduate programmes leading to the award of M.Ed in Educational Administration; M.Phil in Educational Planning, Educational Administration and Administration in Higher Education. In addition to these graduate programmes, she (i.e. IEPA) offers a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programme in Qualitative Research. This programme was introduced deliberately, and with the view to strengthening and/or enhancing the research capacities of early career researchers of the University of Cape Coast and other professional research institutions in the country in the area of qualitative research. It is also heart-warming to note that IEPA has recently obtained clearance from the Academic Board of the University of Cape Coast for the introduction of new postgraduate programmes, namely: MPhil/PhD in Educational Leadership, MPhil/PhD in Monitoring and Evaluation in Education, MPhil/PhD in Economics of Education, PhD in Educational Administration, PhD in Educational Planning, and Postgraduate Diploma in Quality Assurance in

Tertiary Education. These programmes are being introduced to fill in human resource gaps in these critical areas of the Ghanaian educational system.

Thus, through these training and capacity building programmes vis-à-vis the academic courses she renders, IEPA has assumed a leading role in the preparation of graduates for careers within the Ghanaian education sector and other sectors of the general economy. Whilst this undoubtedly is a significant contribution to the development of the nation, it is unclear how her graduates are placed and utilised effectively in the labour market to enable them contribute their quota towards the developmental agenda of the country. A baseline tracer study commissioned by IEPA in this regard in the Central Region of Ghana in 2014 (Nudzor and Danso 2015; Nudzor 2016) produced interesting results worth citing. Among other things, the findings suggested that although employers were aware that educational preparation and training ought to take pre-eminence in determining the job placement of IEPA graduates, they prioritised factors such as seniority, rank, wishes, career prospects and trustworthiness of prospective employees. Also, the findings indicated that IEPA graduate employees were utilised in ways that made them perform roles they received no professional training for from IEPA.

As interesting as these insights from the baseline study are, they represent the views of employers and IEPA graduates from only one out of 10 regions of Ghana. This thus call for a nationwide tracer study which, apart from probing these issues further, will inform a revision, if need be, of IEPA's curricula and general modes of training and course delivery to ensure that she churns out efficient and effective graduate employees to serve the human resource needs of the education sector in particular, and other sectors of the Ghanaian economy.

### **Conceptualising employee utilisation**

Employees, as critical human resource, are important assets of organisations, who, when well-developed and utilised, facilitate the realisation of goals and objectives of organisations. The Business Dictionary (n.d.) describes the essence of employee utilisation as attempts to maximize the efficiency of an organisation's employees, accomplished by a variety of methods, including training an employee in multiple areas, so that they can switch from one role to another depending upon where they are most needed at a given time. This, the Business Dictionary believes, ensures that employees do not waste time on less-profitable tasks. Nübler (1997) adds that employee utilisation is about the extent to which available employees are deployed effectively for the maximum achievement of individual, collective, organisational or national goals and objectives. So as observed aptly by Nudzor (2016), educational preparation and training, certification, experience, and working relationships of the employee are useful determinants of job placement, but the panacea to attainment of organisational goals and objectives depend largely on how employees are deployed and utilised effectively. This means that employee utilisation is an important human resource practice that should be an ongoing concern of human resource departments of organisations (Armstrong 2009; Nudzor 2016; Rebore 2007).

Available evidence from human resource development literature (Armstrong 2009; Chester and Baudin 1996; Cotton 1993; Drummond, Grimes, and Terell 1990; Grossman and Thompson 2004; Rebore 2007) endorses this view forcefully. The literature suggests strongly that subsequent to employee selection, recruitment, placement and induction, the next steps are for the employees to be deployed appropriately and utilised in ways that enable them to function towards the achievement of organisational goals. The objective of any organisation, according to the human resource development literature, is to utilise its human resources (labour, scientific and technical personnel) efficiently to maximise output or productivity of the organisation. This, in the view of the literature, makes utilisation of human resource a critical element in determining organisational performance and effectiveness. It refers essentially to the effective deployment of existing skills, qualifications and competencies of employees for the maximum achievement of individual, social, and/or

organizational goals. Thus, in the view of Nübler (1997), employee utilisation aims at using the services of the employee to the best possible extent to achieve organisational goals and objectives.

In the context of this article, and as we indicated earlier, we conceptualise 'utilisation of IEPA graduates' to refer to their engagement and involvement in the attainment of the goals and objectives of the organisations to which they belong, and in ways that are congruent with the degree/professional qualifications they had attained from IEPA. In specific terms, we view IEPA graduate utilisation in context to mean how or the ways employers use the services of IEPA graduates employed in various sectors of the economy to the best possible extent to achieve organisational goals and objectives. The Gallup Organisation (as cited in Markos and Sridevi 2010), for example, defines employee engagement broadly as the involvement with, and enthusiasm for work. The Gallup Organisation likens employee engagement to positive employees' emotional attachment and employees' commitment. Robinson et al. (as cited in Markos and Sridevi 2010), on the other hand, see employee engagement as meaning a positive attitude held by employees towards the organization and its value, whilst Ram & Prabhakar (2011, 47) define employee engagement as the strategic approach for driving improvement and encouraging organisational change. The important point here, and the human resource literature indicates, is that employee engagement requires a year-round focus on changing behaviours, processes, and systems to anticipate and respond to an organization's needs. Thus, high levels of employee engagement occur when employees are involved with, committed to, enthusiastic of, and passionate about their work (Markos and Sridevi 2010).

Employee involvement, on the other hand, is seen in the human resource development literature as a central principle of 'soft' HRM, where the focus is upon capturing the ideas of employees and securing their commitment (Beardwell & Claydon, as cited in Kular et al. 2008). The concept of employee involvement is strongly grounded in 'unitarist' views of organisations, as it assumes that managers and employees have the same interests. Kular et al. (2008) notes that critics have argued that employee involvement has management firmly in control and very limited real influence is given to employees. Others, for example, Hyman and Mason (as cited in Kular et al. 2008) argue that employee involvement schemes extend little or no input into corporate or higher level decision-making, and generally do not entail any significant sharing of power and authority. Similarly, Blyton and Turnbull (as cited in Kular et al. 2008) argue that employee involvement is 'soft on power'. In spite of these criticisms, however, there is credible research evidence (for example, Kisumbe, Sanga, and Kasubi 2014) which suggests that employee involvement in decisions affecting the job or work is an important driver strongly associated with high levels of employee engagement.

Thus, for the purposes of this article, we subscribe to the views illuminated by the human resource literature and we conceptualise employee utilisation as encompassing two variables, namely employee engagement and involvement. We define employee engagement simply as the positive attitudes and commitments that IEPA graduate employees have towards their organisations and their work as a result of the roles they perform and how they are used, treated or deployed by their employers. On the other hand, we operationalize employee involvement in this article to entail or mean how interested and committed IEPA graduate employees are as a result of their attachment, connection, participation or engagement in decisions involving themselves, their work and organisations. In simple terms, 'engagement' in this context denotes the kinds of roles or tasks IEPA graduate employees perform or undertake, whereas 'involvement' connotes the frequency with which they are engaged in taking management, leadership, administrative and planning decisions concerning the operations of their respective organisations. Our view essentially is that the frequency with which IEPA graduate employees are engaged in decision-making and the extent of their involvement in organisational tasks all have the propensity to affect their utilisation or underutilisation in the organisations they are employed.

## Theoretical resource

The human capital literature (for example, Almendarez 2010; Becker 1964; Saleem and Balakrishnan 2015; Schultz 1993) contend that an educated population is a productive population because



formal education and training is highly instrumental and necessary to improve the productive capacity of a nation. Typically, Becker (1964) and Schultz (1993), for example, view human capital traditionally as a physical means of production (i.e. machines). They (i.e. Becker and Schultz) argue that, one's productivity depend substantially on the rate of return on the human capital one owns and that one can invest in human capital via education and training (in Fugar, Ashiboe-Mensah, and Adinyira 2013). This argument places a strong emphasis on the stock of knowledge, skills and abilities embedded in an individual, which results from natural endowment and subsequent investment in education, training and experience which are critical for the development of every nation.

However, several other authors (for example, Levin and Kelley 1994; Nübler 1997; Spence 1973) believe that, Becker and Schultz's opinion of human capital overemphasized the payoffs from increased education and overlooked complimentary inputs like management practices (i.e. staff scheduling, placement and/or utilisation) which must exist for education to improve productivity. In extending the human capital theorists' argument, the World Economic Forum (2017, 3) lends support to the latter view of Levin and Kelley (1994); Nübler (1997) and Spence (1973), and adds that the knowledge and skills people possess enable them to create value in the global economic system<sup>3</sup>. This implies that human capital (knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences) acquired through education, when utilised efficiently and effectively, enables employees to contribute to economic growth and development of any nation.

In line with the broad purpose of the research on which this article draws, coupled with the need to generate evidence-informed findings to address the research questions posed, we relied on a human capital development framework developed by World Economic Forum (2017) as a theoretical and/or conceptual resource for the article. This framework focuses on four key elements (namely: capacity, development, know-how and deployment) which involve employees' knowledge, skills and abilities that give an organisation its economic value. First, 'capacity' looks at the level of formal education of employees as a result of past education investment. This relates contextually to the knowledge, skills, competencies, instincts, abilities, processes and resources required by employees to enable them to perform creditably in their jobs. Second, 'development' focuses on the process of equipping individuals within organisations with the understanding, skills and access to information, knowledge and training that enables them to perform effectively. This involves the provision of formal education for the next-generation workforce and continued upskilling and reskilling of the current workforce (The World Economic Forum 2017). Third, 'know-how' relates to personal competency traits of employees that enable them to perform towards achieving organisational goals. Fourth, 'deployment' represents employees or staff scheduling, placement and/or utilisation (Harms 2009), and how they are able to contribute their quota towards the attainment of organisational goals and objectives. Figure 1 shows the distinctive aspects to human capital development theory as conceptualised for the purposes of this article.

Thus, as the framework illustrates, effective utilisation of employees' results from the interplay of the employees' capacity, development, know-how and deployment. Our view is that by adopting the human capital development framework as a theoretical lens or resource, employee efficiency and effectiveness is guaranteed owing to the interplay between and among these four variables. Conversely, it is our believe that efficiency and effectiveness in terms of employee output cannot be attained, maintained and/or enhanced by giving negligible attention to any of the four elements. All four elements of the framework need attention and consideration in equal measure. Seen in this light, the human capital development framework we adopt as a theoretical lens offers a better prospect for examining issues regarding employers' utilisation of their employees. Essentially, the framework points to key consideration for policy-makers and employers seeking to enhance employee and organisational performance within countries and across the global economy.

So clearly, the rationale for the human capital development theory adopted does link to the criteria for the evaluation closely as it exemplifies the parameters and/or determinants of employee

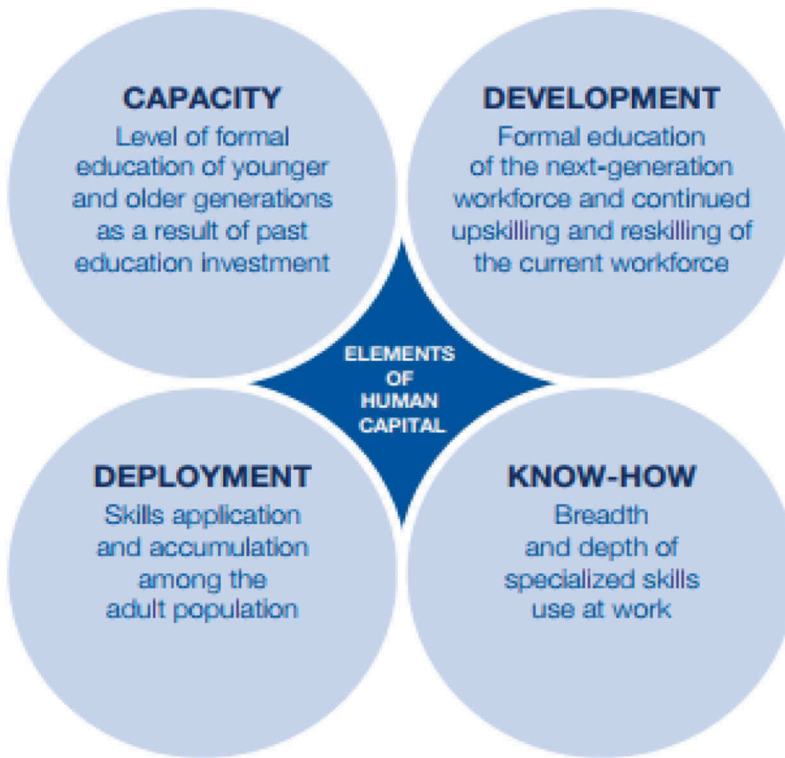


Figure 1. Theoretical resource for the study.

Adopted from the World Economic Forum, The Global Human Capital Report (2017, 3.)

utilisation in this article to include how or the ways in which IEPA graduates were utilised consistently with the specialised areas of IEPA programmes of study and delivery, and the professional training and degrees they had attained from IEPA, as well as how efficient and effective they were in their places and schedules of work.

## Methods

Considering the nature of the research problem and the context within which the study was undertaken, the concurrent mixed methods design was adopted for the research. Qualitative data in the form of insights from semi-structured open-ended interviews with employers of IEPA graduates was elicited for analysis. This was complemented by the analysis of quantitative data derived from self-administered questionnaires distributed to graduate employees on the purpose of the study. Thus, apart from helping to ensure and assure purposes of research triangulation, the concurrent mixed methods design was preferred because its use certainly guaranteed that the findings of the study have gone beyond speculations to be grounded in the evidence gathered (Creswell 2009; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2010).

The population of the study consisted of two target groups of respondents. The first group comprised all the organisations in the various sectors of the Ghanaian economy that employ of IEPA graduates. For the purposes of the study on which this article draws, we designated these organisations simply as 'employers'. The second group comprised all alumni of IEPA. That is, all graduates who had obtained MA, MEd, MPhil and PhD qualifications from IEPA.



In all, a sample of 423 participants was obtained for the study. This number consisted of two groups of participants. The first group comprised 16 'employers' of IEPA's graduates who were selected purposively for semi-structured open-ended in-depth interviews to ascertain the factors that inform them regarding the placement of IEPA graduates in their organisations, and their utilisation and effectiveness in their respective posts and schedules. These 16 'employers' were drawn from various sectors of the Ghanaian economy, including but not limited to, Education, Health, Security, Religious, Banking/Financial, Political/Governance, Human Resource Development, Agricultural, and Private sectors, and were either the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) or representatives of the CEOs for these sectors/organisations. These 16 officials designated as 'employers' had direct oversight responsibilities over IEPA graduates, particularly in terms of their placement and utilisation in their respective places of work, and were therefore deemed to have credible information needed for the purposes of the study. The second group comprised four hundred and seven (407) IEPA graduates themselves selected from organisations within which employers were selected, and who were served with self-administered questionnaires regarding the purpose of the study. Regarding the latter group of participants (i.e. graduates of IEPA), an advertisement regarding the nation-wide tracer study was placed in media outlets to bring this to their notice and solicit their involvement.

Following on from this, three modes of sampling were employed to select the 407 participants required to get a full complement of sample size for the self-administered questionnaires. The first of these approaches involved administering self-completed questionnaires to IEPA employees who responded to our invitation in the media and had agreed and availed themselves to participate in the research study. This was followed by administering the same self-completed questionnaires to IEPA graduates who were known personally or whose organisations were known to the research team but who did not respond to our invitation to participate in the tracer study. The third mode of sampling involved the use of the 'snow-ball' sampling technique to identify other alumni of IEPA through colleague participants and serve them with the self-administered questionnaires. Thus, the two groups of participants and the varying sampling strategies for their selection were employed as a means of attending to contexts and comparing knowledge claims among actors with different locations and orientations in what Vavrus and Bartlett (2006) refer to as 'vertically bounded analysis'.

Regarding the procedures for data collection, ethical clearance for the research was first sought from the University of Cape Coast (UCC) Institutional Review Board since the original research this article reports on was supported/sponsored by the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Consultancy of UCC. Subsequent to this, introductory letters were obtained from IEPA and copies were sent to institutions/organisations that were perceived to have employed IEPA graduates, informing them about the research study, its aims and benefits. This was followed by an advertisement about the research in a Ghanaian newspaper (i.e. Daily Graphic) to invite graduates of IEPA to participate in the study. Thereafter, the research team was constituted and research data (i.e. both qualitative and quantitative) were collected concurrently. In adherence to research ethics, all respondents/participants consented to be part of the study by signing a consent form, and they were briefed and debriefed appropriately about the research processes and outcomes.

Owing to the composite data collection approach employed (typified by the use of mixed methods design), data generated was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Data generated through, the self-completed questionnaires were edited, coded and entered into SPSS for processing and analysis. The results were presented using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency tables, bar charts and pie charts to allow for statistical inferences and generalisations regarding the utilisation and effectiveness of IEPA graduates to be made. The semi-structured interviews with employers, on the other hand, was first coded and transcribed manually thereafter. The transcribed data was then cleaned by correcting errors in grammar without distorting the meaning. The data were subsequently categorised according to the five research questions posed and then extrapolated to avoid category overlap. Finally, the key issues, observations and lessons were drawn from the data regarding the placement, utilisation and effectiveness of IEPA graduate employees in their respective places of work.

## Findings

For purposes of clarity and succinctness, we present the findings emerging from the analyses of data along the lines of the research questions posed. But before this, we outline the demographic characteristics of participants involved in the nationwide tracer study in [Table 1](#) to set the findings in context.

### *What professional tasks/roles did IEPA graduates perform in their respective posts/workplaces?*

The question sought generally to describe the various ways by which IEPA graduates were utilised in their respective schedule of work by their employers. The quantitative findings to this question are indicated in [Figure 2](#).

From [Figure 2](#), it can be observed that in terms of ratings, participants believed generally that they performed leadership roles/tasks most in their schedules. This is followed by management; administration; planning; research and analysis; and secretarial roles/tasks. So clearly, this finding is an indication that IEPA perhaps is fulfilling her mandate of training personnel for careers in the educational sector and other sectors of the country. Also, and in exception to secretarial roles/tasks, the findings, as shown in [Figure 2](#), indicate that employers were utilising graduates of IEPA in ways that resonated with the specialised areas of IEPA programmes of study and delivery, and the professional training and degrees they had attained from IEPA. This, thus, sits in well with the literature reviewed for the purposes of this article (for, example, [Armstrong 2009](#); [Cotton 1993](#); [Markos and Sridevi 2010](#); [Nübler 1997](#); [Rebore 2007](#)) which argues that employee utilisation is about the extent to which available employees are deployed effectively for the maximum achievement of organisational goals and objectives.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of participants.

Demographic information		Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Respondents	IEPA graduates	407	96.2
	Employers	16	3.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>100</b>
Respondents' Gender	Male	206	50.6
	Female	182	44.7
	No response	19	4.7
Respondents' age range	21–30 yrs	14	3.4
	31–40 yrs	137	33.7
	41–50 yrs	177	43.5
	51–60 yrs	67	16.5
	61 yrs & above	2	0.5
	No response	10	2.5
<b>IEPA graduates</b>			
Programme pursued	M.A. Administration	9	2.2
	M.Ed Regular	5	1.2
	M. Ed Sandwich	273	67.1
	M. Phil Regular	95	23.3
	M. Phil Top-up	6	1.5
	M. Ed Distance	5	1.2
	No response	14	3.4
Year of enrolment	1994–2005	55	14
	2006–2010	70	17
	2011–2015	127	31
	2016	151	37
	No response	4	1
Year of completion	1998–2005	19	5
	2006–2010	55	13
	2011–2015	133	33
	2016–2017	192	47
	No response	8	2

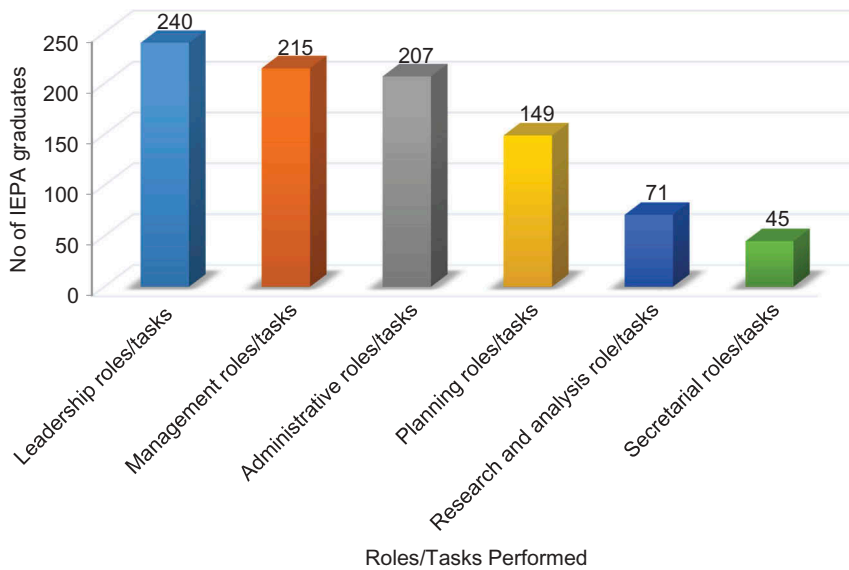


Figure 2. Specific roles/tasks performed by IEPA graduates in their current job/post.

In addition, although it is unclear from Figure 2 what the ‘secretarial roles/tasks’ IEPA graduates claimed to have performed were or meant, the mere mention of it suggests quite clearly that aside the roles/tasks they performed in the specialised and/or focus areas of IEPA’s programme of study, they equally performed other ‘supplementary’ roles/tasks for which they may necessarily not have had training and/or qualification for from IEPA. This finding, thus, supports the evidence from the baseline tracer study conducted in the Central Region of Ghana (Nudzor and Danso 2015; Nudzor 2016), which suggested that although graduates of IEPA were utilised in ways that were generally consistent with their degree specialisations, they performed ‘other’ supplementary roles for which they received no formal or professional training from neither their employers nor IEPA.

Employers’ insights regarding utilisation of IEPA graduates corroborated the quantitative findings in respect of how the graduates were being utilised consistent with the specialised areas of IEPA programmes of study and delivery, and the professional training and degrees they had attained from IEPA. Generally, the employers’ accounts indicated that they saw IEPA graduate employees as useful insofar as they were able to perform functions related to their professional training and degrees they had attained from IEPA. For example, some employers felt that IEPA graduates had the needed training, which helped them to perform administrative duties creditably. This view is, for example, explicit in the words of one employer:

They are the core administrative staff so they are normally delegated responsibilities in the schools as Faculty Officers. Here we call them School Officers ... They usually serve as secretaries to committees and undertake general administrative duties. (Employer 2)

Other employers talked generally about the utilisation of IEPA graduates in their organisations in terms of their versatility in undertaking tasks. For this group of employers, IEPA graduates have demonstrated a great deal of ability, zeal, competency and the wherewithal to/in undertaking tasks as managers, leaders, and administrators in their various organisations. One employer captures this succinctly in her own words, thus:

Some of the IEPA graduate employees, like my Vice, at times holds meetings with the heads of department (HoDs) and takes decisions on the students in relation to promotion. She also ensures that teachers mark their exams papers and prepare students’ reports on time. In fact, she is more involved in these activities than me as

the head because she is their immediate supervisor. Here, requisitions come to me through her so she collects all requests for logistics, materials, whatever, and present them for my attention and action. Sometimes I travel ... so when I am not around, she is able to run the school as if I was here; even at times better than when I am around. (Employer 6)

Other employers who shared similar sentiments about the usefulness of IEPA graduates added that sometimes they assigned them different roles ranging from planning to decision-making. They explained that they got the graduates to switch roles and also to stand-in for others so that they get the maximum opportunity to improve their competencies and versatility. One employer puts it this way:

We have different schedules in this office and the schedules are divided into pre-admission exercises, admission, registration, official ceremonies, training and development, board work/board meetings. ... A lot goes into all of this so what I do is to put them (i.e. IEPA graduate employees) on specific schedules. For example, one is now working on board matters and another deal with daily office correspondence, managing office correspondences. Then after some time, I switch them to get them round. The reason is obvious, so that it should be possible for any one of them to stand in for the other at any time. ...and when it comes to examination, how we examine our thesis, the procedure for doing that, they all do it. (Employer 13)

Another employer, in support of the views outlined so far, explained how he/she utilised IEPA graduates extensively in decision-making, planning, research and the general management of the school s/he is the head of:

I have two IEPA graduates I utilise extensively in my decision-making and in planning. I utilise them even when I am organising in-service training. I give them key responsibilities. My assistant is an IEPA product and virtually I don't do things alone. He is very much of help. Sometimes we undertake small research here and we are able to come out with some findings that inform us in our planning. So, I use them extensively in the management of the school. (Employer 15)

Thus, overall, the words of employers reverberated in the semi-structured open-ended interview excerpts above appear to concur with Nübler's (1997) rendition in the literature that employee utilisation should aim at using the services of the employee to the best possible extent to achieve organisational goals and objectives. Pleasing as this sounds to the ears, the findings, nevertheless have some implications for IEPA and her operations. In particular, the aspect of the finding which suggested that IEPA graduate employees performed 'other' supplementary roles for which they received no formal or professional training from neither their employers nor IEPA could be seen as an indictment on IEPA's operations in a sense. This finding may be interpreted to mean IEPA is perhaps not have meeting all the needs and aspirations of her clientele. In this sense therefore, this finding could be a 'wake-up' call for IEPA to undertake a needs assessment of the activities of her clientele to be able to identify the gaps and/or lapses in the knowledge, skills and expertise of her graduates to inform the revision of IEPA's curricula and general modes of training and course delivery to make them relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs of her clientele.

How frequent are IEPA graduates engaged in leadership, managerial, administrative and/or planning roles/tasks in the various sectors of the economy?

This research question sought to find out the frequency and extent of involvement of IEPA graduate employees in undertaking leadership, managerial, administrative and/or planning roles/tasks. Two specific items on the self-administered questionnaire were deployed to help answer this question. The first item sought to find out how frequent employers engaged IEPA graduates employees in leadership, managerial, administrative and planning roles, whilst the second examined their (i.e. IEPA graduates) extent of involvement in these roles. The findings to these specific items are presented in [Figures 3 and 4](#).

Reading from [Figure 3](#), it can be observed that 292(191 + 101) respondents (representing 72% of respondents) indicated that they were frequently and very frequently engaged in leadership, management, administrative and planning roles whilst 94 (23%) of respondents were of the view that they were rarely engaged by their employers in these roles. [Figure 3](#) shows further that

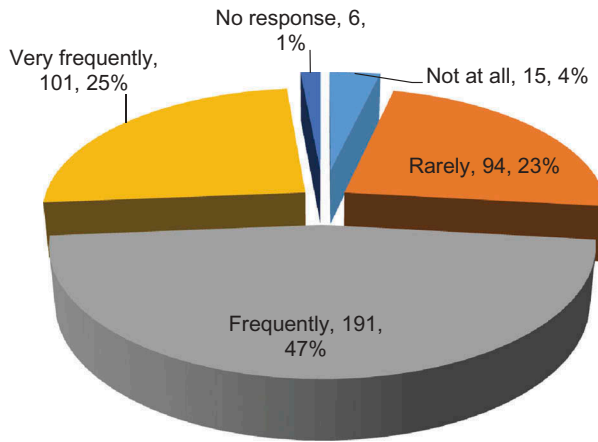


Figure 3. How frequently employer engages IEPA graduate employees in leadership, managerial, administrative and planning roles.

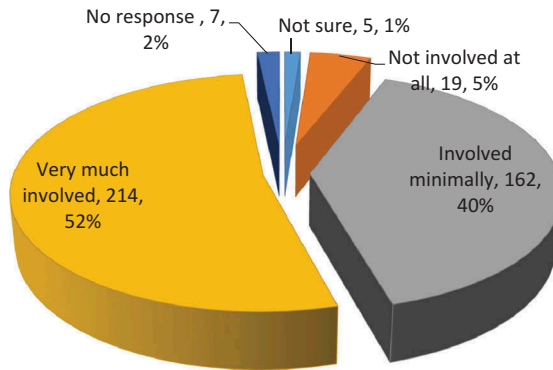


Figure 4. Extent to which employers involve IEPA graduates in leadership, management, administrative and/or planning roles/tasks.

whereas 15(4%) of the respondents thought that they were not all engaged in these roles, 6(1%) did not provide any response to the question. In contrast, the findings in Figure 4 indicate that 214 (52%) of the respondents felt they were very much involved; 162(40%) thought they were minimally involved whilst 19(5%) indicated that they were not at all involved in leadership, managerial, administrative and planning task/roles in their respective organisations. The rest are 5(1%) of the respondents indicating that they were not sure that they were being involved, whilst 7(2%) did not provide any response to the question about their involvement in these tasks/roles.

The interesting thing, however, about the findings in Figure 4 is that the dynamics of the findings would change dramatically if the variable ‘minimally involved’ is operationalized in context to mean that respondents have had or were having some form of involvement in the aforementioned tasks/roles. In so doing, 376(92%) would be taken to represent the number of respondents who thought or at least implied that they were involved (in varying degrees or with varying intensities) in the tasks/roles identified. In comparison with findings in Figure 3, the picture would not be too different if in the same way, ‘very frequently engaged’ (101, 25%), ‘frequently engaged’ (191, 47%), and ‘rarely engaged’ (94, 23%) are conceptualised and defined operationally to mean that the respondents had or were having some form of engagements in their respective organisations in leadership, managerial, administrative and planning tasks/roles. If these were so, the suggestion then would be that 386(95%) of the respondents thought they were engaged in

varying frequencies in the aforementioned tasks/roles. The findings, when conceptualised and interpreted in this way, would thus indicate some level of consistency between the observations in [Figures 3](#) and [4](#), particularly regarding the issue of the frequency of engagement and extent (or intensity) with which graduates of IEPA were involved in leadership, managerial, administrative and planning tasks/roles in their respective organisations. The reason for comparison, therefore, is grounded in our belief that if a sound assessment can be or is to be made about how IEPA graduates are utilised at their workplaces by their employers, such an assessment should focus on the frequency of engagement and intensity (or extent) of involvement of the graduates in the specialised fields in which IEPA gives her training. In this sense, both [Figures 3](#) and [4](#) present interesting findings worth contrasting in order to be able to determine how IEPA graduate employees were utilised by their employers.

So clearly, the findings in [Figures 3](#) and [4](#) are important as they show that largely employers engaged and involved IEPA graduate employees efficiently and effectively in roles/tasks that were congruent with their degree/professional qualifications obtained from IEPA. This, thus resonates strongly with our conceptualisation of 'employee utilisation', and particularly our review of literature for the purposes of this article (for example, Kisumbe, Sanga, and Kasubi 2014; Markos and Sridevi 2010; Rebore 2007; Kular et al. 2008; Saleem and Balakrishnan 2015; World Economic Forum 2017 etc.) which demonstrates that high levels of employee engagement occur when employees are engaged with, involved in, committed to, enthusiastic of, and passionate about their work.

This notwithstanding, it remains to be said that from [Figures 3](#) and [4](#), the suggestion is put forth, albeit implicitly, that not all IEPA graduates felt that they were being engaged and/or involved (either fully or not at all) in leadership, management, planning and administrative roles or schedules they had obtained degrees/professional qualifications for from IEPA. Undoubtedly, a variety of reasons could be advanced to explain this finding. However, for the purposes of this article, we adopt the human capital development approach, and explain this as suggesting that it is the employers' prerogative to place employees at various schedules based on consideration of the context and a plethora of factors, including but not limited to, the employees' degree specialisation, qualification and training, experience, working relations with colleagues, rank, seniority, career prospects, trustworthiness, wishes and demeanour of prospective employees (Armstrong 2009; Chester and Beaudin 1996; Cotton 1993; Drummond, Grimes, and Terrell 1990; Grossman and Thompson 2004; Rebore 2007).

### ***How efficient and effective were IEPA graduates in their respective places of work?***

This research question sought to find out how efficient and effective IEPA graduate employees were in their respective schedules and places of work. The quantitative aspect of the findings (derived from analysis of self-administered questionnaires) focuses on how efficient and effective IEPA graduate employees themselves thought they were, whilst the qualitative aspect delves into what the employers had to say (in their respective interview sessions) about the efficiency and effectiveness of IEPA graduate employees. [Figure 5](#) presents the quantitative findings to this question.

As shown in [Figure 5](#), majority of the respondents (270, 66.3%) thought that they were efficient and effective to a high extent whereas 114(28%) felt that they were efficient and effective to some extent. Furthermore, 9(2.2%) respondents considered themselves as efficient and effective 'to a low extent', 3 (0.7%) said that they were 'not sure' whilst 11(2.7%) did not provide responses to the question. This, for us, is interesting and is a basis for us to suggest that the 66.3% of respondents who thought they were efficient and effective 'to a high extent' were those who were satisfied with the leadership, managerial, administrative and planning role they were being assigned by their employers. In the same vein, we could conclude on the basis of the findings in [Figure 5](#) that those respondents who said they were efficient and effective 'to some extent' and 'to a low extent', respectively, could have been



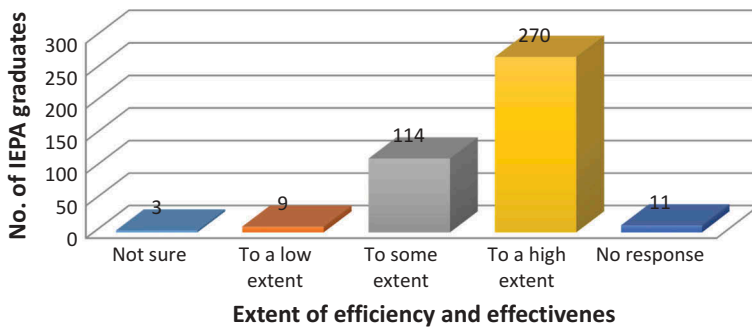


Figure 5. Extent of the agreement by IEPA graduates that they were efficient and effective employees.

those who felt their potentials were not being utilised to the maximum, whereas those who indicated that they were 'not sure' as well as those who did not respond, possibly were those who felt their utilisation were not in tandem with the degree specialisation and/or training they had received from IEPA on the basis of which they were employed.

Insights from the interviews conducted with employers suggested that they were divided as far as the issue of efficiency and effectiveness of IEPA graduate employees was concerned. Majority of them intimated that IEPA graduate employees were effective and efficient in the doing their work. They pointed out that in all cases, the graduates were up to task and were discharging their duties rather well. One employer, for example, had these to say about IEPA graduates:

Your graduates (IEPA graduate employees) are very efficient and effective. That's how I see them. I have not gotten any instance to complain about any of them here. They are doing their work as diligently and as required of them.... (Employer 11)

Another employer talked about the efficiency and effectiveness of IEPA graduates directly in terms of how trustworthy and capable they were even to hold 'higher offices'. He recounted:

Yes, they (IEPA graduates) are very efficient. I work with them and I trust them. I trust what they do and I believe that they are capable people. In fact, they are all capable to hold the office that I am holding now because they have risen through the ranks and they can be trusted. When I am not there, I don't have much problems – I can easily travel trusting that everything will go on smoothly. (Employer 9)

On the flip side of the coin, other employers (although in the minority) expressed dissent and argued strongly that IEPA graduates in their respective organisations cannot be said to be efficient and effective insofar as they were unable to deliver on their core mandates for which they were employed. Generally, these employers catalogued a number of issues, including but not limited to: the theory/practice gap in the operations of the graduates; their incompetency in undertaking tasks; their inability to think creatively and take initiatives; their lackadaisical attitude towards work; their quest to pursue second degree to enhance their career prospects: as some of the 'axes they had to grind' with IEPA graduate employees. Some of these concerns expressed are visible in the following two excerpts, for example:

...I think I have mentioned that it is like the theory is not meeting practice. Also, there is a hurry to just complete the programme and fit in and get a senior member position in a university and that's it. IEPA is failing to produce new age thinkers who are going to say let me go against the norm, let me see, let me establish another school of thought and use this theory and see how it will work out. (Employer 2)

It looks like most of our graduates have the paper certificate but can't perform. Honestly speaking, ...at interviews, the person will tell you, I went to pursue this programme at the university, but ask him/her a question on what he or she has studied (i.e. his/her area or field of study) and he or she will tell you I learnt this so many years ago... I am telling you, more than 50% of our teachers are holding their 2<sup>nd</sup> degree – master's degree but this is the time also the children are not learning. They are simply not performing because

when you go round... when I was a District Director you go round and ask the children... the teachers will be there they will not teach “nd3 teacher aba w’ankyere yen adea” (Today the teacher came but didn’t teach us anything), “nd3 teacher mbae” (Today the teacher didn’t come)...when you find out they are either sitting down somewhere not even doing anything... (Employer 16)

Thus clearly, the dissenting views expressed in this section of the article bring some form of inconsistency in the findings of the study in respect to how efficient and effective IEPA graduates were in the respective places of work. While on the one hand, majority of participants of the study (including IEPA graduate employees themselves) were of the view that IEPA graduates were efficient and effective inasmuch as they applied themselves assiduously to tasks assigned, the other school of thought, held mostly by some employers showed that they believed that they (i.e. IEPA graduates) were simply not ‘cut for the job’. Inasmuch as it remains unclear whether or not any of these employers had any axe to grind with IEPA or her graduates, these criticisms could be seen as a genuine call on IEPA to undertake two key tasks. First, this presents a fine opportunity to IEPA, as a human resource training and development institution, to undertake a needs assessment of her clientele to identify and provide additional and on-the-job training to her alumni who are found ‘wanting’ on the job. Second, the findings enlisted in this article presents IEPA an opportunity to undertake some form of introspection with the view to identifying her own ‘blind spots’ so as to be able to come out with meaningful training programmes that would be used to train her students to make them really fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century job market.

So whilst this article has examined IEPA graduates utilisation by their employers, and how efficient and effective they were in their respective schedules and places of work, the findings exemplify and reiterate the human capital development theory we adopted as the theoretical resource for the article implicitly. As the framework illustrates in relation to the findings, effective utilisation of employees’ results from the interplay of issues related particularly to the employees’ capacity, development, know-how and deployment. What this means, or at least implies invariably, is that efficiency and effectiveness in terms of employee output cannot be attained, maintained and/or enhanced by giving negligible attention to any of the four elements. Seen in this light, therefore, the human capital development framework we adopted as a theoretical lens points essentially to key consideration for policy-makers and employers seeking to enhance employee and organisational performance within countries and across the global economy.

## Conclusions

This article has examined the ways by which IEPA graduates were utilised by their employers and how efficient and effective they (i.e. IEPA graduate employees) were in their respective schedules and places of work. In view of the findings discussed, a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, we conclude that IEPA graduate employees performed leadership, management, administration, planning, research and analysis roles/tasks in their respective places and schedules of work. Second, we conclude that employers were utilising graduates of IEPA in ways that resonated with the specialised areas of IEPA programmes of study and delivery, and the professional training and degrees they had attained from IEPA. Third, it is concluded that aside the leadership, management, administration, planning, research and analysis roles/tasks, IEPA graduate employees performed additional and/or ‘supplementary’ roles/tasks for which they may not have had training and/or qualification for from IEPA. Fourth, and in relation to the additional and/or supplementary roles/tasks performed by IEPA graduate employees, we conclude that perhaps IEPA may not have meeting all the needs and aspirations of her clientele directly. Fifth, we also conclude that largely IEPA graduate employees were engaged frequently and involved intensely in tasks/roles in the specialised fields or areas in which IEPA gives her training and/or preparation. Sixth, and finally, we conclude in view of the findings enlisted and presented in this article that some graduate employees of IEPA may not be ‘fit for purpose’ in terms of their inability or lack of competence in undertaking the tasks for which they have been employed.

Against the backdrop of these findings, we recommend that IEPA as a training institution, to undertake a needs assessment of her clientele to identify and provide additional and on-the-job training to her alumni who are found 'wanting' on the job. Conversely, we advise that the 'supplementary' roles/tasks performed by her graduate employees are factored into her curricula and modes of training and delivery to ensure that concerted efforts are made to give the training required by her clientele are given to her graduates so that they are well-equipped and able to deliver 'on the job'. Alternatively, we recommend short professional development courses to be designed and delivered by IEPA to the employees of her clientele to ensure that personnel in the various sectors are trained properly and wholly to acquire skills and knowledge needed to perform roles/tasks assigned them by their employers.

## Notes

1. Human resource training and development institutions, as used in the generic sense, refers to those institutions in the Ghanaian context that are involved in/with the training and/or development of human resources (mainly in terms of preparing graduates) for the 'world of work'.
2. Detailed information concerning the history of establishment, mandates and exploits of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA), as a human resource training and development institute in Ghana, is presented in the next section of the article entitled 'Context of the Study'.
3. So theoretically, this article espouses human capital development theory, but as the latter discussion demonstrates, the approach taken is not the conventional narrow approach of a human capital theory of/by Becker (1996) and Schultz (1993). Rather, it takes up on the latter work of scholars, especially that of Nübler (1997). This is particularly apparent in Figure 1, which is a much wider and more inclusive account of human capital theory. As the article itself has demonstrated, this wider approach is taken as it offers a better prospect for examining the interplay of issues (i.e. employees' capacity, development, know-how and deployment) related to employee efficiency and effectiveness.

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