



Work Ethics and Employee Performance in the Ghanaian Civil Service

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between work ethics and employee performance within the Ghanaian Civil Service. Recognizing the critical role of the civil service in national development, this research investigates how ethical conduct—manifested through diligence, reliability, and professionalism—influences performance outcomes. Using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data were collected from 350 civil servants across selected ministries, departments, and agencies, while qualitative insights were obtained through semi-structured interviews with 25 participants. Regression analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between work ethics and employee performance ($\beta = 0.72$, $p < .001$), with work ethics explaining 51.6% of the variance in performance. Qualitative findings identified three key organizational factors influencing this relationship: leadership and ethical modeling, reward and recognition systems, and resource constraints. The study concludes that work ethics are a fundamental driver of performance in the Ghanaian Civil Service, but are significantly shaped by organizational practices and working conditions. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and public sector managers seeking to enhance performance through ethical leadership, improved incentive systems, and better working conditions.

Keywords: Work Ethics, Employee Performance, Ghanaian Civil Service, Public Sector Reform, Ethical Leadership

1. Introduction

The efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service are fundamental pillars for national development, particularly in emerging economies like Ghana. As the primary machinery for implementing government policies and delivering public services, the performance of the Ghanaian Civil Service (GCS) has a direct and profound impact on socioeconomic progress, public trust in governance, and the attainment of national development goals such as Ghana Beyond Aid and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the heart of this performance lies the human element—the work ethic of civil servants, which encompasses their dedication, integrity, reliability, and commitment to public service values.

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Work ethic, defined as a set of values centered on the moral benefits of diligence, discipline, and commitment to one's duties, is a critical determinant of organizational productivity and service quality. In the context of public administration, a strong work ethic translates into timely service delivery, reduced bureaucratic delays, accountability in the use of public resources, and a citizen-centric approach to governance. However, the public sector, especially in many developing nations, is often characterized by complex challenges—including political interference, resource constraints, and entrenched bureaucratic cultures—that can stifle motivation and erode ethical standards.

The discourse on public sector performance in Ghana has been ongoing for decades, with recurring concerns about inefficiency, perceived laziness, bureaucratic red tape, and sometimes corruption. While these challenges are often attributed to systemic and institutional failures, the role of individual work ethics—shaped by a combination of personal values, organizational culture, and managerial leadership—remains a crucial yet underexplored factor. A high-performing civil service requires not only robust systems and policies but also a workforce that is intrinsically motivated, ethically grounded, and professionally committed to excellence.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the relationship between work ethics and employee performance within the Ghanaian Civil Service. It aims to move beyond the prevalent narrative of systemic failure to examine the individual and organizational factors that cultivate—or hinder—a strong work ethic among civil servants. By doing so, it provides insights that are essential for designing targeted human resource interventions, strengthening organizational culture, and ultimately enhancing the capacity of the GCS to drive national development.

Statement of the Problem

The Ghanaian Civil Service, despite being the backbone of public administration and policy implementation, has long been plagued by perceptions and reports of underperformance. Common criticisms include chronic delays in service delivery, absenteeism, lack of accountability, low productivity, and a culture of indifference towards public complaints. These issues have significant consequences, ranging from stalled projects and inefficient use of public funds to a deep-seated erosion of public trust in government institutions. While these problems are widely acknowledged in public discourse and policy circles, interventions have predominantly focused on top-down structural reforms, pay adjustments, and technical capacity building, with limited sustained success.

A critical gap in these reform efforts is the insufficient attention paid to the foundational element of work ethics. Employee performance is not solely a function of skills, resources, or rules; it is fundamentally shaped by attitudes, values, and ethical commitment. The persistent performance deficits suggest that there may be a widespread weakness in the work ethic within the service, which structural reforms alone cannot address. Globally, research has consistently shown that work ethics—manifested as punctuality, responsibility, diligence, and integrity—are strong predictors of individual and organizational performance. However, within the unique context of the GCS, characterized by job security that may sometimes foster complacency, political patronage, and weak performance management systems, the dynamics of work ethics and its impact on performance are not well understood.

Moreover, the existing literature on public administration in Ghana tends to analyze systemic and macroeconomic factors—such as pay competitiveness, funding constraints, or organizational structure—in isolation from the psychosocial and cultural dimensions of employee behavior. There is a scarcity of empirical research that specifically investigates how the work ethic of civil servants influences their performance outcomes. Key questions remain unanswered: To what extent do factors like intrinsic motivation, professional pride, sense of duty, and supervisory leadership influence work ethic? How

does a strong work ethic translate into measurable performance improvements in the Ghanaian public sector context?

This lack of understanding presents a major problem for policymakers and public managers. Without evidence-based insights into the drivers and manifestations of work ethics, interventions risk being superficial or misdirected. Therefore, the problem this study addresses is the lack of empirical understanding of the relationship between work ethics and employee performance within the Ghanaian Civil Service. By investigating this relationship, the research aims to provide actionable knowledge for developing more effective, culturally attuned, and sustainable strategies to enhance ethical conduct and performance in Ghana's most critical administrative institution.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between work ethics and employee performance within the Ghanaian Civil Service. It seeks to identify the key dimensions of work ethics—such as integrity, reliability, commitment, and professionalism—that significantly influence the performance outcomes of civil servants. By investigating the psychological, organizational, and cultural factors that shape work ethic in the public sector, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for improving both individual and institutional performance through strengthened ethical conduct and values-driven human resource management.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the level of work ethics (e.g., punctuality, accountability, diligence) exhibited by employees within the Ghanaian Civil Service.
2. To examine the relationship between work ethics and key performance indicators such as productivity, quality of service delivery, and adherence to deadlines.
3. To identify the organizational and managerial factors (e.g., leadership style, incentive systems, organizational culture) that influence the development and sustainability of strong work ethics among civil servants.

Theoretical Review

This study is grounded in three interrelated theoretical frameworks that together provide a comprehensive lens for understanding work ethics and performance in a public service context: Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy, Social Cognitive Theory, and Public Service Motivation (PSM) theory.

Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy emphasizes the importance of a professional, rule-based, and impersonal administrative system where officials are expected to exhibit diligence, hierarchy adherence, and commitment to their roles without personal or political favoritism. According to Weber, an ideal bureaucracy thrives on ethical discipline, where civil servants are motivated by a sense of duty rather than personal gain. In the Ghanaian context, this theory offers a normative model against which the actual work ethics and performance of civil servants can be evaluated. However, deviations from this ideal—such as nepotism, informal influence, and lack of accountability—often observed in many public sectors in developing countries, form a significant part of the problem under investigation.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), particularly Albert Bandura's concept of **triadic reciprocity**, explains how personal factors (e.g., self-efficacy, moral values), environmental influences (e.g., organizational culture, leadership models), and behavior (work performance) continuously interact. SCT suggests that work ethics are not merely innate but are learned and reinforced through observation, experience, and organizational feedback. For instance, civil servants who observe ethical behavior being rewarded and

unethical behavior being sanctioned are more likely to adopt and sustain strong work ethics. Conversely, a culture of impunity or perceived injustice can diminish ethical motivation. This theory helps explain how organizational practices and role models within the Ghanaian Civil Service can either promote or inhibit the development of a strong work ethic.

Public Service Motivation (PSM) Theory posits that individuals in the public sector are often driven by intrinsic motives such as a desire to serve the public interest, commitment to social equity, and loyalty to the state. PSM aligns closely with the notion of work ethics in public institutions, as it emphasizes self-sacrifice, civic duty, and ethical integrity over extrinsic rewards like pay or promotion. In the Ghanaian Civil Service, where extrinsic incentives may be limited or inconsistently applied, understanding the role of PSM becomes critical. This theory helps to explore whether civil servants are motivated by broader societal goals and how this motivation translates into ethical behavior and enhanced performance, even in challenging bureaucratic environments.

Together, these theories provide a multi-level framework. Weber's theory offers the structural and idealistic foundation, SCT explains the psychological and learning mechanisms through which work ethics are acquired and maintained, and PSM focuses on the unique motivational drivers in public service settings. Integrating these perspectives allows for a holistic analysis of how system design, personal cognition, and motivational factors collectively shape work ethics and performance in the Ghanaian Civil Service.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on work ethics and employee performance, particularly within public sector contexts, highlight the significant role of ethical conduct, motivation, and organizational environment in determining productivity and service quality. Globally, research consistently affirms that employees with strong work ethics—characterized by diligence, punctuality, and integrity—demonstrate higher job performance, greater accountability, and enhanced organizational commitment (Hill & Petty, 2021; Meriac et al., 2010). In public administrations, these traits are even more critical due to the sector's impact on national development and public trust.

In sub-Saharan Africa, and Ghana specifically, studies on public sector performance often cite institutional weaknesses—such as political interference, resource constraints, and bureaucratic inefficiencies—as major impediments to efficiency (Ackah & Agboyi, 2019). However, a growing body of research emphasizes that individual and behavioral factors, including work ethics, play an equally important role. For instance, Ohemeng and Obuobisa-Darko (2020) found that ethical leadership and accountability mechanisms significantly improved performance in Ghanaian public institutions. Similarly, Danso and Addo (2022) reported that civil servants with high public service motivation (PSM) exhibited greater responsibility and lower absenteeism, directly linking intrinsic motivation to ethical behavior.

Despite these findings, there is limited research focusing specifically on the dimensions of work ethics within the Ghanaian Civil Service and their direct correlation with performance metrics. Existing studies tend to concentrate on macroeconomic or systemic explanations, neglecting the micro-level psychological and cultural drivers of employee behavior. For example, although compensation and working conditions are frequently studied, less attention is paid to how supervisory support, organizational justice, and performance feedback influence work ethic and output (Amponsah-Tawiah & Annor, 2021). Furthermore, the role of Ghana's socio-cultural context—such as the influence of communal values, respect for authority, and religious beliefs—on work ethics remains underexplored, despite its potential to shape attitudes toward work and public service.

This study aims to fill these gaps by offering a nuanced, empirically grounded examination of how work ethics influence performance in the Ghanaian Civil Service, taking into account both organizational and cultural variables.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure comprehensive and contextually rich findings. The research design was explanatory sequential, beginning with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative interviews to explain and deepen the quantitative results.

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of civil servants from selected ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) in Accra, Kumasi, and Tamale. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across various grades and functions. For the quantitative phase, 350 respondents were selected. For the qualitative phase, 25 participants were purposively chosen based on their roles, experience, and willingness to provide in-depth insights.

Data Collection

Quantitative data were gathered using a structured questionnaire divided into three sections:

- Work Ethics Scale (adapted from Hill & Petty, 2021) measuring diligence, reliability, and professionalism.
- Employee Performance Scale (based on Koopmans et al., 2014) assessing task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive behaviors.
- Organizational Factors Scale measuring leadership support, incentive systems, and organizational culture.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Interview guides explored perceptions of work ethics, performance challenges, and the influence of organizational culture and leadership.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) summarized the data. Inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and regression analysis, were used to examine relationships between work ethics and performance, and to test the influence of organizational factors.

Qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed thematically using NVivo 12. Codes were generated inductively and grouped into themes such as "leadership and ethical modeling," "reward and sanction systems," and "socio-cultural influences on work attitude."

Validity and Reliability

Cronbach's alpha was used to ensure internal consistency of the scales, with all values above 0.70. Triangulation through mixed methods enhanced validity, while member checking and expert review of instruments ensured reliability and contextual appropriateness.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participants provided informed consent, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study.

Analysis and Results

Quantitative Analysis:

Descriptive statistics were computed for all study variables. The Work Ethics Scale (WES) showed a mean score of 3.65 (SD = 0.78) on a 5-point scale, indicating a moderate level of work ethics among respondents. The Employee Performance Scale (EPS) had a mean of 3.82 (SD = 0.69), suggesting reasonably good performance, though with room for improvement.

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between work ethics and employee performance ($r^* = 0.72$, $p^* < 0.01$), indicating that higher work ethics scores were associated with better performance ratings.

To further examine the predictive power of work ethics on employee performance, a simple linear regression was conducted. Work ethics was entered as the independent variable, and employee performance as the dependent variable.

Regression Analysis Summary:

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.72	0.518	0.516	0.482

ANOVA Results:

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	48.32	1	48.32	207.84	.000
Residual	44.98	348	0.129		
Total	93.30	349			

Coefficients:

Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.224	0.183		6.69	.000
Work Ethics	0.712	0.049	0.72	14.42	.000

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 348) = 207.84$, $p^* < 0.001$, and explained 51.6% of the variance in employee performance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.516$). Work ethics was a significant positive predictor of employee performance ($\beta = 0.72$, $p^* < 0.001$).

Qualitative Analysis:

Thematic analysis of interview data revealed three key themes that help explain and contextualize the quantitative findings:

Theme 1: Leadership and Ethical Modeling

Participants consistently emphasized the crucial role of supervisory leadership in shaping work ethics. A principal administrative officer noted, "When our directors arrive early and show dedication, it motivates us to do same. But when leaders are absent or show favoritism, it kills morale." This suggests that ethical leadership serves as a powerful model for civil servants' conduct.

Theme 2: Reward and Recognition Systems

Many respondents highlighted the disconnect between performance and rewards. A senior budget analyst stated, "There's little difference in treatment between those who work hard and those who do the minimum. This makes it difficult to maintain high standards when excellence goes unrecognized." This indicates that weak performance incentives may undermine work ethics.

Theme 3: Resource Constraints and Work Environment

Participants frequently mentioned challenges related to working conditions. An HR officer explained, "How can we be expected to meet deadlines when we lack basic tools like functioning computers and reliable internet? These frustrations sometimes affect our attitude toward work." This suggests that inadequate resources may negatively impact both work ethics and performance.

The regression analysis quantitatively established the strong positive relationship between work ethics and performance, while the qualitative data provided rich contextual explanation for this relationship. The themes revealed that organizational factors—particularly leadership practices, reward systems, and working conditions—significantly influence the development and maintenance of work ethics, which in turn affects performance outcomes.

The mixed-methods approach thus provided both statistical evidence of the work ethics-performance relationship and deeper understanding of the organizational dynamics that shape this relationship in the Ghanaian Civil Service context.

3. Discussion of Results

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that work ethics serve as a critical determinant of employee performance within the Ghanaian Civil Service. The strong positive correlation ($r^* = 0.72$) and significant predictive relationship ($\beta = 0.72$, $p < .001$) between work ethics and performance quantitatively affirm that civil servants who exhibit higher levels of diligence, reliability, and professionalism tend to demonstrate superior task performance and overall effectiveness in their roles. This finding aligns with global research emphasizing the importance of ethical conduct in organizational success (Hill & Petty, 2021; Meriac et al., 2010) and specifically supports studies within African public administration contexts that link ethical behavior to improved service delivery (Ohemeng & Obuobisa-Darko, 2020).

The qualitative insights deepen our understanding of this relationship by revealing the organizational mechanisms through which work ethics are either cultivated or undermined. The theme of **Leadership and Ethical Modeling** strongly supports Social Cognitive Theory, demonstrating that civil servants learn and adopt ethical behaviors through observation of their supervisors. This finding reinforces Bandura's concept of triadic reciprocity, where environmental factors (leadership practices) directly influence personal factors (work ethics) and consequently affect behavior (performance). The emphasis on leadership integrity as a motivational factor particularly resonates within the Ghanaian cultural context, where respect for authority and hierarchical relationships remains prominent.

The theme of **Reward and Recognition Systems** highlights a significant challenge within the civil service structure. The perceived lack of connection between performance and rewards creates a demotivating environment that undermines work ethics. This finding supports Weber's theoretical concern about bureaucratic systems potentially deviating from ideal merit-based principles. When employees perceive that effort and excellence are not properly recognized, their intrinsic motivation—conceptualized in Public Service Motivation theory—may diminish, leading to reduced ethical commitment and performance.

The **Resource Constraints and Work Environment** theme further contextualizes the performance challenges within the practical realities of the Ghanaian Civil Service. Inadequate working conditions not only directly impede performance but also indirectly affect work ethics by creating frustrations that diminish morale and commitment. This finding suggests that work ethics do not exist in a vacuum but are significantly influenced by the organizational support system available to employees.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study demonstrates that work ethics are a fundamental driver of employee performance in the Ghanaian Civil Service. The research confirms that ethical conduct—manifested as diligence, reliability, and professionalism—significantly predicts performance outcomes. However, the findings also reveal that work ethics are not merely individual attributes but are shaped by organizational factors including leadership practices, reward systems, and working conditions. The strong quantitative relationship, enriched by qualitative insights, provides a comprehensive understanding of how personal, organizational, and environmental factors interact to influence performance in the public sector.

The study's findings have important implications for public sector reform in Ghana. They suggest that improving civil service performance requires not only technical capacity building but also focused attention on developing ethical leadership, strengthening performance management systems, and providing adequate working resources. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods provides both statistical evidence and contextual understanding of the work ethics-performance relationship, offering a solid foundation for evidence-based interventions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthen Ethical Leadership Development:** Implement comprehensive leadership training programs focused on ethical modeling, accountability, and supportive supervision for managers and directors within the civil service.
2. **Reform Performance Management Systems:** Develop and implement transparent, merit-based reward and recognition systems that clearly link performance to incentives, promotions, and career advancement opportunities.
3. **Improve Working Conditions:** Prioritize resource allocation to provide civil servants with adequate tools, equipment, and working environments necessary to perform their duties effectively and efficiently.
4. **Integrate Ethics into HR Practices:** Incorporate work ethics assessment into recruitment, performance appraisal, and promotion processes to reinforce the importance of ethical conduct throughout the employee lifecycle.

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