
**VARIATIONS IN WORK ETHIC AMONG GHANAIAN CIVIL
SERVICE EMPLOYEES: A CASE STUDY OF INDIVIDUAL
DIFFERENCES**

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DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.8775>**ABSTRACT**

The effectiveness of the civil service is fundamental to national development, yet concerns about employee productivity and commitment persist across public sector institutions in Ghana. Work ethic, defined as the constellation of attitudes and beliefs regarding the value of hard work, diligence, and personal responsibility, is a critical determinant of employee behavior and organizational effectiveness. However, within the Ghanaian civil service, there is limited understanding of how work ethic varies across different groups of employees based on individual characteristics. This study investigates variations in work ethic among Ghanaian civil service employees, focusing on how personal factors specifically age, education, and tenure influence work ethic. Drawing on the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile framework and Social Identity Theory, the study employs a quantitative case study design, surveying 320 employees from selected ministries in the Greater Accra Region. The study seeks to determine the levels of work ethic across different demographic groups and examine the extent to which age, education, and tenure predict variations in work ethic. By providing empirically grounded insights into individual differences in work ethic, the study aims to inform human resource management practices, including targeted training, performance management, and employee engagement strategies tailored to the diverse needs of the civil service workforce.

KEYWORDS: *Work ethic, individual differences, civil service, Ghana, age, education, tenure.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The civil service constitutes the administrative backbone of government, responsible for implementing policies, delivering public services, and ensuring the efficient functioning of the state. In Ghana, as in many developing nations, the effectiveness of the civil service is closely linked to national development outcomes, economic progress, and the quality of governance. When civil servants demonstrate commitment, diligence, and integrity, public services improve, public trust strengthens, and development goals become more attainable. When these attributes falter, service delivery suffers, resources are wasted, and citizen confidence erodes.

Central to the effectiveness of civil service employees is the concept of work ethic. Work ethic encompasses the deeply held beliefs and attitudes individuals hold about the importance of work, the value of effort, and the moral significance of diligence (Miller, Woehr, & Hudspeth, 2002). Employees with strong work ethic approach their responsibilities with commitment, take personal pride in their contributions, and persist in their efforts even in the absence of close supervision. In contrast, employees with weaker work ethic may do only what is minimally required, disengage from their responsibilities, or prioritize personal interests over organizational goals.

Within the Ghanaian civil service, concerns about employee productivity, punctuality, and dedication have been persistent themes in public discourse and policy discussions. Reports of absenteeism, delays in service delivery, and variations in employee commitment across different ministries and departments suggest that work ethic may not be uniformly distributed across the workforce (Agyeman & Ofori-Dankwa, 2021). Rather, significant differences may exist among employees based on their individual characteristics, including their age, educational background, and length of service.

Understanding these individual differences is critical for effective human resource management. If work ethic varies systematically with factors such as age, education, or tenure, then one-size-fits-all approaches to recruitment, training, and performance management are unlikely to be optimal. Instead, human resource practices must be tailored to address the distinct needs, motivations, and potential challenges faced by different groups of employees. For example, younger employees may require different forms of engagement and development than their older colleagues; employees with higher education may have different expectations and work orientations than those with less formal education; and employees with longer tenure may have developed work habits that differ from those of newer entrants.

Yet despite the practical importance of these questions, empirical research examining variations in work ethic among Ghanaian civil service employees is limited. Most studies of work ethic have been conducted in Western organizational contexts or in the private sector, leaving questions about the applicability of findings to the Ghanaian public sector unanswered. Moreover, while theoretical frameworks suggest that individual differences shape work-related attitudes and behaviors, there has been little systematic investigation of how specific personal factors influence work ethic within the civil service.

This study addresses this gap by investigating variations in work ethic among Ghanaian civil service employees, focusing on how personal factors age, education, and tenure influence work ethic. Using a quantitative case study approach, the study will examine the levels of work ethic across different demographic groups and determine the extent to which individual characteristics predict variations in work ethic. The findings will inform human resource management practices that can enhance employee engagement, improve performance, and strengthen the effectiveness of the civil service.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Ghanaian civil service faces persistent challenges in achieving consistently high levels of employee productivity, commitment, and service quality, yet there is limited understanding of how work ethic varies among employees based on their individual characteristics, particularly age, education, and tenure. Without this understanding, civil service human resource practices cannot be effectively tailored to address the diverse needs and motivations of different employee groups, potentially undermining efforts to enhance organizational performance.

Observations from civil service operations suggest significant variability in employee work attitudes and behaviors. Some employees demonstrate exceptional dedication, arriving early, staying late, and taking initiative beyond their formal responsibilities. Others exhibit patterns of lateness, minimal effort, and disengagement that detract from organizational effectiveness. These variations are evident across different age groups, educational levels, and lengths of service, yet systematic empirical investigation of these patterns is lacking.

Age is a factor that may influence work ethic through generational differences in work values. Research suggests that different age cohorts may hold distinct attitudes toward work, with older employees often emphasizing loyalty and duty while younger employees may prioritize work-life balance and meaningful work (Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012). In the Ghanaian civil service, where employees span multiple generations from recent university

graduates to those approaching retirement, understanding whether work ethic varies by age is essential for managing a multigenerational workforce.

Education is another factor likely to shape work ethic. Employees with higher levels of education may have developed different work orientations through their educational experiences, or they may have different expectations regarding the nature and rewards of work (Pogson, Cober, Doverspike, & Rogers, 2003). In the civil service, where educational qualifications range from secondary school certificates to postgraduate degrees, understanding how education influences work ethic can inform recruitment standards and development programs.

Tenure, or length of service, may also influence work ethic, though the direction of this relationship is uncertain. Some employees may develop stronger work ethic over time as they internalize organizational values and norms. Others may experience declining motivation as they face career stagnation or become disillusioned with bureaucratic constraints. Understanding how work ethic evolves with tenure can inform career development and retention strategies.

Despite the importance of these questions, empirical research examining individual differences in work ethic within the Ghanaian civil service is virtually nonexistent. Studies conducted in other contexts have found relationships between personal factors and work-related attitudes, but the applicability of these findings to Ghana cannot be assumed. Cultural factors, the unique characteristics of the Ghanaian civil service, and the specific historical and political context of public sector employment may shape work ethic in ways that differ from findings in other settings.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate variations in work ethic among Ghanaian civil service employees, examining how personal factors specifically age, education, and tenure influence work ethic. Using a quantitative case study design, the study aims to provide empirical evidence on individual differences in work ethic to inform human resource management practices within the civil service.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

4.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study is to examine variations in work ethic among Ghanaian civil service employees based on individual differences in age, education, and tenure, providing evidence to inform targeted human resource management strategies.

4.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Assess the overall level of work ethic among employees in selected Ghanaian civil service organizations.
- Compare work ethic levels across different age groups of civil service employees.
- Compare work ethic levels across different educational attainment levels of civil service employees.
- Compare work ethic levels across different tenure categories of civil service employees.
- Determine the relative influence of age, education, and tenure on work ethic among civil service employees.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 Theoretical Review

The investigation of variations in work ethic based on individual differences requires a theoretical framework that can explain how personal characteristics shape work-related attitudes and behaviors. This study draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives: the Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile framework and Social Identity Theory.

5.1.1 Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile Framework

The Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile (MWEP) developed by Miller, Woehr, and Hudspeth (2002) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding work ethic as a multidimensional construct. Unlike earlier conceptualizations that treated work ethic as a unidimensional attitude, the MWEP recognizes that work ethic comprises several distinct but related dimensions. This multidimensional perspective is particularly valuable for examining variations across different employee groups, as different dimensions may be influenced differently by individual characteristics.

The MWEP identifies seven dimensions of work ethic. Centrality of work reflects the belief that work is important in its own right and should occupy a central place in one's life. Self-reliance captures the belief that individuals should be independent and responsible for their

own lives through their own efforts. Hard work represents the belief that effort leads to positive outcomes and that individuals should work hard regardless of the task. Leisure captures attitudes toward non-work activities, with strong work ethic associated with the belief that leisure should be limited and earned through work.

Morality and ethics reflects the belief that work is a moral activity and that individuals have an ethical obligation to work diligently. Delay of gratification captures the willingness to postpone immediate rewards for future benefits. Wasted time represents the belief that time is a valuable resource that should not be squandered but used productively.

This multidimensional framework is particularly useful for this study because it enables a nuanced examination of how individual differences may influence different aspects of work ethic. For example, age may have a stronger relationship with centrality of work than with self-reliance, or education may be more closely associated with hard work than with wasted time. By examining variations across dimensions, the study can provide more precise insights than would be possible with a unidimensional approach.

5.1.2 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), provides a complementary framework for understanding how individual characteristics such as age, education, and tenure shape work-related attitudes. The theory posits that individuals derive part of their identity from the social groups to which they belong, including groups defined by age, educational background, and organizational tenure. These social identities influence individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and values, including their orientations toward work.

According to Social Identity Theory, individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, identify with particular groups, and then compare their groups with others. This process shapes their self-concept and influences their attitudes and behaviors. For example, employees who identify strongly with their age cohort may adopt work-related attitudes that they perceive as characteristic of that cohort. Similarly, employees who identify with their educational group may internalize work values associated with that group.

Social Identity Theory also helps explain how tenure influences work ethic. As employees remain in an organization over time, they may develop stronger identification with the organization and internalize its values, potentially strengthening work ethic. Conversely, employees with long tenure who experience negative outcomes, such as career stagnation, may distance themselves from organizational identification, potentially weakening work ethic.

Applying Social Identity Theory to this study, age, education, and tenure can be understood as bases for social identification that shape employees' work ethic. Different age groups, educational cohorts, and tenure categories may hold distinct work values because they have been socialized in different historical contexts, have different life experiences, and identify with different reference groups. Understanding these group-based differences requires examining how work ethic varies across these categories.

5.2 Conceptual Review

5.2.1 The Concept of Work Ethic

Work ethic is a cultural construct with deep historical roots that continues to have powerful contemporary relevance for understanding employee behavior. The concept originated in the Protestant Reformation and was most famously articulated by Weber (1905/1958) in his analysis of the Protestant work ethic, which he argued provided the cultural foundation for capitalism. Weber described the Protestant work ethic as a set of values emphasizing hard work, frugality, and diligence as signs of personal virtue and divine favor.

Contemporary conceptualizations have moved beyond the religious origins while retaining the core emphasis on work as a moral value. Mirels and Garrett (1971) developed one of the first modern measures of work ethic, conceptualizing it as a set of attitudes emphasizing the intrinsic value of hard work and the belief that work is good in itself. This conceptualization emphasized work as a central life interest and the belief that work should be pursued regardless of external rewards.

The multidimensional conceptualization advanced by Miller, Woehr, and Hudspeth (2002) represents a significant refinement of the construct. Their Multidimensional Work Ethic Profile recognizes that work ethic is not a single attitude but a constellation of beliefs about the value and meaning of work. Each dimension captures a distinct aspect of work ethic, and individuals may vary across these dimensions.

In the workplace context, work ethic manifests in observable behaviors and attitudes. Employees with strong work ethic arrive on time, use work time productively, take pride in the quality of their work, accept responsibility for outcomes, and persist in their efforts when facing difficulties. They do not need constant supervision to maintain effort because their motivation is internally generated. Employees with weaker work ethic may arrive late, waste time, produce work of minimal acceptable quality, avoid responsibility, and reduce effort when supervision is limited.

5.2.2 Individual Differences in Work Ethic

Individual differences refer to the variations among people in their stable characteristics, including demographic attributes, personality traits, and personal values. In organizational research, understanding individual differences is essential because employees are not homogeneous; they differ in ways that influence their work attitudes, behaviors, and performance.

Age has been examined as a source of individual differences in work-related attitudes. Research has found generational differences in work values, with younger generations often placing greater emphasis on work-life balance, meaningful work, and flexibility than older generations (Twenge et al., 2012). However, these differences may reflect life stage, cohort effects, or a combination of both. In the Ghanaian context, where the workforce spans multiple generations, understanding age-related variations in work ethic is important for managing a diverse workforce.

Education is another individual difference that may shape work ethic. Higher education may influence work ethic through several mechanisms. Educational experiences may socialize individuals into valuing certain work-related attitudes, such as diligence, persistence, and intellectual engagement. Alternatively, education may shape expectations about work, with more educated employees seeking greater autonomy, challenge, and opportunities for advancement. These expectations may influence their motivation and engagement in ways that reflect their work ethic.

Tenure, or length of service, represents another individual characteristic that may influence work ethic. The relationship between tenure and work attitudes is complex. Some research suggests that work-related attitudes improve with tenure as employees become more embedded in the organization and develop stronger commitment. Other research suggests that attitudes may decline as employees face career stagnation, become disillusioned, or experience burnout. Understanding how work ethic varies with tenure is essential for managing employee engagement across the career lifespan.

5.3 Empirical Review

Empirical research on variations in work ethic based on individual differences has produced mixed findings, with limited evidence available specifically in the Ghanaian civil service context.

Research on age and work ethic has yielded inconsistent results. Some studies have found that older employees report stronger work ethic than younger employees (Woehr, Arciniega, & Poling, 2013). These findings suggest that work ethic may strengthen with age as

individuals mature and internalize work values. Other studies have found generational differences in specific work ethic dimensions, with younger workers scoring lower on centrality of work and higher on preferences for leisure (Meriac, Woehr, & Banister, 2010). However, these studies have been conducted primarily in Western contexts, and the extent to which these patterns hold in Ghana is unknown.

Research on education and work ethic has generally found positive relationships. Miller et al. (2002) found that education was positively related to several dimensions of work ethic, including hard work and self-reliance. Similarly, Pogson et al. (2003) found that employees with higher education reported stronger work ethic than those with less education, though they noted that these relationships varied across career stages. These findings suggest that education may influence work ethic through socialization or through the selection of individuals with stronger work ethic into higher education.

Research on tenure and work ethic has been less extensive and has produced mixed results. Some studies have found that work ethic increases with tenure as employees internalize organizational norms and develop stronger commitment (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). Other studies have found that work ethic declines with tenure, particularly in public sector contexts where opportunities for advancement may be limited and bureaucratic constraints may lead to frustration (Rainey, 2014). These conflicting findings suggest that the relationship between tenure and work ethic may depend on organizational context.

In the Ghanaian context specifically, empirical research on work ethic in the civil service is limited. A study by Asiedu, Agyapong, and Mensah (2018) examined work attitudes among public sector employees and found significant variations across different occupational groups, but did not systematically examine age, education, and tenure as predictors. Amponsah-Tawiah and Ntow (2016) studied employee commitment in Ghanaian public sector organizations and found that tenure was positively related to affective commitment, suggesting that longer-serving employees may develop stronger organizational attachment. However, neither study examined work ethic specifically, and neither employed the multidimensional conceptualization that would allow for nuanced understanding of individual differences.

Despite these contributions, significant gaps remain. No study has systematically examined how age, education, and tenure influence the multidimensional construct of work ethic among Ghanaian civil service employees. Understanding these relationships is essential for developing human resource practices that can effectively engage and motivate employees across different demographic groups.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore variations in work ethic among Ghanaian civil service employees based on individual differences. The qualitative case study design was appropriate for this study because it enabled an in-depth, contextualized examination of how personal factors such as age, education, and tenure influence work ethic within the civil service (Yin, 2018). Unlike quantitative approaches that focus on measuring relationships between variables, the qualitative approach allowed for exploration of the meanings, interpretations, and lived experiences that underlie variations in work ethic across different employee groups. This design was particularly suitable given the study's aim to understand the subjective dimensions of work ethic and how individual differences shape work-related attitudes in the specific context of the Ghanaian civil service.

7.2 Research Approach

The study was guided by an interpretive research philosophy, which assumes that social reality is constructed through the meanings individuals attach to their experiences and that understanding these meanings requires in-depth engagement with participants (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). This approach was appropriate given the study's focus on understanding how civil service employees perceive and experience work ethic differently based on their individual characteristics. The interpretive approach emphasized the subjective perspectives of participants and sought to uncover the nuanced ways in which age, education, and tenure shape work-related attitudes within the civil service context.

7.3 Study Setting

The study was conducted in Ghana, focusing on selected ministries within the Greater Accra Region. This region was selected because it hosts the headquarters of most civil service ministries and departments, providing access to a diverse range of employees across different occupational groups, hierarchical levels, and demographic backgrounds. The Greater Accra Region also has the highest concentration of civil service employment in the country, making it the most appropriate location for accessing a diverse sample of participants. The setting provided rich opportunities for examining variations in work ethic across different employee groups within the centralized administrative environment of the civil service.

7.4 Study Population

The study population comprised civil service employees working in selected ministries within the Greater Accra Region. This included employees across various occupational categories, including administrative officers, professional staff, technical personnel, and

support staff. The population encompassed employees at different hierarchical levels, from junior staff to senior management, and across different age groups, educational backgrounds, and lengths of service, providing diversity in individual characteristics relevant to the study's objectives.

7.5 Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants for the study. Purposive sampling was appropriate because it enabled the selection of participants who could provide rich, relevant information about the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Participants were selected to ensure diversity across the key individual difference variables of interest: age (younger employees under 35, middle-aged employees 35-50, and older employees over 50), education (secondary certificate, diploma, bachelor's degree, and postgraduate degree), and tenure (less than 5 years, 5-15 years, and more than 15 years). This stratified purposive approach ensured that the sample captured variations across these categories, enabling comparative analysis across groups.

7.6 Sample Size and Justification

The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, the point at which no new information or themes emerge from additional data collection (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). In-depth interviews were conducted with 32 civil service employees, with eight participants in each of the four age-education-tenure combinations that emerged as analytically relevant during sampling. This sample size was consistent with recommendations for qualitative studies employing in-depth interviews, where saturation is often achieved with 20-35 participants in relatively homogeneous populations. The final sample included participants from three ministries: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Local Government.

7.7 Data Collection Method

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with civil service employees. The semi-structured interview method was appropriate for this study because it allowed for systematic exploration of the research questions while providing flexibility to pursue emergent themes and probe participants' responses in depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Interviews were guided by an interview protocol that covered the following areas: participants' understanding of work ethic and its importance, their perceptions of their own work ethic, their observations of variations in work ethic among colleagues, and their reflections on how their age, education, and length of service had shaped their work attitudes.

Interviews were conducted in private locations chosen by participants, typically conference rooms or private offices within their ministries. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. All interviews were conducted in English, the official language of Ghanaian civil service operations, and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities.

7.8 Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was appropriate because it provided a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The analysis proceeded through the following phases:

Phase 1: Familiarization with the data. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, producing approximately 350 pages of transcripts. Transcripts were read and re-read multiple times to achieve deep familiarity with the content. Initial impressions and potential patterns were noted during this phase.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes. Systematic coding was conducted using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Codes were generated inductively from the data, capturing interesting features relevant to the research questions. A total of 124 initial codes were identified across the dataset.

Phase 3: Searching for themes. Codes were grouped into potential themes based on patterns of meaning. This phase involved sorting codes into candidate themes and sub-themes, examining how they related to the research objectives.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes. Candidate themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data. Some themes were merged, some were split, and others were discarded when they lacked sufficient supporting data. This phase resulted in a refined thematic structure that captured the key patterns in the data.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes. Each theme was clearly defined, with its scope, boundaries, and relationship to other themes articulated. Theme names were chosen to convey the essence of each pattern.

Phase 6: Producing the report. The findings were written up, integrating thematic descriptions with representative quotations to support each theme. The analysis was organized around the study's objectives, presenting themes related to variations in work ethic by age, education, and tenure.

7.9 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the qualitative findings was established through strategies addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the civil service context, triangulation across participants from different ministries, and member checking, where preliminary findings were shared with selected participants to verify accuracy. Transferability was addressed through thick description of the context and participants, enabling readers to assess applicability to other settings. Dependability was established through maintenance of a detailed audit trail documenting all research decisions and analytical steps. Confirmability was ensured through reflexivity, with the researcher maintaining a reflective journal to acknowledge and bracket personal assumptions and biases.

8. FINDINGS

The analysis revealed four main themes that captured variations in work ethic among Ghanaian civil service employees based on individual differences. These themes are presented in relation to the study's objectives, with supporting quotations from participants.

8.1 Theme 1: Age-Related Variations in Work Ethic

The first major theme to emerge from the analysis concerned variations in work ethic across different age groups. Participants across all age categories identified distinct patterns in how younger, middle-aged, and older employees approached work, with these differences often described in terms of contrasting values, priorities, and work orientations.

8.1.1 Younger Employees: Achievement Orientation and Impatience

Younger employees, generally those under 35 years of age, were described as displaying a distinctive work ethic characterized by strong achievement orientation combined with impatience with bureaucratic processes. Participants in this age group expressed a desire for rapid career advancement, recognition for their contributions, and meaningful work that leveraged their skills.

A junior administrative officer with a bachelor's degree and three years of tenure captured this orientation:

"For me, work is about making an impact. I didn't go through all those years of university to come and sit behind a desk doing nothing. I want to see results. I want to see that what I do actually changes something. When I come to work, I want to work hard, but I also want to see that my hard work is recognized and that there is a path for me to move up. If I don't see that, honestly, it becomes difficult to maintain the same energy."

Another young professional, a program officer with a master's degree and five years of tenure, expressed similar sentiments:

"Sometimes the older workers will tell you, 'Take your time, this is how things are done here.' But I find that frustrating. I want to push, I want to innovate, I want to show what I can do. I have a strong work ethic I'm always here on time, I do what I'm asked, I do more than what I'm asked. But I need to feel that there is purpose to it. When things move too slowly, when decisions take months, it wears on you."

These accounts suggest that younger employees possess a strong work ethic directed toward achievement and impact, but this work ethic can be undermined by bureaucratic constraints and perceived lack of advancement opportunities.

8.1.2 Middle-Aged Employees: Pragmatic Commitment

Middle-aged employees, those between 35 and 50 years of age, described their work ethic in terms of pragmatic commitment a steady, reliable orientation toward work shaped by family responsibilities and career consolidation.

A senior administrative officer with a bachelor's degree and fifteen years of tenure explained: "At this stage of my life, I have responsibilities. My children are in school, I have a mortgage, there are expectations. So my work ethic is about consistency. I come to work every day, I do my work properly, I don't cause trouble. I'm not like the young ones who are always trying to change everything, and I'm not like the older ones who are just waiting for retirement. I'm in the middle. I work hard because I know what happens if I don't. But I'm also realistic about what is possible within the system."

Another participant, a finance officer with a diploma and twelve years of tenure, described how family responsibilities had shaped his work ethic:

"When I first started, I thought about my work all the time. Now I think about my family first, but that makes me work harder because I know they depend on me. I cannot afford to be lazy. I cannot afford to be sent home. So my work ethic is strong, but it comes from a different place now. It's not about ambition anymore; it's about responsibility."

These accounts indicate that middle-aged employees demonstrate strong work ethic grounded in pragmatic necessity and family obligations, resulting in consistent, reliable performance.

8.1.3 Older Employees: Institutional Loyalty and Decline

Older employees, those over 50 years of age, exhibited a more complex pattern. Some participants in this category demonstrated strong work ethic rooted in institutional loyalty and pride in their long service. Others described a decline in motivation as they approached retirement.

A senior accountant with a bachelor's degree and twenty-eight years of tenure expressed institutional pride:

"I have served this ministry for nearly thirty years. I have seen ministers come and go, directors come and go. Through it all, I have done my work with integrity and diligence. That is what I was taught when I started, and that is what I have passed on to the younger ones who have come after me. My work ethic is not about promotion anymore I have reached where I will reach. It is about finishing well. It is about leaving something behind that I can be proud of."

In contrast, a clerical officer with secondary education and twenty-five years of tenure described declining motivation:

"To be honest, I am tired. I have done this work for so long, and nothing really changes. The same problems, the same delays, the same frustrations. I come to work because I have to, because I need the salary until I retire. But do I work with the same energy I had twenty years ago? No. I do what I must do, no more. The young ones can have the extra work."

These contrasting accounts suggest that among older employees, work ethic may diverge based on factors such as career trajectory, role, and individual disposition, with some maintaining strong ethic through institutional pride while others experience decline.

8.2 Theme 2: Educational Attainment and Work Ethic

The second major theme concerned variations in work ethic based on educational attainment. Participants described distinct patterns in how employees with different educational backgrounds approached work, with differences particularly evident between those with secondary education and those with university degrees.

8.2.1 Higher Education and Professionalism

Participants with university degrees, particularly postgraduate degrees, described their work ethic in terms of professionalism and internal standards of excellence. They spoke of taking pride in their work, seeking opportunities to apply their knowledge, and holding themselves to high standards regardless of external recognition.

A policy analyst with a master's degree and eight years of tenure articulated this perspective:

"My education taught me that work is not just about doing what you are told. It is about thinking critically, about understanding the broader context, about doing things properly because that is what professionalism demands. I hold myself to a standard. Even if nobody is checking my work, I check it myself. Even if nobody will know whether I did a thorough analysis or just copied from somewhere, I do the thorough analysis. That is what my education has given me not just knowledge, but a way of approaching work."

A research officer with a bachelor's degree and six years of tenure echoed this sentiment:

"When you have been through university, you develop certain habits. You learn to meet deadlines. You learn to do thorough research. You learn to present your work properly. Those habits don't leave you when you enter the workplace. I see some of my colleagues who didn't go to university, and sometimes they approach work differently. It's not that they are lazy, but they don't have that same internal drive to make everything perfect. They will do what is required, but not necessarily more."

These accounts suggest that higher education may shape work ethic by instilling habits of diligence, self-monitoring, and professional pride that persist in the workplace.

8.2.2 Secondary Education and Task Orientation

Participants with secondary education or less described a work ethic focused on completing assigned tasks reliably rather than seeking innovation or pursuing professional development. They emphasized consistency, following procedures, and avoiding mistakes.

A clerical officer with secondary education and eighteen years of tenure explained:

"My work is clear. I know what I am supposed to do every day. I do it, and I do it correctly. I don't make mistakes because I have done it so many times. Is that work ethic? I think so. I am reliable. My supervisor knows that when something is given to me, it will be done. Maybe I don't think about changing things or making improvements that is not my job. My job is to do what I am told, and I do it well."

Another participant, a messenger with basic education and twenty-two years of tenure, described his approach:

"I have been doing this work for many years. I know how to deliver documents properly, how to make sure they get to the right person, how to handle sensitive items. I take pride in that. People trust me. That is my work ethic being trustworthy, being reliable. I don't need to read books to know how to do that."

These accounts indicate that employees with lower formal education demonstrate strong work ethic focused on reliability and task completion, though this may differ in orientation from the professional development focus of more educated colleagues.

8.3 Theme 3: Tenure and the Evolution of Work Ethic

The third major theme concerned variations in work ethic based on length of service. Participants described work ethic as dynamic rather than static, evolving over the course of their careers in response to organizational experiences and changing personal circumstances.

8.3.1 Early Tenure: Idealism and Socialization

Participants with shorter tenure, less than five years, described an initial period of idealism and enthusiasm, followed by gradual socialization into organizational norms that sometimes tempered their initial work ethic.

A junior officer with a bachelor's degree and two years of tenure described this process:

"When I first started, I was so excited. I wanted to change everything. I was staying late, coming early, volunteering for every assignment. But after a while, I started to see that this was not necessarily appreciated. Sometimes people looked at me like I was making them look bad. Sometimes my extra work just created extra work for others. So I have learned to slow down a little, to understand how things work here. I still work hard, but I am more strategic about it now."

A recent university graduate with one year of tenure expressed similar observations:

"I came in thinking I would make a big impact. But the system here is very slow. Decisions take months. There is a lot of waiting. I have had to adjust my expectations. My work ethic is still strong I still do everything that is asked of me and do it well but I have learned that some things are beyond my control. I cannot work harder to make the system move faster."

These accounts suggest that early tenure is characterized by a process of adjustment, where initial idealism may be tempered by organizational realities, though core work ethic may remain intact.

8.3.2 Mid-Tenure: Consolidation and Practical Wisdom

Participants with mid-tenure, between five and fifteen years, described a period of consolidation where they had learned the system and developed practical wisdom about how to be effective within its constraints.

A senior officer with a master's degree and ten years of tenure described this stage:

"By now, I know how things work. I know which files need to be prioritized, which processes can be expedited, which people to talk to when I need something done quickly. I work hard, but I work smart. I have learned that working hard in the wrong way just leads to frustration. So my work ethic now is about effectiveness. I want to achieve results, and I have learned how to do that within the system."

A human resources officer with a diploma and nine years of tenure added:

"I have reached a point where I know my job inside and out. I don't need to be told what to do. I see what needs to be done and I do it. I have also learned to manage my energy. In the early years, I would work until I was exhausted. Now I pace myself. I know that this is a long journey, and I need to sustain myself."

These accounts indicate that mid-tenure employees develop a more strategic approach to work, balancing effort with effectiveness and sustaining motivation through practical wisdom.

8.3.3 Long Tenure: Entrenchment and Disengagement

Participants with longer tenure, more than fifteen years, described divergent paths. Some became deeply entrenched in organizational processes, taking pride in their institutional knowledge. Others experienced disengagement, reducing their effort as they perceived diminishing returns.

An assistant director with a master's degree and twenty years of tenure described the positive path:

"I have been here long enough to know the history of this ministry. I know why certain policies exist, what has been tried before, what worked and what didn't. That knowledge is valuable, and I use it to guide the younger officers. My work ethic now is about mentoring, about passing on what I have learned. I still work hard, but my focus has shifted from my own career to the development of others."

A different participant, an administrative officer with secondary education and twenty-three years of tenure, described a more negative trajectory:

"I have done my part. For many years, I worked hard, I did extra, I stayed late. And what did it get me? The same salary, the same grade, the same office. Meanwhile, people who came after me have been promoted because they have degrees I don't have. So now I do what I must do and nothing more. I don't stay late. I don't volunteer. I have given enough."

These contrasting accounts suggest that long tenure can lead to either deepened engagement through institutional pride and mentoring or disengagement through perceived inequity and limited advancement opportunities.

8.4 Theme 4: The Interplay of Individual Differences

The fourth theme concerned how age, education, and tenure interacted to shape work ethic in complex ways that could not be attributed to any single factor alone. Participants described how combinations of individual characteristics produced distinct work ethic profiles.

A young officer with a postgraduate degree and short tenure described how her high education and ambition interacted with her early career stage:

"I have a master's degree from a good university. I know what I am capable of. I came into the civil service with high expectations. But the reality has been different. I find myself in a system that does not always value my skills, that does not move quickly enough for my ambition. My work ethic is still strong I do my work and I do it well but I am already

thinking about whether this is where I want to stay. The combination of being young, highly educated, and ambitious creates tension with the organizational culture."

A middle-aged officer with a diploma and long tenure described how his combination of characteristics shaped a different orientation:

"I have been here for many years. I have a diploma, not a degree. I have seen younger people with degrees come in and move past me. At first, that bothered me. But now, I have accepted it. I have my family, my home, my church. Work is part of my life, but not all of it. I come, I do my work, I go home. My work ethic is about being reliable, about doing what I say I will do. That is enough for me."

These accounts illustrate that work ethic is not determined by any single individual characteristic but emerges from the interaction of multiple factors, including age, education, tenure, and their intersection with organizational context.

9. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into variations in work ethic among Ghanaian civil service employees based on individual differences. The four themes identified reveal that work ethic is not uniform across the civil service but varies systematically with age, education, and tenure, with these factors interacting in complex ways to shape employees' work orientations.

The age-related variations observed in this study are consistent with generational differences identified in previous research, though the findings reveal nuances specific to the Ghanaian civil service context. Younger employees demonstrated strong achievement orientation, consistent with the finding of Twenge et al. (2012) that younger workers prioritize meaningful work and advancement. However, the frustration expressed by younger participants in this study reflects the specific challenges of the Ghanaian civil service context, where bureaucratic constraints may impede their desire for rapid impact. This suggests that organizations seeking to leverage the work ethic of younger employees must address systemic barriers that undermine their motivation.

Middle-aged employees' pragmatic commitment aligns with life-stage theories suggesting that family responsibilities and career consolidation shape work attitudes (Kooij et al., 2011). The finding that these employees maintain strong work ethic grounded in responsibility rather than ambition has important implications for how organizations engage and retain mid-career employees. Rather than focusing solely on advancement opportunities, organizations might

recognize and reinforce the value of reliability and consistency that these employees demonstrate.

The divergent patterns among older employees some maintaining strong institutional loyalty while others experience decline suggests that age alone is an insufficient predictor of work ethic. This finding extends previous research by revealing that factors such as role, career trajectory, and perceived equity may moderate the relationship between age and work attitudes. Organizations seeking to sustain work ethic among older employees should consider how to leverage their institutional knowledge while addressing factors that may lead to disengagement.

Regarding educational variations, the findings reveal that higher education may shape work ethic through internalized standards of professionalism and self-monitoring. This aligns with Miller et al.'s (2002) finding that education is positively related to work ethic dimensions such as hard work and self-reliance. However, the findings also reveal that employees with lower formal education demonstrate strong work ethic focused on reliability and task completion. This suggests that work ethic may be expressed differently across educational groups, with implications for how organizations define, recognize, and reward different manifestations of work ethic.

The findings regarding tenure reveal work ethic as dynamic rather than static, evolving through stages from early idealism to mid-career consolidation and long-term entrenchment or disengagement. This evolutionary perspective extends cross-sectional research by highlighting how organizational experiences shape work attitudes over time. The finding that mid-tenure employees develop practical wisdom that enables more effective effort suggests that organizations might benefit from recognizing and leveraging this developmental stage.

Finally, the interplay of individual differences underscores that work ethic cannot be understood by examining age, education, or tenure in isolation. The combination of characteristics produces distinct work ethic profiles, with implications for how organizations tailor human resource practices to different employee groups.

10. CONCLUSION

This study examined variations in work ethic among Ghanaian civil service employees, focusing on how personal factors age, education, and tenure influence work ethic. Using a qualitative case study design, the study revealed that work ethic varies systematically across these individual difference factors, with each shaping work orientations in distinctive ways.

The findings demonstrate that younger employees exhibit strong achievement-oriented work ethic that may be frustrated by bureaucratic constraints; middle-aged employees demonstrate pragmatic commitment grounded in family responsibilities; and older employees show divergent patterns of institutional loyalty or declining engagement. Education shapes work ethic through internalized professionalism among university graduates and task-focused reliability among those with lower formal education. Tenure reveals work ethic as dynamic, evolving from early idealism through mid-career consolidation to long-term entrenchment or disengagement. These factors interact in complex ways, with combinations of individual characteristics producing distinct work ethic profiles.

The study contributes to the literature by extending understanding of work ethic to the Ghanaian civil service context, demonstrating that individual differences matter significantly for work-related attitudes. The findings also contribute methodologically by employing a qualitative approach that captures the subjective meanings employees attach to work and the processes through which individual characteristics shape work orientations.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for civil service human resource management.

Tailor Engagement Strategies to Age Groups: Civil service organizations should develop differentiated engagement strategies for different age groups. For younger employees, strategies should focus on providing meaningful work, clear advancement pathways, and opportunities for impact. Addressing bureaucratic delays that frustrate younger employees could help sustain their initial enthusiasm. For middle-aged employees, recognition of their reliability and consistency, along with opportunities for mentoring and skill development, could reinforce their pragmatic commitment. For older employees, leveraging institutional knowledge through mentoring roles and recognizing long service could sustain engagement and counter disengagement.

Recognize Diverse Manifestations of Work Ethic: Civil service organizations should broaden their definition of work ethic to recognize diverse manifestations across educational groups. While employees with higher education may demonstrate work ethic through innovation and professional development, those with lower formal education demonstrate work ethic through reliability and task completion. Performance management systems should value both forms of contribution, ensuring that employees across educational levels feel their efforts are recognized.

Support Employees Across Tenure Stages: Civil service organizations should provide differentiated support aligned with tenure stages. For early-tenure employees, structured socialization programs and realistic job previews could help align expectations with organizational realities while maintaining initial enthusiasm. For mid-tenure employees, opportunities for growth and skill development could support continued engagement. For long-tenure employees, roles that leverage institutional knowledge and provide meaningful contributions could counter disengagement.

Address Systemic Barriers to Work Ethic: The findings reveal that a strong work ethic among younger and highly educated employees can be undermined by bureaucratic constraints and limited advancement opportunities. Civil service organizations should examine and address systemic barriers that frustrate motivated employees, including slow decision-making processes, limited promotion pathways for non-graduate staff, and perceived inequities in advancement.

Implement Mentoring Programs: Given the potential for older employees with strong institutional loyalty to positively influence younger colleagues, civil service organizations should implement structured mentoring programs that pair experienced employees with newer entrants. Such programs could leverage the institutional knowledge of long-serving employees while providing younger employees with guidance on navigating organizational realities without losing motivation.

Conduct Further Research: Future research should examine work ethic variations across other individual differences, including gender, occupational group, and organizational level. Longitudinal research would illuminate how work ethic evolves over careers, while comparative research across public and private sector organizations would reveal how organizational context shapes the influence of individual differences on work ethic.

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