
EVALUATING ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES THAT ENHANCE WORK ETHIC IN GHANA: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

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Article Received: 18 May 2026, Article Revised: 6 June 2026, Published on: 26 June 2026

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Doi: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.3018>

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study employed focus group methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of organizational strategies, specifically human resource policies, training modules, and leadership styles in shaping work ethic and employee commitment within Ghanaian organizations. Drawing upon Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and Ubuntu Philosophy (Gyekye, 1997), the study conducted six focus group sessions with 42 participants drawn from public sector, private sector, and multinational organizational contexts across Accra, Tema, and Kumasi. Focus group discussions were guided by open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' lived experiences with HR policies (performance management systems, attendance tracking, reward structures), training interventions (work ethic modules, orientation programmes, values-based training), and leadership styles (autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transformational) as these intersected with their sense of commitment and motivation to work diligently. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Six overarching themes emerged from the data: the implementation gap as a pervasive feature of HR policy experience; transactional compliance as the dominant response to formal performance systems; the differential effectiveness of training as shaped by perceived authenticity; the centrality of leadership accessibility and relational presence in shaping commitment; the alienating effects of bureaucratic impersonality on employee work ethic; and cultural misfit between Western HR models and Ghanaian communal work expectations. Participants' narratives revealed a profound disconnect between the stated intentions of organizational strategies and the lived experiences of Ghanaian employees, with policies and programmes frequently experienced as performative, disconnected from daily work realities, and poorly adapted to Ghanaian

cultural contexts of relational work orientation. The study contributes to the understanding of organizational behaviour in Ghana by identifying specific conditions under which HR strategies, training modules, and leadership styles succeed or fail to enhance work ethic, offering evidence-based recommendations for policy design and implementation practice.

KEYWORDS: *Work ethic, HR policies, leadership styles, training effectiveness, employee commitment, Ghana, focus groups, Ubuntu, Social Constructionism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations across Ghana invest substantial resources in strategies designed to enhance work ethic and employee commitment. Human resource departments develop performance management policies, attendance tracking systems, and reward structures intended to motivate diligent work behaviour. Training modules on work ethic, professionalism, and organizational values are delivered to new hires and existing employees. Leadership development programmes aim to cultivate management styles that inspire commitment and discretionary effort (Dartey-Baah & Amoako, 2021). Yet despite these investments, managers in Ghanaian organizations frequently express frustration with what they perceive as persistent gaps between the work ethic strategies they implement and the work behaviour they observe. Employees arrive late, complete minimum requirements, fail to exercise initiative, and appear unmoved by the policies and programmes designed to motivate them (Amankwah-Amoah, Danso, & Adomako, 2021). The question that emerges from this recurrent managerial complaint is both practical and theoretical: Do organizational strategies that enhance work ethic actually work in Ghanaian contexts, or are organizations investing in approaches that are culturally misaligned, poorly implemented, or fundamentally ineffective? This question sits at an underexplored intersection of human resource management, organizational behaviour, and cross-cultural management studies. International research on HR effectiveness has been dominated by studies conducted in Western, individualistic contexts where assumptions about employee motivation, the employer-employee relationship, and the role of formal systems differ significantly from those that characterize Ghanaian workplaces (Ayentimi, Burgess, & Dayaram, 2018). The transfer of HR practices developed in North American and European organizational contexts to Ghanaian settings has occurred with limited empirical examination of whether, how, and under what conditions these practices produce the intended effects on work ethic and commitment (Debrah, Oseghale, & Budhwar, 2023).

Ghana represents a particularly important context for examining the effectiveness of organizational strategies for work ethic enhancement. As one of sub-Saharan Africa's more stable economies, Ghana has attracted substantial foreign direct investment, with multinational corporations establishing operations alongside growing Ghanaian-owned private enterprises and a still-substantial public sector (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). These diverse organizational contexts operate within a shared national culture characterized by high collectivism, high power distance, strong communalism, and relational work orientation (Hofstede, 2001). Yet the HR policies, training modules, and leadership models implemented in these organizations are frequently imported from Western management literature and consulting practice, with limited adaptation to the Ghanaian cultural context. The resulting cultural friction may undermine the effectiveness of well-intentioned strategies, producing implementation gaps and unintended consequences that reduce rather than enhance employee commitment.

Qualitative research employing focus group methodology is particularly well suited to evaluating organizational strategy effectiveness because it generates rich, contextualized accounts of how employees actually experience the policies, training, and leadership they encounter. Unlike survey research that measures attitudes on pre-specified scales, focus groups allow participants to narrate their experiences, describe contradictions between policy intent and implementation reality, and engage in collective sense-making about what works, what fails, and why (Morgan, 1997). The interactive dynamics of focus group discussion also surface the shared workplace narratives through which employees collectively interpret organizational strategies, revealing how policies are translated, resisted, or ignored at the level of everyday work practice.

Despite growing recognition that HR strategy effectiveness cannot be assumed and must be empirically evaluated in the local context, systematic evaluation of work ethic enhancement strategies in Ghanaian organizations remains rare. Existing studies have tended to focus on either policy design without implementation assessment, or on employee outcomes without attention to the specific strategies intended to produce them (Ayentimi et al., 2018). This study addresses that gap by directly evaluating the effectiveness of three categories of organizational strategy: HR policies, training modules, and leadership styles, through the lived experiences and collective sense-making of Ghanaian employees who are the intended targets of these strategies.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite widespread adoption of HR policies, training modules, and leadership development programmes designed to enhance work ethic in Ghanaian organizations, significant gaps exist in empirical knowledge about the actual effectiveness of these strategies. These gaps carry both practical consequences for organizational performance and theoretical consequences for understanding cross-cultural transfer of management practices.

First, the assumed effectiveness of Western-derived HR policies in Ghanaian contexts has not been adequately empirically tested. Performance management systems, attendance tracking, and incentive structures developed in individualistic, low-power-distance cultural contexts may produce different effects when implemented in Ghana's collectivist, high-power-distance cultural environment (Debrah et al., 2023). Formal policies designed to motivate individual performance may conflict with Ubuntu communal values that prioritize group harmony and collective contribution over individual recognition. The resulting cultural misfit may produce compliance without commitment, performative adherence without internalized motivation, and in some cases active resistance that undermines policy objectives. Without empirical evaluation, organizations continue implementing policies whose effectiveness in the Ghanaian context remains unproven.

Second, the effectiveness of training modules focused on work ethic and professionalism has not been systematically evaluated from the perspective of Ghanaian employees. Organizations invest significant resources in work ethic training during orientation and ongoing professional development, yet little is known about whether employees find this training credible, relevant, applicable, or behaviourally influential. The assumption that classroom instruction in work values translates into changed workplace behaviour is empirically questionable in any context, but particularly so in contexts where a significant gap exists between espoused organizational values and observed management behaviour (Appiah, 2010). Employees who perceive a gap between what training teaches and what leadership models may dismiss training as performative rhetoric rather than a genuine organizational commitment to work ethic.

Third, the relationship between leadership style and employee work ethic in Ghanaian organizations has not been adequately examined. International leadership research has identified multiple styles, from autocratic to democratic to transformational, with varying effects on employee motivation and commitment. However, these relationships have been studied predominantly in Western contexts, with limited attention to how Ghanaian employees experience and respond to different leadership approaches (Mensah, 2020).

Ubuntu philosophy's emphasis on relational personhood suggests that Ghanaian employees may respond differently to leadership styles than the universalist models assume, with accessibility, relational presence, and demonstrated care for employee welfare potentially mattering more than charismatic vision or transactional incentive structures.

Fourth, the implementation gap between formal organizational strategy and enacted workplace practice has not been adequately explored in the Ghanaian context. Policies exist on paper; training modules are delivered in classrooms; leadership philosophies are articulated in mission statements. Yet what employees actually experience may differ substantially from what strategies intend. Understanding why these implementation gaps occur, how employees navigate them, and what conditions reduce them requires qualitative inquiry that captures the lived experience of strategy implementation from the employee perspective.

Fifth, the cultural specificity of work ethic as a construct has not been adequately integrated into strategy evaluation research in Ghana. If work ethic in Ghana includes relational dimensions, communal obligations, and collective responsibility that are not captured by Western individualistic definitions, then strategies designed to enhance work ethic may be targeting the wrong behaviours or measuring the wrong outcomes. Evaluating strategy effectiveness requires a culturally grounded understanding of what work ethic means to Ghanaian employees, not only implementation fidelity to imported models.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative focus group study is to evaluate the effectiveness of organizational strategies, specifically HR policies, training modules, and leadership styles designed to enhance work ethic and employee commitment in Ghanaian organizations, as experienced and narrated by employees across public, private, and multinational organizational contexts.

4. Objectives of the Study

The following specific objectives guided this study:

- To evaluate how Ghanaian employees experience and respond to formal HR policies (performance management systems, attendance tracking, reward structures) intended to enhance work ethic and commitment.

- To assess the perceived effectiveness of training modules focused on work ethic, professionalism, and organizational values as described by employees who have participated in such training.
- To examine how different leadership styles shape employee work ethic, motivation, and commitment as narrated by employees working under various management approaches.
- To identify the implementation gaps and cultural misfits that reduce the effectiveness of organizational strategies for work ethic enhancement in Ghanaian contexts.
- To generate evidence-based recommendations for designing HR policies, training interventions, and leadership practices that are culturally congruent and behaviourally effective in Ghanaian organizations.

5. Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question One: How do Ghanaian employees experience and evaluate the effectiveness of formal HR policies (performance management, attendance tracking, reward structures) in shaping their work ethic and organizational commitment?

Research Question Two: What is the perceived effectiveness of work ethic training modules and values-based training programmes as experienced by Ghanaian employees who have participated in them?

Research Question Three: How do different leadership styles (autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, transformational) influence Ghanaian employees' motivation, commitment, and willingness to exert discretionary effort?

Research Question Four: What implementation gaps and cultural misfits do employees identify between the stated intentions of organizational strategies and the lived realities of workplace practice?

Research Question Five: What conditions, practices, and adaptations increase the effectiveness of organizational strategies for enhancing work ethic in Ghanaian organizational contexts?

6. Literature Review

6.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives: Social Constructionism and Ubuntu Philosophy. Social Constructionism, as elaborated by Berger and Luckmann (1966) in *The Social Construction of Reality*, posits that human beings

actively construct social reality through shared meanings, language, and symbolic systems. Institutions, policies, roles, and values including work ethic and the meaning of organizational commitment are not natural facts but historically and culturally produced social constructions sustained by ongoing practices of interaction, narration, and legitimation (Gergen, 2015). From this perspective, the effectiveness of an HR policy or training module is not an inherent property of the policy itself but is socially constructed through employees' collective interpretation of that policy, their experiences of its implementation, and the workplace narratives they construct about its meaning and legitimacy. Focus group discussions, in which participants collaboratively construct and contest evaluations of organizational strategies, are therefore not merely a method for accessing pre-existing opinions but are themselves sites of social construction in which strategy effectiveness is collectively negotiated.

Social Constructionism directs analytical attention toward the processes through which organizational strategies are translated, interpreted, resisted, or embraced at the level of everyday workplace interaction. A policy that appears effective on paper, with clear metrics and logical incentives, may be socially constructed by employees as illegitimate, disrespectful, or disconnected from workplace realities, thereby producing compliance without commitment or active resistance that undermines its intended effects. Conversely, a policy with less formal sophistication may be socially constructed as fair, respectful, and culturally congruent, thereby generating genuine motivation and commitment. Understanding strategy effectiveness therefore requires understanding the social construction processes through which employees make meaning of organizational interventions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Ubuntu Philosophy, the second theoretical pillar of this study, provides a culturally grounded framework for understanding the specifically African and Ghanaian dimensions of work ethic and organizational commitment. The Ubuntu principle, encapsulated in the Nguni phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other persons), posits that personhood, identity, and moral value are constituted through relationships and communal participation rather than individual achievement alone (Metz, 2011). In the Ghanaian context, this philosophical orientation manifests in Akan concepts such as *onipa na ohia onipa* (a person needs another person) and in communal work institutions such as *nnoboa* that organize labour as a collective rather than individual endeavour (Gyekye, 1997). Ubuntu philosophy suggests that Ghanaian employees may evaluate organizational strategies not only on individual instrumental grounds (what this policy does for me) but also on relational and

communal grounds (what this policy does to our collective, whether it respects our interdependency, whether it honours or undermines our relational work orientation). HR policies that emphasize individual competition, performance ranking, and differential rewards may be culturally alienating for employees socialized into Ubuntu communalism. Training modules that frame Work Ethic as an individual virtue disconnected from collective responsibility may miss the motivational power of relational obligation. Leadership styles that prioritize efficiency and control over accessibility and relational presence may fail to inspire commitment in a cultural context where leader accessibility is interpreted as respect and care for subordinates.

Together, Social Constructionism and Ubuntu Philosophy provide a theoretical framework that is both universally applicable (social construction processes occur in all organizational contexts) and culturally specific (Ubuntu captures distinctively African dimensions of work and relationship). This dual framework enables the study to evaluate organizational strategies both against their stated instrumental purposes and against culturally grounded expectations about what makes work meaningful and commitment sustainable in the Ghanaian context.

6.2 Empirical Review of HR Policies and Work Ethic in African Contexts

International HR research has extensively examined the relationship between HR policies and employee outcomes such as commitment, satisfaction, and performance. High-commitment HR practices, including selective hiring, extensive training, performance-contingent rewards, and employee participation, have been associated with superior organizational performance in Western contexts (Boxall & Purcell, 2022). However, the transferability of these practices to African contexts has been questioned. Debrah and colleagues (2023) examined HR practice transfer to Ghanaian organizations and found that Western-derived practices were frequently implemented with limited adaptation, producing mixed effects on employee outcomes. Performance management systems were experienced as externally imposed control mechanisms rather than developmental tools, generating compliance without genuine commitment.

Ayentimi and colleagues (2018) investigated HRM practices in Ghanaian multinational subsidiaries and found that while formal policies were adopted to conform to corporate requirements, implementation practices were substantially adapted to local cultural norms. Managers reported balancing corporate HR requirements with Ghanaian expectations of relational management, communal recognition, and hierarchical deference. This finding suggests that the formal policy, as documented in HR manuals, may be a poor predictor of

employee experience, which is shaped more by how policies are implemented than by their formal design.

Research specifically examining attendance and punctuality policies in Ghanaian organizations has documented persistent challenges despite formal tracking systems. Amankwah-Amoah and colleagues (2021) found that lateness and absenteeism remained common in both public and private sector organizations, with formal sanctions producing only temporary compliance. Employees interviewed in that study described attending work as a performative act (being present without being productive) and described strategies for appearing punctual while not actually working. This finding points to a significant implementation gap: formal policies designed to enhance work ethic produced behavioural compliance without genuine commitment, as employees learned to perform adherence while withholding discretionary effort.

6.3 Training Effectiveness and Work Ethic Development

The assumption that training programmes can effectively develop or enhance work ethic has received limited empirical support, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. Meta-analyses of training effectiveness have consistently found that training outcomes depend heavily on trainee characteristics, training design, and transfer climate (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010). Even when training successfully increases knowledge or changes attitudes, behaviour change in the workplace is contingent on supervisor support, opportunities to apply learning, and reinforcement from organizational systems. In contexts where the workplace transfer climate is poor, training effects rapidly dissipate.

Research on values-based training in African organizational contexts has identified authenticity as a critical moderating variable. Appiah (2010) argues that employees in hierarchical, collectivist cultural contexts are particularly sensitive to perceived gaps between what organizations say (training content) and what organizations do (everyday management practice). When employees observe managers violating the values espoused in training modules, training is socially constructed as a hypocritical ritual rather than a genuine organizational commitment. This social construction substantially reduces training effectiveness, as employees dismiss training content as irrelevant to the real rules of workplace success.

Bawa and Sanyare (2013) examined training programmes in Ghanaian mining companies and found that employees distinguished between technical training (which they valued) and values-based training (which they often dismissed as performative). Employees who perceived a gap between training content and management behaviour reported lower

motivation to apply training learning, and in some cases reported reduced organizational commitment as a result of perceived organizational hypocrisy. This finding suggests that training effectiveness cannot be evaluated in isolation from the broader organizational context of policy implementation and leadership behaviour.

6.4 Leadership Styles and Employee Commitment in Ghana

The relationship between leadership style and employee commitment has been extensively studied internationally, with transformational leadership consistently associated with higher employee commitment, satisfaction, and discretionary effort (Bass & Riggio, 2006). However, the cross-cultural generalizability of these findings has been questioned. Research in high-power-distance, collectivist cultural contexts has found that the specific leadership behaviours that generate commitment may differ from those identified in Western research.

Mensah (2020) examined leadership and employee engagement in Ghanaian private enterprises and found that leader accessibility and relational presence were stronger predictors of employee commitment than charismatic vision or intellectual stimulation. Employees described valuing leaders who were physically present, available to listen to personal concerns, and willing to advocate for employee welfare with higher management. These findings are consistent with Ubuntu philosophy's emphasis on relational personhood: leaders who demonstrate that they see employees as whole persons embedded in relationships, rather than as discrete units of productive capacity, generate loyalty and commitment that transactional or purely charismatic leadership does not.

Dartey-Baah (2013) examined the applicability of Western leadership models to Ghanaian organizational contexts and argued that the high power distance characteristic of Ghanaian culture means that autocratic leadership, which is generally viewed negatively in Western leadership research, may be neither unusual nor necessarily ineffective in Ghana. Subordinates socialized into hierarchical deference may expect clear direction from leaders and may experience democratic or laissez-faire leadership as abdication of responsibility rather than empowerment. This finding suggests that leadership effectiveness is culturally contingent: the same leadership style may produce different effects on employee work ethic depending on the cultural expectations that employees bring to the leader-follower relationship.

6.5 Implementation Gaps and Cultural Misfit

The gap between formal organizational strategy and enacted workplace practice has been theorized in implementation science as the implementation gap, which refers to the difference between what an intervention intends and what actually occurs when it is delivered in real-

world contexts (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Implementation gaps can occur at multiple levels: policy design may be disconnected from workplace realities; communication of policies may be inadequate; resources for implementation may be insufficient; organizational culture may resist the policy's assumptions; or employees may actively or passively resist policy implementation.

In cross-cultural contexts, implementation gaps may be widened by cultural misfit between the assumptions embedded in imported strategies and the cultural norms of the host context. Cultural misfit occurs when organizational strategies assume individualistic motivation, universal rule application, and low power distance, while employees operate from collectivist, particularist, and high-power-distance cultural frameworks (Hofstede, 2001). When cultural misfit is present, even well-implemented strategies may produce unintended consequences, as employees interpret and respond to strategies through cultural frameworks that strategy designers did not anticipate.

Appiah (2010) argues that in Ghanaian organizational contexts, cultural misfit between Western HR models and Ubuntu communal values produces what he terms the ritualization of compliance: employees learn to perform the behaviours that formal policies require (attendance, punctuality, form completion) while withholding genuine commitment, discretionary effort, and emotional investment. This ritualized compliance allows organizations to maintain the appearance of policy effectiveness while employees maintain internal autonomy and direct their genuine work ethic toward informal economy activities, family enterprises, or other sites where work feels relationally meaningful. If Appiah's analysis is correct, then evaluating strategy effectiveness by measuring compliance with formal policies may systematically overestimate genuine work ethic enhancement.

6.6 Gaps in the Literature and Contribution of This Study

The literature review reveals that while HR policies, training modules, and leadership styles have been examined individually in Ghanaian organizational contexts, no study has systematically evaluated the comparative effectiveness of these three strategy categories using focus group methodology that captures employees' collective sense-making. No study has examined how employees themselves evaluate the strategies designed to enhance their work ethic, nor how they narrate the conditions under which these strategies succeed or fail. No study has integrated Social Constructionism and Ubuntu Philosophy to evaluate cultural fit as a dimension of strategy effectiveness. The present study addresses these gaps by generating rich qualitative data on Ghanaian employees' lived experiences of organizational

strategies, contributing both to the empirical literature on African HRM and to theoretical understanding of cross-cultural strategy transfer.

7. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative, interpretive research design employing focus group methodology. Qualitative designs are appropriate when the research aim is to understand meaning-making, lived experience, and social construction rather than to measure the distribution of variables in a population (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Focus group methodology was selected because it generates interactive dialogue in which participants co-construct evaluations, surface shared workplace narratives, and engage in collective sense-making about organizational strategies (Morgan, 1997; Krueger & Casey, 2015). The interactive dynamics of focus groups are particularly valuable for evaluating strategy effectiveness because participants challenge, confirm, and elaborate each other's accounts, producing a more complete picture of how strategies are actually experienced in workplace contexts.

7.2 Research Approach

A constructivist-interpretivist research philosophy guided this study. Constructivism assumes that social reality is not given but constructed through human meaning-making activities, and that multiple, contextually situated realities coexist within any organizational setting (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). The interpretivist approach holds that the researcher's role is not to measure pre-specified outcomes but to interpret the meanings that participants ascribe to their experiences and to represent those meanings faithfully and reflexively (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This approach aligns with the study's interest in how employees socially construct the effectiveness of organizational strategies rather than in measuring effectiveness against pre-determined objective criteria. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout data collection and analysis, documenting how prior knowledge of Ghanaian organizational culture and HR practice shaped the interpretive process, and actively sought disconfirming evidence to challenge emerging analytical conclusions.

7.3 Study Setting

Focus group sessions were conducted in three Ghanaian cities: Accra (the capital and largest commercial centre), Tema (the primary industrial and port city), and Kumasi (the major commercial centre of the Ashanti Region). These three locations were selected to capture diversity in organizational contexts, with Accra representing headquarters and multinational operations, Tema representing manufacturing and industrial employment, and Kumasi

representing regional commercial and public sector employment. Two focus group sessions were conducted in each city, yielding six sessions in total. Sessions were held at accessible neutral venues including hotel conference rooms, university seminar rooms, and trade union meeting facilities. Seating was arranged in circular configuration to facilitate equal participation and signal the absence of hierarchy. Sessions were conducted in the morning or late afternoon to accommodate participants' work schedules. Refreshments and transportation reimbursement were provided as culturally appropriate gestures of respect for participants' time and contribution.

7.4 Study Population

The study population comprised formally employed adults working in Ghanaian organizations who had a minimum of three years of experience with their current employer, sufficient time to have experienced the organization's HR policies, training programmes, and leadership practices. Three categories of organizations were represented across the focus groups: public sector organizations (government ministries, state-owned enterprises, and public agencies); private Ghanaian-owned organizations (indigenous companies operating in manufacturing, retail, and services); and multinational corporations operating in Ghana (foreign-owned subsidiaries with corporate policies developed externally). This breadth of organizational representation was intentional, as the study sought to compare how strategy effectiveness varies across organizational types with different policy origins and implementation contexts.

7.5 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants with diverse organizational experiences. The researcher identified participants through three channels: professional associations (Chartered Institute of Human Resource Management, Ghana), trade union contacts in each study location, and employer referrals from organizations willing to facilitate employee participation. Purposive sampling criteria were applied to ensure diversity across gender, age group, organizational sector, job level (junior, mid-level, senior), and years of organizational experience within and across focus groups. Each group was composed to include a mix of genders and a spread of organizational levels to generate diverse perspectives on strategy effectiveness. Participants from the same organization were placed in different focus groups to avoid workplace hierarchy dynamics constraining discussion, except where explicitly requested to enable group dialogue among colleagues who already had established trust.

7.6 Sample Size

Six focus groups were conducted, with participant numbers per group ranging from six to eight, yielding a total of 42 participants. Focus group sizes of six to eight participants are recommended as optimal for generating diverse perspectives while allowing all participants adequate speaking time (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Data saturation, the point at which new focus group sessions yield no substantially new themes, was assessed during iterative analysis and was considered achieved after the fifth focus group session, with the sixth session serving confirmatory purposes. Among the 42 participants, 23 were female and 19 were male. Ages ranged from 25 to 59 years. Organizational representation was distributed as follows: public sector workers, 15 participants; private Ghanaian-owned sector workers, 14 participants; multinational corporation workers, 13 participants. Job level distribution: junior staff (entry-level to 5 years), 14 participants; mid-level staff (6-15 years experience), 18 participants; senior staff (management and above), 10 participants.

Table 1: Participant Demographics.

Focus Group	City	Sector Representation	Gender (F/M)	Age Range	Participants (N)
FG1	Accra	Public, Private, MNC	4F/3M	25-55	7
FG2	Accra	Public, MNC	5F/2M	28-52	7
FG3	Tema	Private, MNC	3F/4M	26-58	7
FG4	Tema	Public, Private	4F/3M	30-59	7
FG5	Kumasi	Public, Private, MNC	4F/3M	27-56	7
FG6	Kumasi	Public, Private	3F/4M	25-57	7
Total	3 cities	All sectors	23F/19M	25-59	42

7.7 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using a semi-structured focus group discussion guide developed by the researcher. The guide opened with a general warm-up prompt asking participants to describe their current job and how long they had been with their organization. The discussion then moved to three main sections corresponding to the study's strategy categories.

The HR policies section included prompts about performance management systems (e.g., "How does your organization evaluate your work performance? Does this evaluation affect your motivation to work hard?"); attendance and punctuality policies (e.g., "What happens if someone comes late or is absent? Does the system for tracking attendance actually make people more committed?"); and reward and recognition structures (e.g., "Does your organization reward hard work? If yes, does that reward make you want to work harder?").

The training modules section included prompts about orientation and onboarding (e.g., "What training did you receive when you joined about how to work hard and be professional?"); values-based and work ethic training (e.g., "Has your organization ever sent you to training specifically about work ethic or professionalism? Did it actually change how you work?"); and perceived authenticity (e.g., "Do the people who teach work ethic training also model work ethic in how they manage? Is there consistency?").

The leadership styles section included prompts about direct supervisors (e.g., "Describe the person who supervises you. How does their leadership style affect your willingness to work hard?"); leadership accessibility (e.g., "Can you access your leader if you have a concern? Does that matter for your commitment?"); and comparative leadership experiences (e.g., "If you have worked under different leaders, did your work ethic change depending on who was in charge? How?").

The guide also included a structured contradiction prompt inviting participants to describe a time when organizational policy or training said one thing about work ethic but leadership behaviour or workplace practice contradicted that message. This prompt was specifically designed to surface the implementation gaps and cultural misfits that the study sought to explore. All prompts were reviewed for clarity and cultural appropriateness by three Ghanaian HR professionals prior to data collection and revised based on their feedback. The guide was translated into Twi for use in sessions where participants preferred to use that language, with back-translation into English during transcription.

7.8 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted between March and May 2026. Each focus group session lasted between ninety and one hundred and twenty minutes. Sessions were facilitated by the researcher with assistance from a trained Ghanaian co-facilitator who also managed language interpretation when participants narrated in Twi. All sessions were audio-recorded with participants' written informed consent. A research assistant took detailed field notes capturing non-verbal interactions, group dynamics, notable moments of consensus or contestation, and environmental factors that might affect interpretation. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, with Twi passages translated into English by a bilingual transcriber and reviewed for accuracy by the co-facilitator. Completed transcripts were returned to a purposively selected subset of participants, one from each focus group, for member checking; corrections identified through this process were incorporated into the final transcripts.

7.9 Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis approach, which involves six iterative phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the written account. The researcher read all six transcripts multiple times before beginning systematic coding to achieve deep familiarity with the data as a whole. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data, attending closely to participants' evaluative language, their narrative accounts of policy experiences, their comparisons between different organizational strategies, and the moments of agreement, disagreement, or collective laughter that characterized group interactions. Codes were organized into candidate themes and reviewed against the complete data set to assess internal coherence, mutual exclusivity, and evidential grounding. Themes were defined and named with attention to capturing both the content of participants' evaluations and the analytical insights about conditions of strategy effectiveness or ineffectiveness. The co-facilitator independently coded a 25% sample of the transcripts, and coding differences were discussed and negotiated to enhance dependability. Negative case analysis was systematically conducted to ensure that instances where strategies were reported as effective were incorporated alongside instances of ineffectiveness rather than excluded in pursuit of thematic coherence.

7.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA). All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation, having been given a detailed information sheet explaining the study's purpose, the audio-recording procedure, and their rights as participants. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty and that all contributions would be anonymized in any publications arising from the research. To protect anonymity, participants are referred to using pseudonyms selected at the beginning of each focus group session. Given the communal nature of focus group discussion, participants were additionally asked to respect the confidentiality of other group members' contributions, and this norm was reinforced at the opening of each session. The potential for group dynamics to pressure participants toward majority views was explicitly acknowledged, and the facilitator was trained to actively invite dissenting perspectives and to monitor signs of social conformity pressure throughout each session. Participants who disclosed workplace problems during discussions were provided with information about employee assistance resources where available.

8. FINDINGS

Reflexive thematic analysis of the six focus group transcripts yielded six overarching themes that capture participants' collective evaluations of organizational strategies for enhancing work ethic. The themes are presented below with illustrative participant quotations. All participant names are pseudonyms.

8.1 Theme One: "The Policy Is on Paper, Not in Practice" The Implementation Gap as Pervasive Feature of HR Policy Experience

The most consistent finding across all six focus groups was participants' description of a profound and pervasive gap between HR policies as formally documented and HR policies as actually implemented in daily workplace practice. Participants across all sectors described policies that existed on paper, were referenced in employee handbooks and orientation materials, but were applied inconsistently, selectively enforced, or effectively suspended when inconvenient for management. This implementation gap fundamentally shaped participants' evaluation of policy effectiveness, as policies that were not reliably implemented could not reliably shape behaviour.

Kwame, a 41-year-old public sector finance officer in Accra (FG1), described the gap with characteristic clarity:

"Our attendance policy says that any staff who reports after 8:30 am without prior approval will have half a day's salary deducted. This is written in our conditions of service. I have read it. Everyone has read it. But in my five years here, I have never once seen it applied. Not once. People come at 9, 9:30, sometimes 10. Nothing happens. So do I take the policy seriously? No. Because the organization does not take it seriously. The policy is on paper, not in practice."

This disjuncture between policy documentation and policy enforcement was reported across all six groups. Participants described learning quickly that the real rules of their organizations were not those written in handbooks but those enacted through management behaviour. For participants in multinational corporations, the gap was sometimes described as a tension between global policy and local implementation. Ama, a 34-year-old MNC marketing officer in Accra (FG2), explained:

"Our corporate headquarters has very strict performance management. Every quarter, we are supposed to have a formal review meeting with our supervisor where we discuss our objectives, our achievements, and areas for improvement. This is the global policy. But here in Ghana, my supervisor has never once conducted this meeting. Not in three years. I raised it

once, and he said, 'We don't really do that here.' So the policy exists. It is in the system. But in practice, we do something else."

Participants described the consequences of this implementation gap for their work ethic. When formal policies were not reliably enforced, participants reported that they calibrated their effort to the informal rules they observed rather than the formal rules they read. As Kojo, a 52-year-old private sector operations manager in Tema (FG3), put it:

"Why would I kill myself coming exactly on time when people who come after me face no consequence? Why would I work late finishing a report when the policy says overtime will be compensated but no one ever processes the compensation? You learn very quickly: do what you must to avoid trouble, but do not do extra expecting that the system will recognize or reward you."

This theme reveals that the effectiveness of HR policies in shaping work ethic is fundamentally mediated by implementation fidelity. Policies that are documented but not enacted are not merely ineffective; they actively undermine employee motivation by communicating that organizational commitments cannot be trusted. The implementation gap socially constructs policies as performative rather than genuine, reducing employees' willingness to invest discretionary effort.

8.2 Theme Two: "I Do What Avoids Trouble" Transactional Compliance as the Dominant Response to Formal Performance Systems

The second theme concerned participants' reported behavioural response to formal performance management systems. Across all six groups, participants described responding to performance policies, attendance tracking, and reward structures with what they termed "avoidance of trouble" rather than genuine commitment to excellence. The goal was not to work hard because one valued diligence or felt committed to organizational success, but to do just enough to avoid negative consequences, meet minimum requirements, and stay off management's radar.

Esi, a 29-year-old private sector customer service representative in Kumasi (FG5), provided a representative account:

"My organization has a scorecard. Every month, they rate you on five metrics: attendance, customer feedback, speed, accuracy, and teamwork. If you fall below target on two metrics, you get a verbal warning. Three metrics, written warning. Four metrics, probation. I know this system perfectly. And I know exactly the minimum I need to do to avoid warnings. I hit those minimums. I do not aim for excellence because excellence gives me nothing extra. The reward for working harder is just a higher target next month."

Participants across groups described similar calculative orientations toward formal performance systems. The systems were understood as control mechanisms to be managed rather than as developmental tools to be embraced. This transactional orientation was consistently contrasted with the kind of genuine work ethic participants described as emerging from relational commitment, personal pride in craft, or Ubuntu communal obligation.

Yaw, a 38-year-old public sector administrator in Tema (FG4), articulated the distinction:

"There is a difference between working because you are afraid of being written up and working because you care. The performance system gives me the first. It makes sure I do not do too little. But it does not make me want to do more. For more, you need something else. You need a boss who respects you, colleagues you do not want to let down, and a sense that your work matters. The formal system cannot produce that."

Participants were specific about the conditions under which performance systems might move beyond transactional compliance. When rewards were perceived as fair, when recognition was public and meaningful, and when employees felt that their effort would be acknowledged even if not immediately rewarded, some participants described increased motivation. However, these conditions were reported as rare in their experience. More commonly, participants described performance systems that felt arbitrary, inconsistently applied, or disconnected from actual contribution.

Adwoa, a 44-year-old MNC human resources officer in Accra (FG2), offered an insider's perspective:

"As an HR person, I have to defend the performance system. But honestly, even I know it does not work the way it is supposed to. The problem is that managers do not have time to really evaluate. They give everyone 'meets expectations' except the people they personally dislike, who get 'needs improvement.' So the system becomes a tool for personal grudges, not for motivating excellence. Employees see this. And they respond by doing exactly what is asked, nothing more, nothing less. You cannot blame them."

This theme reveals that performance management systems, as currently implemented in many Ghanaian organizations, produce compliance without commitment. They ensure that employees do not fall below minimum thresholds but do not inspire the discretionary effort that distinguishes adequate from excellent organizational performance. The transactional orientation they produce is a rational response to systems that reward avoidance of punishment more than pursuit of excellence.

8.3 Theme Three: "The Training Was Beautiful, but ..." Differential Effectiveness of Work Ethic Training as Shaped by Perceived Authenticity

The third theme concerned participants' evaluations of training modules focused on work ethic, professionalism, and organizational values. Across all groups, participants distinguished between training they found genuinely valuable and training they dismissed as performative. The critical discriminating factor was not training content, duration, or delivery method, but the perceived authenticity of the training relative to observed organizational practice and management behaviour.

The phrase "the training was beautiful, but..." recurred across multiple groups, with participants describing training sessions that were engaging, well-presented, and convincing in the moment, but whose lessons were rapidly contradicted by workplace realities. Nana, a 47-year-old private sector sales manager in Kumasi (FG6), offered a representative account:

"We had a two-day training on work ethic and professionalism. Very beautiful. The facilitator was energetic. The materials were glossy. We did role plays about being proactive and taking initiative. Everyone left feeling motivated. But I came back to the office on Monday, and my supervisor yelled at me for making a decision without checking with him first. The training said take initiative. My boss said ask permission for everything. You tell me, which lesson will I follow?"

This perceived contradiction between training messages and organizational practice was the most frequently cited reason for dismissing work ethic training as ineffective. Participants described training as a ritual that organizations performed to appear committed to work ethic without actually changing the conditions that produced or inhibited diligence.

Akua, a 31-year-old public sector nurse in Accra (FG1), described the emotional consequence of this contradiction:

"The training made me feel hopeful. It made me think, maybe this organization really values hard work. Maybe if I work harder, they will notice. Then I came back to my unit and saw the same people being lazy, the same favouritism, the same lack of consequences for the people who do nothing. And I felt foolish for believing the training. That feeling of foolishness made me less motivated, not more. I thought, they are just saying these things. They do not mean them."

Participants described several conditions under which training might be more effective. When organizational leaders visibly modelled the values taught in training, participants reported taking training more seriously. When training was reinforced by follow-up coaching, peer accountability, and integration with performance systems, participants reported sustained

behaviour change. When training acknowledged the real constraints and contradictions of workplace life rather than presenting idealized visions of professionalism, participants reported greater credibility and applicability.

Samuel, a 53-year-old MNC logistics supervisor in Tema (FG3), described training that worked:

"The best training I ever had was when our plant manager came and sat with us for the whole session. He did not just talk at us. He listened. He admitted that the organization had problems with favouritism and inconsistency. He said, 'I do not expect you to change everything overnight. But let us start with three small things.' He followed up two weeks later to ask how we were doing. That training changed behaviour because the leader showed he was serious. He was not just checking a box."

This theme reveals that training effectiveness is not a property of training design alone but is socially constructed through employees' perception of alignment between training messages and organizational reality. Training that employees perceive as authentic, leader-supported, and connected to real workplace conditions can shape work ethic. Training perceived as a performative ritual may actively undermine motivation by creating hope that the organization then disappoints.

8.4 Theme Four: "I Can Work Hard for a Boss Who Sees Me" Leadership Accessibility and Relational Presence as Central to Commitment

The fourth theme concerned participants' accounts of how leadership style shaped their work ethic and commitment. Across all six groups, the most frequently mentioned leadership qualities that generated genuine commitment were not charisma, strategic vision, or technical competence, but accessibility, relational presence, and demonstrated care for employee welfare. Participants described working harder for leaders who knew their names, listened to their concerns, advocated for them with higher management, and treated them as whole persons rather than as production units.

Mercy, a 36-year-old private sector administrative assistant in Kumasi (FG5), offered a representative account:

"My current boss is not the smartest person I have ever worked for. But she is the best. Why? Because she sees me. She asks about my children. When I had an emergency, she said, 'Go, handle your family. The work will wait.' Because of that, I will stay late when she needs something. I will come early. I will do extra without being asked. She has not given me a single monetary reward for any of this. But I work harder for her than for any boss before."

This pattern, in which relational leadership generated discretionary effort that formal incentives could not produce, was reported across all sectors and organizational types. Participants consistently contrasted leaders who were accessible and present with leaders who were distant, inaccessible, or present only to inspect and criticize. The contrast was not merely about pleasantness; participants described it as fundamentally about respect and dignity.

Kofi, a 45-year-old public sector engineer in Accra (FG2), articulated the cultural dimension: "In our Ghanaian culture, a leader who does not greet you, who does not ask about your welfare, who does not know your name, is not a leader. They are a foreigner in our midst. We will do what they say because we fear losing our job. But we will not give them our heart. The work ethic we give them is the minimum, the compliance, the 'I did what you said so do not trouble me.' The genuine work ethic, the one that comes from inside, we keep for people who treat us as human beings."

This finding aligns with Ubuntu philosophy's emphasis on relational personhood: employees experience leaders as fully human only when leaders acknowledge the humanity of subordinates. Without this relational foundation, formal authority produces compliance but not commitment. With it, employees voluntarily invest effort that exceeds any contractual obligation.

Participants also described the negative consequences of inaccessible leadership. Leaders who were absent, who hid in private offices, who communicated only through email or intermediaries, who made themselves unavailable for subordinate concerns, were described as demotivating and alienating. The absence of relational accessibility was interpreted as disrespect: if the leader does not have time for me, the leader does not value me, and if I am not valued, why should I exert effort beyond the minimum required?

Akwasi, a 42-year-old MNC factory supervisor in Tema (FG4), described the contrast:

"My previous supervisor had an open-door policy. Actually open. You could walk in, sit down, and talk. He would listen. He might not solve your problem, but he would listen and you felt heard. My current supervisor has an open-door policy that means his door is open but he is never there. If he is there, he is on his phone. He does not look at you when you speak. He says, 'Send me an email.' But an email is not a person. I do not work for emails. I work less hard now. Not because I am lazy. Because I do not feel like a person to him."

This theme reveals that leadership effectiveness in shaping work ethic cannot be reduced to leadership style categories (autocratic, democratic, transformational) without attending to the relational dimension that may be the most culturally significant factor in Ghanaian contexts.

Accessibility, relational presence, and demonstrated care are not optional soft skills but central mechanisms through which leaders communicate respect and thereby generate commitment.

8.5 Theme Five: "They See Us as Problems to Be Managed, Not People to Be Developed" Alienating Effects of Bureaucratic Impersonality on Work Ethic

The fifth theme concerned participants' experience of organizational strategies as fundamentally impersonal and alienating. Across focus groups, participants described HR policies, training modules, and leadership practices that treated employees as interchangeable units, potential problems to be controlled, rather than as people with unique contributions, developmental aspirations, and legitimate needs for dignity and respect. This bureaucratic impersonality was identified as a significant factor undermining work ethic.

Ama, a 34-year-old MNC marketing officer in Accra (FG2), provided a vivid account:

"Everything in my organization is a form. You need leave? Complete form. You need training? Complete form. You have a complaint? Complete form. The form goes to someone you never meet, who makes a decision without ever speaking to you, and you receive an email saying 'approved' or 'not approved.' No one asks, 'How are you? How can we help you do your best work?' They see us as problems to be managed, not people to be developed. And then they wonder why we do not feel committed."

Participants described the emotional experience of working in bureaucratically impersonal organizations as demoralizing and exhausting. The constant filling of forms, the unavailability of human decision-makers, the sense that one's unique circumstances did not matter, all contributed to a work environment that participants experienced as hostile to genuine work ethic.

Adjei, a 39-year-old public sector procurement officer in Kumasi (FG6), described the paradox:

"The organization says they want us to be proactive, to take initiative, to go beyond the minimum. But the system punishes initiative. If you try to solve a problem without following the exact procedure, you get in trouble. So you learn: follow the procedure, fill the form, wait for approval, do not try to make things better on your own. That is not work ethic. That is bureaucracy. And it kills the spirit of anyone who actually wants to work hard."

Participants in multinational corporations described this bureaucratic impersonality as sometimes even more pronounced than in Ghanaian-owned organizations, because global policies were applied without local adaptation. Ama, from FG2, continued:

"The global system does not know Ghana. It does not know that in Ghana, a person might need to leave early because a family member is sick and they are the only one who can help. The system just says, 'Attendance is mandatory.' So the employee who leaves to care for their mother gets marked absent, gets a warning, feels disrespected. Next time, they do not tell the truth. They say they were sick. They learn to play the system. The system created this dishonesty. It was not there before."

This theme reveals that organizational strategies that prioritize bureaucratic control over relational flexibility may inadvertently produce the very behaviours they intend to eliminate. When employees experience policies as alienating and impersonal, they respond by withholding genuine commitment, playing the system, and directing their energy toward strategies for surviving bureaucracy rather than contributing to organizational success.

8.6 Theme Six: "They Bring Foreign Systems That Do Not Understand Us" Cultural Misfit Between Western HR Models and Ghanaian Communal Work Expectations

The sixth and most theoretically significant theme concerned participants' identification of cultural misfit as a fundamental cause of strategy ineffectiveness. Across all six groups, participants described organizational strategies, particularly those originating from Western headquarters or Western management consulting, that were culturally alien to Ghanaian expectations about work, relationships, and organizational life. This cultural misfit produced resistance, disengagement, and the performance of compliance without genuine commitment. Kweku, a 55-year-old private sector operations director in Tema (FG3), offered a senior manager's perspective on the problem:

"I have sat through many presentations from consultants from Europe and America. They show us systems that work in London or New York. They tell us if we implement them, our productivity will increase. But they do not ask: will a Ghanaian worker respond to this system the same way as a British worker? The British worker is an individualist. He works for his own advancement. The Ghanaian worker is a communalist. She works for her family, for her team, for her community. If the system only rewards individual achievement, it misses what actually motivates us."

Participants described specific dimensions of cultural misfit. Performance ranking systems that pitted colleagues against each other were described as violating Ubuntu values of collective solidarity. Employees described reluctance to outperform colleagues visibly because doing so would disrupt team harmony and damage relationships that mattered more than individual recognition. Formal reward systems that ignored communal obligations were

described as unfair because they did not account for the ways employees helped each other, covered for each other, and shared credit.

Abena, a 48-year-old public sector education administrator in Accra (FG1), described the cultural logic:

"In my unit, we share work. If someone is struggling, others help. We do not keep score about who did more. That is how Ghanaians work together. Then a new director came from a multinational background. She introduced individual performance targets. Suddenly, we were competing, not cooperating. The faster workers stopped helping the slower ones. The slower ones felt humiliated. The team fell apart. Productivity went down, not up. She blamed our work ethic. We blamed her system. She did not understand that for us, work is communal. Her system broke that."

Participants also described cultural misfit in leadership expectations. Ghanaians socialized into high-power-distance cultural frameworks expect leaders to be accessible, to provide clear direction, and to care for subordinates' welfare. Leaders who attempted democratic or laissez-faire styles were experienced as abdicating responsibility. Leaders who were distant and impersonal were experienced as disrespectful.

Yaa, a 37-year-old MNC project coordinator in Kumasi (FG5), described the mismatch:

"My European manager told me I should be empowered to make my own decisions. He said he trusted me. But to me, this felt like he was abandoning me. I did not know what he wanted. I needed him to tell me clearly what to do. In our culture, a leader who does not give clear instructions is not empowering you. He is leaving you to fail. So I felt anxious. I made decisions slowly because I was afraid of choosing wrong. My work ethic looked bad because I was confused. But the problem was not my motivation. The problem was a leadership style that did not fit our cultural expectations."

This theme reveals that evaluating organizational strategy effectiveness without attending to cultural fit may systematically misinterpret employee responses. What looks like poor work ethic from a Western individualistic perspective may be a rational adaptation to culturally alien systems from a Ghanaian Ubuntu perspective. Strategies designed without cultural adaptation are not merely less effective; they may actively produce outcomes opposite to those intended.

Table 2: Summary of Themes and Strategy Effectiveness Implications.

Theme	Core Finding	Implication for Strategy Effectiveness
Implementation Gap	Policies documented but not enforced are socially constructed as performative	Effectiveness requires implementation fidelity, not just policy design
Transactional Compliance	Performance systems produce minimum compliance, not genuine commitment	Systems that reward avoidance of punishment cannot inspire excellence
Training Authenticity	Training effectiveness depends on perceived alignment with practice	Values training without values modelling undermines credibility
Leadership Accessibility	Relational presence generates discretionary effort that formal systems cannot	Leader accessibility is a core mechanism for commitment, not optional soft skill
Bureaucratic Impersonality	Impersonal systems alienate employees and produce system-gaming	Relational flexibility within policy frameworks may enhance effectiveness
Cultural Misfit	Western HR models conflict with Ubuntu communal values	Cultural adaptation is necessary; importation without adaptation produces resistance

9. DISCUSSION

This qualitative focus group study evaluated the effectiveness of organizational strategies HR policies, training modules, and leadership styles intended to enhance work ethic and employee commitment in Ghanaian organizations. The six themes generated by the analysis reveal a consistent pattern across all three strategy categories: the gap between formal strategy and enacted practice is pervasive; employees respond to this gap with transactional compliance rather than genuine commitment; training effectiveness is contingent on perceived authenticity; leadership accessibility is the most powerful reported driver of discretionary effort; bureaucratic impersonality is alienating and counterproductive; and cultural misfit between Western HR models and Ghanaian communal work values fundamentally undermines strategy effectiveness.

The Implementation Gap as Social Construction of Strategy Legitimacy

The first theme's finding that policies documented but not enforced are socially constructed as performative rather than genuine has significant theoretical implications. From a Social Constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), policies do not have inherent effectiveness; their effectiveness is socially constructed through employees' collective interpretation of whether the organization treats the policy as real. When organizations fail to enforce policies consistently, employees do not simply notice a technical implementation

failure; they construct the policy as illegitimate, as not really binding, as a statement without commitment. This social construction fundamentally changes the policy's behavioural influence: employees feel no moral or motivational pressure to comply with a policy the organization itself does not treat as real.

This finding extends implementation science's concept of the implementation gap (Durlak & DuPre, 2008) by specifying that the gap's consequences are not merely behavioural but meaning-based. Implementation gaps do not only reduce compliance; they delegitimize entire policy domains. An organization that fails to enforce its attendance policy does not simply have a lateness problem; it has communicated that its commitments cannot be trusted, affecting employee orientation toward all organizational policies, not only the attendance policy.

Transactional Compliance and the Limits of Performance Management

The second theme's finding that performance systems produce transactional compliance rather than genuine commitment challenges the assumption that well-designed incentives will produce intrinsic motivation. Participants' accounts suggest that performance systems, as currently implemented in many Ghanaian organizations, activate what Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) would call controlled motivation (behaviour driven by external contingencies) rather than autonomous motivation (behaviour driven by genuine valuing of the activity). Controlled motivation produces behaviour only as long as external contingencies are present and monitored; it extinguishes when surveillance is removed. This explains the pattern participants described of working just hard enough to avoid warnings but not harder.

The finding that participants' strategic response to performance systems was to calculate the minimum required to avoid punishment suggests that these systems may inadvertently train employees in mediocrity. By focusing attention on the threshold for avoiding negative consequences, performance systems frame excellence as irrelevant and extra effort as wasted. This is a perverse outcome for systems designed to enhance work ethic: they may systematically discourage the very behaviours they intend to cultivate.

Authenticity as the Mediator of Training Effectiveness

The third theme's finding that training effectiveness depends on perceived authenticity rather than training design quality has significant implications for organizations investing in work ethic training. Participants' accounts suggest that employees evaluate training not only on its

content and delivery but also on its relationship to observed organizational practice. Training perceived as performative, disconnected from how leaders actually behave and what the organization actually rewards, does not merely fail to change behaviour; it may actively reduce motivation by creating hopeful expectations that workplace reality then disappoints.

This finding aligns with Appiah's (2010) observation that employees in hierarchical cultural contexts are particularly sensitive to perceived hypocrisy in organizational communication. The power distance characteristic of Ghanaian organizations means that employees cannot directly confront leaders about contradictions between training messages and management behaviour. Instead, they privately dismiss training as ritual and adjust their behaviour accordingly, but they do not raise the contradiction openly. This silent dismissal means organizations may remain unaware that their expensive training investments are being socially constructed as irrelevant or hypocritical by the employees who receive them.

Leadership Accessibility as Ubuntu-in-Practice

The fourth theme's finding that leadership accessibility and relational presence are central to generating employee commitment represents the study's most theoretically grounded finding. From an Ubuntu perspective (Gyekye, 1997; Metz, 2011), persons are constituted through relationships. A leader who is inaccessible, who does not see subordinates as full persons deserving relational engagement, fails the Ubuntu test of personhood and therefore cannot generate the kind of commitment that flows from genuine relational recognition.

This finding challenges the transferability of Western leadership models that prioritize strategic vision, charisma, or transactional incentive design over relational presence. For Ghanaian employees socialized into Ubuntu values, relational accessibility may be a necessary condition for any other leadership qualities to matter. A leader with brilliant strategic vision who is never accessible to subordinates will not generate commitment. A leader who is relationally present but less strategically sophisticated may generate substantial discretionary effort because employees experience being seen, valued, and respected as human beings.

The finding also has implications for remote and hybrid work arrangements. Participants' emphasis on physical accessibility and in-person relational presence suggests that the shift to remote work, accelerated globally by the COVID-19 pandemic, may have differential effects across cultural contexts. For Ghanaian employees whose commitment depends on leader accessibility, remote work arrangements that reduce in-person interaction may undermine the relational foundations of work ethic. Organizations implementing remote or hybrid work in

Ghana should deliberately create alternative mechanisms for relational connection to preserve this culturally significant dimension of leader-follower relationship.

Bureaucratic Impersonality as Alienation

The fifth theme's finding that bureaucratic impersonality alienates employees and undermines work ethic extends classic sociological analyses of bureaucratic alienation (Weber, 1930/2005) to the contemporary Ghanaian context. Participants' accounts of form-filling, inaccessible decision-makers, and systems that treat employees as interchangeable units describe exactly the alienating effects that Weber identified as the cost of bureaucratic rationality. However, participants' vivid accounts of the emotional experience of this alienation feeling like "problems to be managed, not people to be developed" suggest that the costs of bureaucratic impersonality may be particularly high in cultural contexts where relational recognition is central to personhood.

The finding that bureaucratic impersonality sometimes produced the very behaviours it was designed to eliminate is theoretically significant. Attendance tracking systems that employees experience as alienating may produce the strategic gaming of attendance, the false reporting of illness, and the withdrawal of genuine commitment that managers then interpret as evidence that stricter controls are needed. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle: alienating systems produce resistance behaviours; resistance behaviours are interpreted as requiring more control; more control produces more alienation and more sophisticated resistance. Breaking this cycle requires recognizing that the problem is not insufficient control but the wrong kind of control that ignores the relational and cultural dimensions of Ghanaian work motivation.

Cultural Misfit as Fundamental Barrier to Strategy Effectiveness

The sixth theme's finding that cultural misfit between Western HR models and Ghanaian communal work values fundamentally undermines strategy effectiveness is the study's most practically significant finding. Participants' accounts of performance ranking systems destroying team cooperation, individual reward systems violating Ubuntu values, and leadership models mismatched with hierarchical cultural expectations suggest that many organizational strategies in Ghana are failing not because of poor implementation alone but because they are fundamentally misaligned with the cultural assumptions of the workers they target.

This finding has significant implications for cross-cultural management theory. The assumption that management practices developed in Western individualistic, low-power-distance contexts can be transferred to non-Western contexts with only surface adaptation (language translation, local examples) is empirically unsupported by this study's findings. Deeper cultural adaptation rethinking the fundamental design of policies, training, and leadership models to align with Ubuntu communal values, hierarchical expectations, and relational work orientation may be necessary for strategy effectiveness. This deeper adaptation cannot be accomplished by expatriate consultants or headquarters HR teams working from a distance; it requires local co-design that takes Ghanaian workers' cultural frameworks as the starting point rather than as an obstacle to be overcome.

Theoretical Integration

Integrating the six themes through the study's theoretical frameworks yields a coherent account of why organizational strategies often fail to enhance work ethic in Ghanaian contexts. Social Constructionism explains that strategy effectiveness is not an inherent property of policies, training, or leadership models but is socially constructed through employees' collective interpretation of whether strategies are genuine, legitimate, and aligned with workplace realities. Ubuntu Philosophy explains the specific content of Ghanaian employees' evaluative frameworks: they evaluate strategies through culturally grounded expectations of relational recognition, communal solidarity, hierarchical respect, and accessible leadership. When strategies align with these expectations, employees socially construct them as legitimate and respond with genuine commitment. When strategies violate these expectations, employees socially construct them as alien, hypocritical, or disrespectful and respond with transactional compliance, strategic gaming, or withdrawal of discretionary effort.

This integrated framework suggests that the effectiveness of organizational strategies in Ghana cannot be evaluated by measuring compliance with policy requirements alone. Effectiveness must be evaluated by assessing whether strategies have been socially constructed as legitimate by employees and whether they align with or violate Ubuntu cultural values. Strategies that achieve high compliance but low genuine commitment, that employees follow while rolling their eyes internally, are not effective in the sense that organizations intend. They produce the appearance of work ethic without its substance.

10. CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the effectiveness of organizational strategies HR policies, training modules, and leadership styles designed to enhance work ethic and employee commitment in Ghanaian organizations. Through six focus groups with 42 participants across public, private, and multinational sectors in Accra, Tema, and Kumasi, six major themes emerged: the pervasive implementation gap between documented policy and enacted practice; transactional compliance as the dominant response to performance systems; training effectiveness as contingent on perceived authenticity rather than design quality; leadership accessibility and relational presence as central to generating genuine commitment; bureaucratic impersonality as alienating and counterproductive; and cultural misfit between Western HR models and Ubuntu communal values as a fundamental barrier to effectiveness.

The most significant contribution of this study is its demonstration that the effectiveness of organizational strategies cannot be assumed from policy design or investment level but must be evaluated through employees' lived experiences and collective sense-making. Strategies that look effective on paper policies with clear metrics, training modules with engaging content, leadership models validated in international research may be socially constructed by Ghanaian employees as illegitimate, hypocritical, or culturally alien, producing compliance without commitment and effort without engagement. The question for Ghanaian organizations is not whether they have strategies to enhance work ethic, but whether those strategies are designed, implemented, and adapted in ways that Ghanaian employees experience as genuine, respectful, and culturally congruent.

Ghana's work culture is not a problem to be solved by imported management models designed for different cultural contexts. It is a resource to be built upon. The Ubuntu communal values that participants described as central to their work motivation relational recognition, collective solidarity, accessible leadership are not barriers to organizational effectiveness but foundations for sustainable employee commitment. Organizations that build strategies upon these cultural foundations, rather than importing alien models that conflict with them, are more likely to achieve the genuine work ethic enhancement that currently remains elusive.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered for organizations operating in Ghana.

For HR Policy Design and Implementation: Move beyond documenting policies to ensuring implementation fidelity. A policy that is not enforced is worse than no policy; it delegitimizes the organization's commitments and teaches employees that organizational communication cannot be trusted. Conduct regular policy implementation audits that assess not only whether policies exist but also whether they are consistently applied across all employees and all levels of the organization. Establish transparent mechanisms for employees to report inconsistent policy application without fear of retaliation. Align reward systems with Ubuntu communal values by including team-based recognition alongside individual performance metrics. Performance ranking systems that pit colleagues against each other should be replaced or supplemented with systems that reward collective achievement and cooperative helping behaviour.

For Training Module Design and Delivery: Ensure that work ethic and values-based training is delivered in contexts where organizational leaders visibly model the values being taught. Training delivered in isolation from leadership behaviour change is likely to be socially constructed as a performative ritual. Include organizational leaders as active participants in training sessions, not only as opening speakers. Design training that acknowledges the real constraints and contradictions of workplace life rather than presenting idealized visions that cannot be realized. Follow training with structured reinforcement activities coaching, peer accountability groups, integration with performance discussions that maintain the training's salience beyond the session itself.

For Leadership Development and Practice: Prioritize leadership accessibility and relational presence as core leadership competencies, not optional soft skills. Leaders should be evaluated not only on technical and strategic performance but on their accessibility to subordinates, their knowledge of subordinate welfare, and their demonstrated care for employee development. Leadership development programmes should include modules on cultural intelligence and Ubuntu leadership, helping Ghanaian and expatriate leaders alike understand the relational expectations that Ghanaian employees bring to the leader-follower relationship. Organizations should consider that remote and hybrid work arrangements may reduce the relational accessibility that Ghanaian employees value; deliberate mechanisms for virtual relational connection should be designed and implemented.

For Multinational Corporations Operating in Ghana: Conduct systematic cultural adaptation of global HR policies before implementation in Ghana. Do not assume that policies effective in Western individualistic contexts will transfer effectively to Ghana's collectivist, Ubuntu cultural context. Engage Ghanaian employees and managers in co-

designing policy adaptations that preserve corporate objectives while aligning with local cultural values. Train expatriate managers specifically on Ghanaian cultural expectations regarding leadership accessibility, relational presence, and communal work orientation. Evaluate strategy effectiveness using culturally grounded metrics that assess not only compliance but also employees' social construction of strategies as legitimate and motivating.

For Policy Makers and National Development Planners: Support research and dissemination of culturally grounded HR practices that build upon Ghana's Ubuntu communal values rather than importing alien frameworks. Encourage business schools and HR professional bodies to develop curricula that centre Ghanaian and African management philosophies alongside international models. Recognize that national productivity and work ethic discourse should draw upon the cultural resources already present in Ghanaian communal traditions rather than framing these traditions as obstacles to be overcome in the name of modernization.

For Future Research: Conduct comparative studies examining strategy effectiveness across a wider range of Ghanaian organizations, including small and medium enterprises, informal sector organizations, and organizations in rural contexts not represented in this urban sample. Conduct longitudinal research tracing how strategy effectiveness perceptions evolve as employees gain organizational tenure and as organizations modify their policies over time. Conduct intervention studies that test specific culturally adapted strategies, for example, team-based recognition systems, leadership accessibility training, or implementation fidelity protocols, to establish causal evidence for the relationships identified qualitatively in this study. Research examining the intersection of gender, organizational level, and strategy effectiveness would add important dimensions to the findings presented here.

For Organizational Leaders and Managers: The most powerful strategy for enhancing work ethic may not be a new policy, training module, or incentive system. It may be simple and difficult at the same time: be present. Be accessible. Know your employees' names. Ask about their welfare. Listen when they speak. Advocate for them when they need support. Treat them as full human beings whose lives extend beyond the workplace. These relational practices, which Ubuntu philosophy has always known and which participants in this study consistently identified as central to their motivation, cannot be outsourced to HR or training consultants. They are the daily work of leadership. No policy or programme can substitute for them.

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