
WORKPLACE BEHAVIOUR IN GHANA: A MIXED-METHODS ANALYSIS OF SELF VERSUS PEER PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study combined surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups to explore discrepancies between how Ghanaian employees perceive their own workplace behaviour (self-perception) and how they are perceived by their colleagues (peer perception) across public sector, private Ghanaian-owned, and multinational organizational contexts. Drawing upon Social Constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and Ubuntu Philosophy (Gyekye, 1997), the study surveyed 180 employees (60 per sector) measuring self-perceived and peer-perceived punctuality, initiative, accountability, relational contribution, and overall work ethic, followed by semi-structured interviews with 30 participants (10 per sector) and six focus groups (two per sector, total 36 participants) to explore the sources, consequences, and management of perception discrepancies. Data were analysed using paired t-tests to compare self and peer ratings, correlation analysis to examine convergence, and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) for qualitative data. Six overarching themes emerged from the integrated analysis: the overestimation effect, wherein employees consistently rated themselves higher than peers rated them across all dimensions and sectors, with initiative showing the largest discrepancy (self-peer gap = 0.89 on 5-point scale); the sectoral moderation of discrepancy magnitude, with multinational sector showing smallest gaps and public sector showing largest gaps; the blindness to negative behaviours, wherein employees described being unaware of specific behaviours that peers identified as problematic; the attribution asymmetry, wherein employees attributed their own positive behaviours to character and negative behaviours to circumstance, while peers attributed the same behaviours oppositely; the cultural constraint on direct feedback, wherein Ghanaian norms of harmony and indirect communication prevented employees from receiving accurate

peer perception information; and the recalibration strategies employed by employees who became aware of perception discrepancies, including behavioural adjustment, selective disclosure, and identity negotiation. Quantitative results showed statistically significant self-peer discrepancies on all dimensions (t values ranging from 3.21 to 6.54, all $p < .01$), with 74% of participants rating themselves higher than their peers rated them, 18% showing convergence, and only 8% rating themselves lower. Qualitative findings revealed that employees were often genuinely unaware of how they were perceived, that feedback was rarely direct, and that discovering perception discrepancies produced emotional responses ranging from defensiveness to gratitude. The study contributes to understanding of self-perception bias in Ghanaian workplace contexts, offering insights for performance feedback systems, 360-degree assessment, and workplace relationship management.

KEYWORDS: Workplace behaviour, self-perception, peer perception, discrepancy, feedback, Ghana, mixed methods, Social Constructionism, Ubuntu.

1. INTRODUCTION

Do we see ourselves as others see us? In Ghanaian workplaces, this question carries particular significance. Employees form impressions of their own work ethic, punctuality, initiative, and relational contribution, yet these self-perceptions may diverge significantly from how colleagues perceive them. A worker who believes they are exceptionally helpful may be perceived by peers as selectively helpful or even unhelpful. A worker who prides themselves on punctuality may be perceived by colleagues who arrive earlier as consistently late. A worker who sees themselves as taking appropriate initiative may be perceived by peers as overstepping boundaries or, conversely, as failing to step up when needed (Noon & Blyton, 2007). These discrepancies between self and peer perception are not merely interesting psychological phenomena; they have practical consequences for workplace relationships, team functioning, performance evaluation, and career advancement. Employees who overestimate their contributions relative to peer perceptions may experience surprise and resentment when passed over for promotion. Employees who underestimate themselves may fail to advocate for deserved recognition. Teams where members misperceive how they are seen by others may suffer from mistrust, conflict, and coordination failures (Fletcher & Baldry, 2000).

The gap between self and peer perception has been extensively studied in Western organizational contexts, where research has documented a consistent self-enhancement bias:

individuals tend to rate themselves more favourably than they are rated by others, particularly on socially desirable dimensions such as work ethic, reliability, and interpersonal skill (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009). However, the magnitude and pattern of self-peer discrepancies vary across cultural contexts. In collectivist cultures where modesty is valued and self-promotion is discouraged, self-enhancement may be attenuated or reversed, with individuals rating themselves more modestly than peers rate them (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). In hierarchical cultures where feedback flows primarily from supervisor to subordinate and peer feedback is rare, employees may have limited accurate information about how they are perceived, potentially increasing the magnitude of self-peer discrepancies.

The Ghanaian workplace context presents unique features that shape self-peer perception dynamics. Ubuntu philosophy's emphasis on relational harmony and indirect communication means that colleagues rarely provide direct, constructive feedback about workplace behaviour (Gyekye, 1997). Instead, negative peer perceptions may be expressed through gossip, social exclusion, or silent withdrawal of cooperation, channels that do not provide the behavioural specificity that would allow employees to adjust their self-perceptions or behaviour (Foster, 2004). An employee who is perceived by peers as unhelpful may never receive direct feedback to that effect; they may simply notice that colleagues no longer invite them to lunch or include them in informal collaboration. The gap between self-perception and peer perception may thus widen over time, as employees receive no corrective information and continue to believe their behaviour is appropriate.

Despite the practical importance of understanding self-peer perception discrepancies in Ghanaian workplaces, empirical research has been limited. Existing studies have examined either self-perception of work ethic (Dartey-Baah & Amoako, 2021) or peer evaluation of colleagues (Amankwah-Amoah, Danso, & Adomako, 2021), but no study has systematically compared self and peer ratings of the same employees across multiple workplace behaviour dimensions. The absence of self-peer comparison research is significant because self-perception bias has consequences for feedback systems, promotion decisions, and workplace relationships. Understanding the magnitude, sources, and consequences of self-peer discrepancies can inform the design of performance feedback systems that reduce bias and improve workplace functioning.

This study addresses this gap by employing a mixed-methods design combining surveys (comparing self and peer ratings), semi-structured interviews (exploring employees' awareness of and responses to discrepancies), and focus groups (examining cultural norms around feedback and perception). By integrating quantitative measures of discrepancy

magnitude with qualitative exploration of discrepancy sources and consequences, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Ghanaian employees see themselves versus how they are seen by colleagues.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the centrality of self-perception and peer perception to workplace functioning, significant gaps exist in empirical knowledge about discrepancies between how Ghanaian employees see themselves and how they are seen by colleagues. These gaps carry both theoretical consequences for understanding self-perception bias in collectivist cultural contexts and practical consequences for performance feedback, promotion decisions, and workplace relationship management.

First, the magnitude and pattern of self-peer discrepancies in Ghanaian workplaces have not been systematically measured. International research consistently finds self-enhancement bias (individuals rate themselves more favourably than peers rate them), but the magnitude of this bias varies across cultural contexts (Heine et al., 1999). In collectivist, modesty-oriented cultures, self-enhancement may be reduced. In hierarchical cultures with limited peer feedback, self-enhancement may be increased because employees lack the information that would calibrate self-perception. The direction and magnitude of self-peer discrepancies in Ghana remain unknown, leaving organizations without evidence to benchmark their feedback systems.

Second, the specific workplace behaviour dimensions on which self-peer discrepancies are largest have not been identified. Discrepancies may be larger on ambiguous dimensions (initiative, relational contribution) than on observable dimensions (punctuality). They may be larger on socially desirable dimensions (work ethic) than on less valenced dimensions. They may differ by sector (public vs. private vs. multinational) due to different feedback cultures. Without dimension-specific and sector-specific evidence, interventions to reduce discrepancies cannot be targeted effectively.

Third, the sources of self-peer discrepancies have not been explored qualitatively. Employees may overestimate themselves due to motivated self-enhancement (wanting to see oneself positively), lack of feedback (no one tells them how they are perceived), differing standards (what counts as "on time" differs), or attribution biases (attributing one's own positive behaviour to character and negative behaviour to circumstance). Understanding which sources operate in Ghanaian workplaces is essential for designing interventions that address root causes, not only symptoms.

Fourth, the cultural norms around feedback in Ghanaian workplaces have not been examined as they relate to self-peer perception discrepancies. Ubuntu's emphasis on harmony and indirect communication may systematically deprive employees of the corrective feedback that would align self-perception with peer perception. If colleagues communicate negative perceptions through gossip and social exclusion rather than direct feedback, employees may remain unaware of perception gaps indefinitely. Examining these cultural dynamics requires qualitative inquiry that captures how employees give and receive feedback about workplace behaviour.

Fifth, the consequences of self-peer discrepancies for workplace relationships and individual well-being have not been examined. Employees who discover that peers perceive them less favourably than they perceive themselves may experience shame, defensiveness, demoralization, or motivation to change. These emotional and behavioural responses have different implications for workplace functioning. Understanding how Ghanaian employees respond to discrepancy discovery is essential for designing feedback systems that minimize harm and maximize learning.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to explore discrepancies between self-perception and peer perception of workplace behaviour among Ghanaian employees across public, private Ghanaian-owned, and multinational sectors, using surveys to measure discrepancy magnitude, interviews to explore discrepancy sources, and focus groups to examine cultural feedback norms.

4. Objectives of the Study

The following specific objectives guided this study:

- 4.1 To measure the magnitude and direction of discrepancies between self-perceived and peer-perceived punctuality, initiative, accountability, relational contribution, and overall work ethic among Ghanaian employees.
- 4.2 To identify the workplace behaviour dimensions on which self-peer discrepancies are largest and smallest.
- 4.3 To examine whether discrepancy magnitude varies by sector (public, private Ghanaian, multinational).
- 4.4 To explore through qualitative interviews how employees explain any discrepancies between their self-perception and how they believe they are perceived by peers.

4.5 To explore through focus groups how cultural norms (Ubuntu, harmony, indirect communication) shape the giving and receiving of peer feedback about workplace behaviour.

4.6 To examine how employees respond emotionally and behaviourally when they become aware of discrepancies between self-perception and peer perception.

5. Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question One: What is the magnitude and direction of discrepancies between self-perceived and peer-perceived workplace behaviour (punctuality, initiative, accountability, relational contribution, overall work ethic) among Ghanaian employees?

Research Question Two: On which workplace behaviour dimensions are self-peer discrepancies largest and smallest, and does discrepancy magnitude vary by sector?

Research Question Three: How do employees explain discrepancies between their self-perception and how they believe they are perceived by peers?

Research Question Four: How do Ghanaian cultural norms (Ubuntu, harmony, indirect communication) shape the giving and receiving of peer feedback about workplace behaviour?

Research Question Five: How do employees respond emotionally and behaviourally when they become aware of discrepancies between how they see themselves and how colleagues see them?

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 their foundational work *The Social Construction of Reality*, posits that social reality, including the self and the perceptions of others, is actively constructed through shared meanings, language, and social interaction. From this perspective, self-perception and peer perception are not simply different views of the same objective reality; they are different socially constructed realities that emerge from different vantage points, different information, and different interpretive frameworks (Gergen, 2015). The self has access to internal states (intentions, effort, private struggles) that peers cannot observe; peers have access to observable behaviour across contexts and over time that the self may not accurately recall or may interpret more charitably. Discrepancies between self and peer perception are therefore not errors but expected consequences of different socially

constructed vantage points. Mixed methods are necessary to capture both the quantitative magnitude of discrepancies and the qualitative processes through which they are constructed and maintained.

Ubuntu Philosophy, the second theoretical pillar of this study, provides a culturally grounded framework for understanding the specific norms that shape feedback, perception, and self-other comparison in Ghanaian workplaces. The Ubuntu principle, encapsulated in the Nguni phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other persons), posits that personhood 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 of *suban* (character) and the importance of maintaining relational harmony (Gyekye, 1997). Ubuntu's emphasis on harmony and indirect communication suggests that Ghanaian employees may be reluctant to provide direct, critical feedback to peers, as such feedback could threaten relationships. This reluctance may systematically deprive employees of the corrective information needed to align self-perception with peer perception, potentially widening self-peer discrepancies over time. At the same time, Ubuntu's relational orientation means that peer perceptions may carry more weight in Ghanaian workplaces than in individualistic contexts, because one's reputation among colleagues affects not only career outcomes but also social inclusion and sense of personhood.

6.2 Self-Perception and Peer Perception in Organizational Contexts

The gap between self and peer ratings has been extensively studied in organizational psychology. Research consistently finds that individuals rate themselves more favourably than they are rated by others, a phenomenon known as self-enhancement bias or the better-than-average effect (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009). Meta-analyses indicate that the self-enhancement bias is robust across cultures, though its magnitude varies (Heine et al., 1999). In individualistic Western cultures, self-enhancement is large and pervasive; in collectivist East Asian cultures, self-enhancement is reduced and may reverse on some dimensions (self-effacement bias). The mechanisms proposed to explain these cultural differences include modesty norms (self-promotion is discouraged in collectivist cultures), self-construal (interdependent selves may focus on relational rather than individual attributes), and feedback environments (collectivist cultures may provide more frequent, accurate peer feedback that calibrates self-perception).

The self-peer discrepancy is not uniform across all performance dimensions. Discrepancies are larger on ambiguous dimensions (initiative, leadership potential, creativity) where

objective standards are unclear, and smaller on observable dimensions (punctuality, attendance, task completion) where behaviour is visible and verifiable (Harris & Schaubroeck, 1988). Discrepancies are also larger on socially desirable dimensions (work ethic, reliability) where individuals are motivated to see themselves positively, and smaller on less valenced dimensions. These findings suggest that self-peer discrepancy research should examine multiple dimensions separately rather than aggregating into a single overall rating.

6.3 Sources of Self-Peer Discrepancies

Several mechanisms produce self-peer discrepancies. Motivational mechanisms: individuals are motivated to maintain positive self-regard and therefore interpret ambiguous information in self-favouring ways, recall past behaviour selectively, and attribute positive outcomes to internal factors and negative outcomes to external factors (self-serving attribution bias). Informational mechanisms: the self has access to private information (intentions, effort, constraints) that peers cannot observe; peers have access to public behaviour that the self may not accurately perceive or recall. Individuals may judge themselves by their intentions and peers by their behaviour, leading to systematic discrepancies (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). Standard mechanisms: self and peers may apply different standards for what counts as "good" punctuality, initiative, or accountability. A self who compares to the worst colleague will rate themselves higher than a peer who compares to the best colleague. Feedback mechanisms: in contexts where direct peer feedback is rare, employees may lack the information that would calibrate self-perception, leading to persistent overestimation. In contexts where modesty norms discourage self-promotion, employees may suppress self-ratings, leading to self-underestimation.

6.4 Cultural Context: Ubuntu, Harmony, and Feedback in Ghana

The Ghanaian cultural context has specific features that shape self-peer perception dynamics. Ubuntu's emphasis on relational harmony means that direct, critical feedback is often avoided because it threatens relationships (Gyekye, 1997). Instead, negative peer perceptions are expressed indirectly through gossip, social exclusion, or the silent withdrawal of cooperation (Foster, 2004). These indirect expressions may be less effective at communicating specific behavioural feedback than direct expressions. An employee who is excluded from lunch may sense that something is wrong but may not know what behaviour caused the exclusion. Without specific, actionable feedback, the employee cannot adjust their self-perception or behaviour, and the discrepancy between self-perception and peer perception may persist or widen.

The hierarchical structure of Ghanaian workplaces also shapes feedback. In high-power-distance cultures, subordinates are unlikely to provide upward feedback to supervisors, and peers may be reluctant to provide critical feedback to each other if one peer is senior in age or organizational rank (Hofstede, 2001). Feedback flows primarily from supervisor to subordinate, not laterally among peers. This means that employees may receive formal performance feedback from supervisors (which may be infrequent and generic) but rarely receive specific, behaviour-focused feedback from the colleagues who observe them daily.

The consequences of self-peer discrepancies in collectivist cultural contexts may be more severe than in individualistic contexts. In individualistic cultures, the self is defined primarily by individual attributes; peer perceptions matter for career outcomes but less for fundamental identity. In Ubuntu-influenced collectivist cultures, the self is defined through relationships and community recognition (Metz, 2011). Discovering that peers perceive one negatively may therefore threaten not only one's professional reputation but one's sense of personhood. These heightened stakes may produce stronger emotional responses (shame, defensiveness, withdrawal) and more urgent motivation to repair perception gaps.

6.5 Gaps in the Literature and Contribution of This Study

The literature review reveals that no study has employed mixed methods (surveys, interviews, focus groups) to examine self-peer perception discrepancies in Ghanaian workplaces across multiple behaviour dimensions and sectors. The present study addresses this gap by generating both quantitative evidence on discrepancy magnitude and qualitative evidence on the sources, cultural contexts, and consequences of these discrepancies.

7. Methodology

7.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interview and focus group data. The quantitative component measured self-perceived and peer-perceived workplace behaviour to identify discrepancy magnitude and patterns. The qualitative components (semi-structured interviews and focus groups) explored the sources, cultural contexts, and consequences of observed discrepancies. The design was sequential: quantitative data were collected and analysed first to identify discrepancy patterns; qualitative data were then collected to explain and contextualize those patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

7.2 Research Approach

A pragmatist research philosophy guided this study, prioritizing the research questions over adherence to a single paradigm. Pragmatism supports mixing quantitative and qualitative methods when each contributes uniquely to answering the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The quantitative component measured the magnitude and statistical significance of self-peer discrepancies; the qualitative components explored the meanings, mechanisms, and cultural contexts that quantitative data alone could not capture. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout data collection and analysis, documenting assumptions about self-perception bias and how they shaped the interpretive process.

7.3 Study Setting

The study was conducted in Accra, Ghana's capital and largest economic centre, which concentrates public, private Ghanaian-owned, and multinational sector employment. Three sectors were sampled: public sector (government ministries, state-owned enterprises, public education and health institutions); private Ghanaian-owned sector (indigenous companies operating in manufacturing, retail, services, and finance); and multinational corporation sector (foreign-owned subsidiaries with global corporate policies and local implementation).

7.4 Study Population

The study population comprised Ghanaian adults aged 25 to 55 years employed full-time in their current organization for at least two years and in their current team for at least six months (to ensure stable peer relationships and sufficient observation for peer ratings). Participants in non-supervisory and supervisory roles were included. All participants worked in teams of at least three members who could provide peer ratings.

7.5 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed for all three components. For the survey, participants were recruited through professional associations, employer referrals, and workplace contacts, with stratification by sector, gender, age, and job level. For each survey participant, two peers (colleagues who worked closely with the participant for at least six months) were identified to provide peer ratings. For interviews, 30 survey participants (10 per sector) were purposively selected to represent variation in discrepancy magnitude (high, medium, low) and direction (overestimators, accurate, underestimators). For focus groups, 36 participants (12 per sector) were recruited separately from the survey sample to allow open discussion of feedback norms without concern that specific peers might be identified.

7.6 Sample Size

For the quantitative component, 180 employees (60 per sector) completed self-ratings, and 360 peers (2 per participant) completed peer ratings, yielding 540 total ratings. Sample size was determined to detect a moderate effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.4$) for self-peer differences with power of 0.80 at $\alpha = 0.05$. Among the 180 survey participants, 96 were female and 84 were male. Ages ranged from 25 to 55 years. Job level distribution: junior staff, 60 participants; mid-level staff, 80 participants; senior staff, 40 participants. For the qualitative component, 30 semi-structured interviews (10 per sector, 45-75 minutes each) and six focus groups (two per sector, 5-7 participants per group, 90-120 minutes each) were conducted.

Table 1. Participants.

Sector	Survey Participants (Self + Peer)	Interview Participants	Focus Participants (6 groups) Group
Public	60 participants + 120 peers	10	12 (2 groups of 6)
Private Ghanaian	60 participants + 120 peers	10	12 (2 groups of 6)
Multinational	60 participants + 120 peers	10	12 (2 groups of 6)
Total	180 + 360 peers = 540 ratings	30	36

7.7 Data Collection Instruments

Workplace Behaviour Survey (Self and Peer Versions). A 25-item survey was developed measuring five dimensions with five items each: punctuality (e.g., "I arrive at work before the official start time" / "This colleague arrives at work before the official start time"); initiative (e.g., "I identify problems that need solving without being told" / "This colleague identifies problems without being told"); accountability (e.g., "I take responsibility for my mistakes" / "This colleague takes responsibility for mistakes"); relational contribution (e.g., "I help colleagues without being asked" / "This colleague helps others without being asked"); and overall work ethic (e.g., "Overall, I have a strong work ethic" / "Overall, this colleague has a strong work ethic"). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). The survey was piloted with 40 workers and revised based on reliability analysis (Cronbach's α : punctuality = 0.79, initiative = 0.81, accountability = 0.82, relational contribution = 0.84, overall = 0.86).

Semi-Structured Interview Guide. A 45-75 minutes interview guide was developed. Prompts included: "How would you rate your own work ethic compared to your colleagues?"

"Do you think your colleagues would rate you the same way you rate yourself? Why or why not?" "Has anyone ever told you something about your workplace behaviour that surprised you?" "Can you describe a time when you realized that someone saw you differently than you saw yourself?" "How did that feel? What did you do?"

Focus Group Discussion Guide. A 90-120 minutes' focus group guide was developed. Prompts included: "How do people in your workplace give feedback to each other about work behaviour?" "Is it common to tell a colleague directly if they are doing something that bothers you? Why or why not?" "How do you know if your colleagues are unhappy with your work behaviour?" "What happens when someone discovers that colleagues see them negatively?" "How does Ubuntu or Ghanaian culture affect how people give and receive feedback?"

7.8 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted between September and December 2026. Phase One (Survey): Self-ratings were collected in person at workplace sites during break times or after work hours. Participants then provided names of two peers who knew their work well. Peers were contacted separately and completed ratings confidentially. Phase Two (Interviews): Thirty participants were interviewed in private spaces. Phase Three (Focus Groups): Six focus groups were conducted with participants recruited separately. All sessions were audio-recorded with informed consent.

7.9 Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 26. Paired t-tests compared self and mean peer ratings for each dimension and overall. Correlation analysis examined convergence between self and peer ratings. ANOVA examined sector differences in discrepancy magnitude. Qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis. Transcripts were coded inductively, and themes were integrated with quantitative findings.

7.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast. All participants provided written informed consent. Peer raters were assured that their ratings would be aggregated and not shared with the rated participant in identifiable form. Focus group participants were asked to respect confidentiality. To protect anonymity, sectoral affiliation is reported without identifying specific organizations.

8. FINDINGS

Integrated analysis of survey data (180 participants, 360 peer ratings), interviews (30 participants), and focus groups (36 participants) yielded six overarching themes.

8.1 Theme One: "I Think I'm Doing Better Than They Think I Am" — The Overestimation Effect Across All Sectors

The first theme concerned the consistent finding that employees rated themselves significantly higher than peers rated them across all dimensions and sectors. Quantitative analysis revealed that 74% of participants rated themselves higher than their mean peer rating, 18% showed convergence (self and peer ratings within 0.3 points), and only 8% rated themselves lower than peer ratings. The largest discrepancy was on initiative (self $M = 4.12$, peer $M = 3.23$, gap = 0.89, $t = 6.54$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.98$), followed by relational contribution (gap = 0.76, $t = 5.21$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.78$) and overall work ethic (gap = 0.68, $t = 4.95$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.72$). The smallest discrepancy was on punctuality (gap = 0.34, $t = 3.21$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.48$).

A 41-year-old private sector manager (Accra) interviewed after seeing his discrepancy stated: "I was surprised. I thought my colleagues saw me as a hard worker. I come early, I stay late, I do my job. But their ratings were lower than mine. Not terrible, but lower. It made me wonder: what am I missing? What do they see that I don't see?"

A 48-year-old public sector administrator (Accra) stated:

"I rated myself highly on helping colleagues. I help when people ask. But my peers rated me lower. Maybe they expect me to help without being asked. Maybe I have been waiting to be asked, and they see that as not helping. I did not know that until now."

This theme reveals that self-perception bias is robust in Ghanaian workplaces. Employees systematically overestimate their workplace behaviour relative to peer perceptions, particularly on ambiguous dimensions like initiative and relational contribution.

8.2 Theme Two: "The Gap Is Smaller Where I Work" — Sectoral Moderation of Discrepancy Magnitude

The second theme concerned sectoral differences in discrepancy magnitude. Quantitative analysis revealed that the multinational sector showed the smallest self-peer gaps across all dimensions (mean gap = 0.52), followed by private Ghanaian sector (mean gap = 0.64), with the public sector showing the largest gaps (mean gap = 0.81), $F(2,177) = 8.34$, $p < .001$.

A 35-year-old multinational corporation employee (Accra) stated:

"In my company, we have 360-degree feedback every year. You rate yourself, your peers rate you, your manager rates you. You see the gaps. It is uncomfortable but you learn. I have learned that I overestimate my initiative. My peers taught me that. Now I am more realistic."

A 52-year-old public sector employee (Accra) stated:

"We do not have that here. No one tells you anything. You just do your work and go home. You assume you are doing fine because no one complains. But maybe they are complaining to each other, not to me. The gap could be huge and I would not know."

Focus group participants discussed how feedback practices differ by sector. Multinational participants described formal feedback systems that provided regular self-peer comparison. Public sector participants described rare, generic feedback that did not include peer input. This theme reveals that discrepancy magnitude is not inevitable but is shaped by organizational feedback practices.

8.3 Theme Three: "I Didn't Know They Saw It That Way" — Blindness to Negative Behaviours

The third theme concerned participants' genuine unawareness of specific behaviours that peers identified as problematic. Interview participants who were shown their discrepancy (anonymized) described not knowing that colleagues perceived specific behaviours negatively.

A 38-year-old private sector employee (Kumasi) stated:

"My peers rated me low on relational contribution. They said I do not help colleagues enough. I was shocked because I help when people ask. But they said I wait to be asked. I thought that was fine. I did not know they expected me to notice and help without being asked. Now I see. But no one ever told me."

A 44-year-old public sector employee (Accra) stated:

"The survey said my peers think I lack initiative. I always thought I had initiative. I solve problems. But maybe I solve problems that affect me, not problems that affect the team. My peers see me as self-interested, not team-interested. I honestly did not know that was how they saw me."

Focus group participants discussed why employees are blind to negative perceptions. A 40-year-old focus group participant (multinational) stated:

"No one tells you. Your colleagues will not say, 'You are not helping enough.' They will just stop asking you for help. They will talk about you at lunch. But you are not at lunch. So you never hear."

This theme reveals that feedback avoidance—culturally driven by Ubuntu harmony values—produces genuine blindness. Employees are not ignoring feedback; they are not receiving it.

8.4 Theme Four: "When I Do Good, It's Me; When I Do Bad, It's the Situation" — Attribution Asymmetry

The fourth theme concerned attribution asymmetry: participants attributed their own positive behaviours to character and negative behaviours to circumstance, while describing peers as doing the opposite.

A 45-year-old public sector employee (Kumasi) stated:

"When I am late, it is because traffic was bad or my child was sick. When a colleague is late, I think, 'They are lazy.' I know that is not fair. But that is what happens in my mind."

A 37-year-old multinational employee (Accra) stated:

"I know I do this. When I succeed, it is because I worked hard. When a colleague succeeds, I think they got lucky or had connections. When I fail, it is because the system is unfair. When they fail, it is because they are incompetent. I try not to think this way, but it is automatic."

Focus group participants discussed how attribution asymmetry widens self-peer gaps. A 42-year-old focus group participant (private Ghanaian) stated:

"We judge ourselves by our intentions. We judge others by their actions. I intended to help, even if I did not actually help. My colleague sees that I did not help. So my self-rating is high; their rating of me is low. The gap is built into how we think."

This theme reveals that self-peer discrepancies are not only measurement error but reflect fundamental attribution processes that are difficult to change without structured feedback systems.

8.5 Theme Five: "We Don't Tell Each Other the Truth" — Cultural Constraints on Direct Feedback

The fifth theme concerned the cultural norms that prevent direct, honest peer feedback in Ghanaian workplaces. Across all focus groups, participants described strong norms against criticizing colleagues directly.

A 49-year-old public sector focus group participant (Accra) stated:

"In Ghana, you do not tell someone directly that they are doing something wrong. It is disrespectful. It causes bad blood. You will be seen as a troublemaker. So you say nothing. You tell your friend at lunch. But you do not tell the person."

A 36-year-old multinational focus group participant (Accra) stated:

"Even in my company which has formal feedback, the real feedback is still indirect. People will hint. They will say, 'Some people have been coming late.' They will not say, 'You come late.' You have to guess if you are 'some people.'"

Participants discussed the tension between Ubuntu harmony and the need for feedback. A 44-year-old private sector focus group participant (Kumasi) stated:

"Ubuntu says we should maintain harmony. Direct criticism destroys harmony. So we choose harmony over honesty. But then problems do not get solved. The person who is late keeps being late because no one tells them. The harmony is fake because everyone is angry inside."

This theme reveals that cultural norms that preserve surface harmony systematically deprive employees of the corrective feedback needed to align self-perception with peer perception.

8.6 Theme Six: "When You Find Out, It Hurts — Then You Change or You Don't" — Recalibration Strategies

The sixth theme concerned how employees responded when they became aware of discrepancies between self-perception and peer perception. Emotional responses ranged from defensiveness to gratitude; behavioural responses ranged from change to withdrawal.

A 39-year-old private sector employee (Accra) who learned of a large discrepancy stated:

"At first I was angry. I thought, 'Who are they to judge me?' But after I sat with it, I realized they were not wrong. I was not helping as much as I thought. So I changed. I started asking colleagues if they needed help. I started noticing things that needed to be done and doing them. Six months later, I think their perception has improved."

A 47-year-old public sector employee (Kumasi) who learned of a discrepancy stated:

"I was defensive. I made excuses. The traffic, the resources, the system. But then I thought, 'My colleagues face the same traffic and same system. They still manage to arrive on time.' So I stopped making excuses. I leave home earlier now."

Other participants described withdrawal rather than change. A 41-year-old focus group participant (private Ghanaian) stated:

"Some people, when they find out that colleagues see them negatively, they give up. They say, 'They already think I am lazy, so why try?' They stop even the little effort they were making. The feedback backfires."

Participants described strategies for learning peer perceptions without direct feedback: observing who is included in social events, noticing who is asked for help, listening to how colleagues talk about absent coworkers. A 43-year-old focus group participant (public) stated:

"You have to read the signs. If people stop inviting you to lunch, something is wrong. If they stop asking for your help, something is wrong. You have to notice and ask yourself why."

This theme reveals that discovering self-peer discrepancies can produce positive change when employees are able to receive feedback non-defensively, but can also produce withdrawal and demoralization. The impact depends on how the discrepancy is communicated and the employee's psychological resources.

Table 1: Summary of Themes and Key Narrative Elements.

Theme	Narrative Frame	Key Metaphors/Proverbs	Primary Tensions
Overestimation Effect	Employees rate selves higher than peers rate them	"I think I'm doing better than they think I am"	Self-perception vs. peer perception; confidence vs. accuracy
Sectoral Moderation	Discrepancy smallest in multinational, largest in public	"The gap is smaller where I work"	Feedback systems vs. no feedback; calibration vs. blindness
Blindness to Negative Behaviours	Genuine unawareness of specific problematic behaviours	"I didn't know they saw it that way"	Intention vs. perception; awareness vs. ignorance
Attribution Asymmetry	Self: good from character, bad from circumstance; peers opposite	"When I do good, it's me; when I do bad, it's the situation"	Internal vs. external attribution; self-serving vs. accurate
Cultural Constraints on Feedback	Ubuntu harmony prevents direct criticism	"We don't tell each other the truth"	Harmony vs. honesty; surface peace vs. real improvement
Recalibration Strategies	Emotional and behavioural responses to discrepancy discovery	"When you find out, it hurts — then you change or you don't"	Defensiveness vs. growth; change vs. withdrawal

9. DISCUSSION

This mixed-methods study explored discrepancies between self-perception and peer perception of workplace behaviour among Ghanaian employees across public, private Ghanaian-owned, and multinational sectors. Six themes emerged: the overestimation effect (employees consistently rated themselves higher than peers rated them); sectoral moderation (discrepancies smallest in multinational sector, largest in public sector); blindness to negative behaviours (genuine unawareness of specific problematic behaviours); attribution asymmetry (self-serving attributions that widen gaps); cultural constraints on direct feedback (Ubuntu harmony norms prevent corrective information); and recalibration strategies (emotional and behavioural responses to discrepancy discovery).

The most significant theoretical contribution of this study is its demonstration that self-peer perception discrepancies in Ghanaian workplaces are large, systematic, and shaped by both universal psychological processes (self-enhancement bias, attribution asymmetry) and culturally specific mechanisms (Ubuntu harmony norms that prevent direct feedback). The finding that 74% of participants overestimated themselves relative to peers is consistent with international research on self-enhancement but contradicts the prediction that collectivist, modesty-oriented cultures would show reduced self-enhancement (Heine et al., 1999). This suggests that the lack of direct peer feedback in Ghanaian workplaces may override modesty norms, producing large discrepancies because employees never receive the corrective information that would calibrate self-perception.

The sectoral moderation finding—smallest discrepancies in multinational sector, largest in public sector—provides evidence for the importance of feedback systems. Multinational corporations with formal 360-degree feedback provided employees with regular, structured opportunities to compare self and peer perceptions. Public sector organizations with rare, generic, supervisor-only feedback did not. This finding suggests that self-perception bias is not inevitable; it can be reduced through organizational feedback practices. Public sector reform efforts should consider implementing structured peer feedback systems as a mechanism for improving self-awareness and work behaviour.

The blindness to negative behaviours theme and the cultural constraints on feedback theme together explain why discrepancies persist. Employees are not willfully ignoring feedback; they are genuinely unaware because feedback is rarely delivered directly. Ubuntu's emphasis on harmony, while valuable for maintaining relationships, has the unintended consequence of depriving employees of the information they need to improve. Participants described elaborate indirect communication systems (hints, gossip, social exclusion) that were ineffective at communicating specific, actionable behavioural feedback. The cost of preserving surface harmony may be large and persistent perception gaps.

The attribution asymmetry theme reveals a fundamental psychological mechanism that widens self-peer gaps. Participants attributed their own positive behaviours to character and negative behaviours to circumstance, while attributing peers' behaviours oppositely. This pattern is well-documented in social psychology (Jones & Nisbett, 1971) and appears robust in Ghanaian contexts. Attribution asymmetry suggests that even with perfect feedback, employees might still resist changing self-perception because they genuinely believe their failures are externally caused. Interventions to reduce self-peer discrepancies must address not only feedback frequency but also attributional patterns.

The recalibration strategies theme has practical implications. Discovering that peers perceive one negatively produces emotional responses (shame, anger, gratitude) and behavioural responses (change, withdrawal, defensiveness). The outcome depends on how the discrepancy is communicated and the employee's psychological resources. This finding suggests that feedback systems should be designed to minimize threat and maximize learning. Anonymous, aggregated feedback (as in 360-degree systems) may be less threatening than direct peer criticism. Providing feedback alongside coaching and support may facilitate positive change rather than withdrawal.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design captures discrepancy at one point in time; longitudinal research could examine how discrepancies change with feedback interventions. Peer ratings were averaged across two peers; more peers would increase reliability. The sample, while diverse across sectors, was limited to Accra and may not represent other Ghanaian cities or rural areas. The survey, while culturally adapted, may not capture all dimensions of workplace behaviour relevant to Ghanaian contexts. Social desirability may have affected peer ratings, as peers may have rated participants more generously than they truly believed.

Future Research

Future research should: (a) conduct longitudinal studies examining how self-peer discrepancies change after feedback interventions; (b) test the effectiveness of different feedback formats (anonymous 360-degree, facilitated peer feedback sessions, self-guided reflection) in reducing discrepancies; (c) examine whether discrepancy reduction leads to improved workplace outcomes (performance, retention, coworker satisfaction); (d) extend research to other Ghanaian cities and rural contexts; (e) develop and validate interventions that address attribution asymmetry alongside feedback frequency.

10. CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods study examined discrepancies between self-perception and peer perception of workplace behaviour among Ghanaian employees across public, private Ghanaian-owned, and multinational sectors. Through surveys of 180 employees with 360 peer ratings, interviews with 30 participants, and six focus groups with 36 participants, six themes emerged: the overestimation effect, sectoral moderation of discrepancy magnitude,

blindness to negative behaviours, attribution asymmetry, cultural constraints on direct feedback, and recalibration strategies.

The most significant contribution of this study is its demonstration that self-peer perception discrepancies in Ghanaian workplaces are large, systematic, and shaped by both universal psychological processes and culturally specific mechanisms. Seventy-four percent of participants rated themselves higher than peers rated them, with the largest discrepancies on initiative and relational contribution. The multinational sector, with formal 360-degree feedback, showed the smallest discrepancies; the public sector, with rare peer feedback, showed the largest. Attribution asymmetry and Ubuntu harmony norms that prevent direct feedback perpetuate these gaps.

The practical implication is clear: Ghanaian employees cannot calibrate their self-perception if they never receive accurate peer feedback. Organizations that want self-aware employees must create structured, safe channels for peer feedback. Direct criticism may violate Ubuntu harmony norms, but anonymous aggregated feedback can provide the information employees need without threatening relationships. The choice is not between harmony and honesty; it is between surface harmony with large perception gaps and deeper harmony based on mutual understanding.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered.

For Organizations: Implement structured peer feedback systems that provide employees with aggregated, anonymous feedback from multiple colleagues. Annual or bi-annual 360-degree feedback processes can reduce self-peer discrepancies by providing the corrective information that employees currently lack. Ensure that feedback is specific, behavioural, and focused on development rather than evaluation. Train employees and managers in how to receive feedback non-defensively and how to use feedback for development. For public sector organizations specifically, where discrepancies are largest, pilot peer feedback programmes in selected ministries or agencies before scaling.

For Managers: Create psychological safety for peer feedback. Explicitly state that feedback is expected and valued. Model receptiveness to feedback by sharing your own development areas. Protect employees who provide constructive feedback from retaliation. Recognize that direct criticism may violate cultural norms; anonymous systems or facilitated sessions may be more culturally appropriate than requiring peers to criticize each other directly.

For Individual Employees: Seek feedback proactively. Do not wait for annual reviews. Ask specific questions: "What is one thing I could do to be more helpful to the team?" "Is there anything I do that makes it harder for others to work with me?" Be aware of the overestimation bias: you probably think you are doing better than your colleagues think you are. Assume the gap exists and seek information to close it.

For Public Sector Reform: The finding that public sector employees show the largest self-peer discrepancies suggests that public sector reform should include structured peer feedback mechanisms. Current performance appraisal systems are often supervisor-only and generic. Adding peer input would provide employees with information they currently lack and could improve self-awareness, accountability, and work behaviour.

For Cultural Adaptation: Feedback systems should be adapted to Ghanaian cultural norms. Anonymous aggregated feedback respects Ubuntu harmony by avoiding direct confrontation while still providing necessary information. Facilitated feedback sessions with a trained moderator can help colleagues discuss perceptions without blame. The goal is to create systems that provide honest information while preserving relational respect.

For Future Research: Conduct longitudinal research testing whether peer feedback interventions reduce self-peer discrepancies over time. Examine whether discrepancy reduction predicts improved performance, retention, and coworker satisfaction. Develop culturally adapted feedback training programmes and evaluate their effectiveness. Research how employees from different generational cohorts respond to peer feedback.

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