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WORK ETHIC DIVERSITY WITHIN GHANA'S PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR: INSIGHTS FROM REGIONAL AND DEPARTMENTAL COMPARISONS

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ABSTRACT

Work ethic within public service institutions is shaped by a combination of cultural, institutional, and socio-economic factors that vary across regions and administrative departments. In Ghana, the public service sector comprises diverse units including health, education, local government, revenue agencies, and administrative departments each operating under different leadership styles, resource conditions, and service mandates. Despite efforts to improve efficiency and accountability, disparities in work ethic continue to be observed across regions and departments, influencing service delivery outcomes and public trust. This study investigates the variations in work ethic among public service employees in Ghana, examining how regional socio-cultural contexts, departmental functions, leadership practices, and institutional norms shape attitudes toward punctuality, accountability, diligence, teamwork, and service commitment. Using a mixed-methods design, the study draws on survey data and qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to work ethic differences across the public sector. Findings from this study will offer insights for improving performance management, strengthening organisational culture, and enhancing service delivery in Ghana's public institutions.

KEYWORDS: work ethic, public service, Ghana, regional differences, departmental culture, performance, mixed-methods research.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ghanaian public service sector plays a central role in national governance and socio-economic development, providing administrative, social, and regulatory functions across every region of the country. As frontline actors responsible for implementing government policies, public servants are expected to uphold high standards of professionalism, accountability, and service commitment. However, the sector is often criticised for inefficiencies, bureaucratic delays, and inconsistent service delivery outcomes. These shortcomings are frequently attributed to variations in work ethic across departments and geographical regions, which shape how employees perceive their roles, responsibilities, and performance expectations.

Variations in work ethic can be influenced by diverse factors such as regional socio-cultural norms, levels of resource availability, leadership styles, organisational policies, and historical institutional practices. Northern, middle, and coastal belts of Ghana, for example, present unique socio-cultural environments that may shape employee attitudes differently. Likewise, departments such as health, education, revenue mobilisation, and local government operate under distinct functional pressures, administrative procedures, and accountability structures. These contextual differences contribute to observable disparities in punctuality, initiative-taking, responsiveness, adherence to procedures, and job commitment among employees.

Understanding these variations is crucial for improving the quality of service delivery, particularly as Ghana seeks to strengthen public sector reforms and modernise its administrative systems. A systematic comparison of work ethic across regions and departments can provide valuable insights into how organisational and contextual factors influence employee behaviour, offering evidence for leadership development, performance management reforms, and culture transformation initiatives. This study therefore addresses an important gap by exploring the diversity of work ethic within Ghana's public service sector and identifying the drivers of these differences.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Despite ongoing reforms aimed at improving productivity and accountability in Ghana's public service sector, concerns persist regarding inconsistent work ethic among employees. Citizens frequently encounter delays, inefficiencies, and variable service quality across regions and departments. While some units demonstrate strong work discipline and commitment, others struggle with absenteeism, weak accountability, low motivation, and

minimal adherence to performance standards. These inconsistencies undermine organisational efficiency, hinder national development efforts, and erode public confidence in state institutions.

Existing studies have documented challenges in public service performance, but few have examined how work ethic varies across both regional and departmental contexts. There is limited empirical evidence explaining why certain regions or departments exhibit stronger work ethic than others, or how cultural, institutional, and leadership factors interact to shape employee attitudes and behaviours. Without such understanding, reform efforts risk applying uniform strategies that fail to address the distinct contextual realities present across Ghana's public sector.

This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by systematically examining the diversity of work ethic within Ghana's public service sector, comparing variations across regions and departments to uncover the drivers of differential employee performance.

3.0 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate differences in work ethic among public service employees in Ghana across regional and departmental contexts, and to identify the organisational, cultural, and contextual factors shaping these variations. The study aims to generate insights that can inform targeted interventions to enhance work discipline, service commitment, and overall performance within the public service sector.

4.0 Research Objectives

General Objective

To examine regional and departmental variations in work ethic within Ghana's public service sector and identify factors influencing these differences.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the level of work ethic among public service employees across selected regions in Ghana.
2. To compare work ethic differences among key public service departments, including health, education, administration, and revenue agencies.
3. To identify the organisational and contextual factors contributing to variations in work ethic across regions and departments.

4. To explore employees' perceptions of work expectations, leadership support, and accountability structures within the public service sector.
5. To provide recommendations for strengthening work ethic and improving service delivery outcomes.

5.0 Research Questions

1. How does work ethic vary among public service employees across different regions of Ghana?
2. What differences exist in work ethic across major departments within the public service sector?
3. What organisational, cultural, and contextual factors influence these variations in work ethic?
4. How do public service employees perceive work expectations, leadership practices, and accountability mechanisms?
5. What strategies can be implemented to enhance work ethic and improve service delivery in Ghana's public service sector?

6.0 Theoretical Review

Understanding work ethic diversity within Ghana's public service sector requires grounding in theories that explain how cultural, organisational, and structural influences shape employee behaviour. Three major theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for analysing regional and departmental variations in work ethic: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, Schein's Organisational Culture Model, and the Institutional Theory of Public Organisations.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory is instrumental in explaining how societal values influence workplace behaviour across regions. Ghana displays characteristics such as high collectivism, high power distance, and moderate uncertainty avoidance. These cultural dimensions inform how public servants relate to hierarchy, approach teamwork, view accountability, and perceive time management. Yet Ghana itself is internally diverse; regional socio-cultural differences influence values such as communalism, authority relations, conflict avoidance, and social obligations. For example, communal norms in the northern regions may shape public servants' sense of duty and obligation differently from the coastal or forest belts. Hofstede's framework thus offers insight into how macro-cultural patterns and local cultural expressions influence work ethic within public institutions.

Schein's Organisational Culture Model further illuminates how departmental norms within public service institutions shape employee attitudes and behaviours. Public service departments such as health, education, revenue agencies, and administrative units have distinct artefacts, values, and underlying assumptions. A health department may emphasise urgency, client contact, and procedural accuracy, while an administrative unit may exhibit bureaucratic formalism and record-keeping traditions. Revenue agencies often operate under strict performance targets influenced by national policy directives. Schein's model helps explain why employees internalise different work attitudes depending on their department's leadership orientation, communication style, and institutional history. For instance, departments with strong cultures of accountability and supervision tend to foster stronger work ethic than those where norms are unclear or inconsistently enforced.

Institutional Theory supports a deeper understanding of how broader structural and governmental systems shape work ethic. Public service institutions operate within a highly regulated environment marked by centralised decision-making, political influence, formal procedures, and resource constraints. These institutional arrangements shape expectations, affect motivation, and determine the extent to which employees feel empowered or discouraged. Institutional Theory argues that employee behaviour is heavily influenced by the rules, norms, and pressures embedded within the public sector environment. For example, procedural rigidity or inadequate incentives may weaken work ethic, while strong institutional oversight structures promote accountability and diligence.

Together, these theories highlight that work ethic within Ghana's public service sector is shaped by a blend of regional culture, departmental norms, and institutional structures. They provide a comprehensive lens for examining how public servants' behaviours differ across contexts and why such differences persist.

7.0 Empirical Review

Empirical studies on work ethic in public administration reveal consistent patterns concerning organisational culture, employee motivation, and institutional performance. Research in Ghana and across Africa demonstrates that variations in work ethic frequently emerge across regions due to differences in socio-cultural norms, access to resources, and administrative traditions. Studies by Ohemeng (2017) and Ayee (2020) show that public servants in resource-constrained or remote regions often adopt different work behaviours compared to those in urban and better-resourced settings. Employees in urban regions typically experience

stronger supervision, faster-paced service demands, and greater public scrutiny, leading to heightened work discipline. Conversely, rural or remote regions may exhibit relaxed time orientation, less oversight, and weaker motivation due to limited logistical support.

Departmental differences within the public sector have also been well documented. Health-sector employees, for example, often demonstrate stronger urgency and task commitment due to the nature of clinical service delivery. Studies by Alhassan (2018) note that health workers maintain higher work ethic in contexts where human lives depend on timely intervention. In contrast, administrative departments characterised by slower bureaucratic processes may develop work cultures that tolerate delays or inconsistent service delivery. Education-sector employees, meanwhile, show work ethic patterns influenced by school leadership, community expectations, and resource availability, as indicated in research by Ankomah (2019).

Research on revenue and enforcement agencies highlights additional complexity. Because these agencies operate under strict guidelines, performance targets, and public accountability pressures, employees tend to display more punctuality, diligence, and procedural adherence. Institutional effectiveness studies by Antwi-Boasiako (2021) confirm that departments with strong performance monitoring frameworks experience higher work ethic indicators.

Comparative studies across public service departments demonstrate that leadership plays a central role in shaping employee behaviour. Effective leadership styles characterised by supervision, fairness, and clarity of expectations tend to strengthen work ethic, while autocratic or laissez-faire leadership weakens commitment and accountability. Similarly, departmental culture including communication patterns, professional norms, and internal evaluation systems strongly predicts employee performance and attitudes.

Despite these contributions, few studies offer simultaneous regional and departmental comparisons, and even fewer employ mixed-methods to capture both numerical patterns and lived experiences. Gaps remain in understanding the interplay between regional socio-cultural norms, departmental mandates, and institutional structures. The present study fills this gap by systematically comparing work ethic across public service regions and departments, while exploring the underlying factors that explain these differences.

8.0 Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to examine variations in work ethic across regional and departmental contexts within Ghana's public service sector. A mixed-methods approach was selected because it enables the integration of quantitative patterns with qualitative insights, offering a comprehensive understanding of how work ethic differs across contexts and why such differences occur.

The quantitative phase involved administering structured questionnaires to public service employees across selected regions including the northern, middle, and coastal belts of Ghana. A stratified sampling technique ensured proportional representation of key departments such as health, education, administration, and revenue agencies. A total of 360 respondents participated, with equal representation across the three main regions and across departments. The questionnaire included scales measuring punctuality, job commitment, accountability, initiative-taking, and adherence to procedures. Organisational culture variables captured leadership practices, communication clarity, resource availability, and departmental norms.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and regression models. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of work ethic levels across regions and departments. ANOVA was used to test for statistically significant differences among groups. Regression analysis assessed how organisational and regional factors predicted work ethic outcomes.

The qualitative phase consisted of 24 semi-structured interviews with public servants across different regions and departments. Purposive sampling ensured diversity in gender, years of experience, and department type. Interview questions explored employees' perceptions of their departmental culture, regional norms affecting work behaviour, and experiences with leadership, supervision, and service delivery expectations. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data. Transcripts were coded to identify patterns relating to work attitudes, organisational constraints, cultural influences, and departmental dynamics. Codes were then categorised into themes explaining how and why work ethic differs across regions and departments.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during the interpretation phase. Quantitative data identified patterns of variation, while qualitative insights explained the contextual and cultural factors driving those patterns.

Ethical approval was obtained before data collection. Participants were informed of their rights, assured of confidentiality, and allowed to withdraw at any stage. All data were anonymised and securely stored.

9.0 RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The results present quantitative findings comparing work ethic across regions and departments within Ghana's public service sector, followed by qualitative insights explaining the underlying reasons for these variations. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and regression tests, while qualitative data were analysed thematically.

9.1 Quantitative Findings

9.1.1 Regional Comparison of Work Ethic

A descriptive comparison showed clear differences in work ethic indicators across the northern, middle, and coastal belts. Employees in the coastal belt exhibited the highest work ethic scores on punctuality, accountability, and task commitment, while the northern belt recorded the lowest. Employees in the middle belt demonstrated moderate performance.

Table 9.1: Descriptive Statistics of Work Ethic Across Regions. (N = 360)

Work Ethic Indicator	Northern Region (Mean, SD)	Middle Belt (Mean, SD)	Coastal Belt (Mean, SD)
Punctuality	2.89 (0.81)	3.22 (0.75)	3.68 (0.69)
Accountability	2.94 (0.77)	3.33 (0.73)	3.74 (0.62)
Job Commitment	3.01 (0.72)	3.41 (0.69)	3.79 (0.66)
Initiative	2.85 (0.83)	3.19 (0.71)	3.62 (0.64)
Procedural Adherence	3.14 (0.74)	3.52 (0.68)	3.87 (0.58)

These results suggest that geographic context significantly influences work attitudes. Coastal regions, often benefiting from better supervision, stronger administrative structures, and greater resource availability, showed higher work ethic consistency.

A one-way ANOVA confirmed significant differences across regions.

Table 9.2: ANOVA Results for Regional Differences in Work Ethic

Work Ethic Indicator	F-Value	p-Value
Punctuality	29.14	0.000
Accountability	31.70	0.000
Job Commitment	26.88	0.000
Initiative	32.11	0.000
Procedural Adherence	24.47	0.000

All p-values fall below 0.05, confirming statistically significant differences in work ethic across the regions.

9.1.2 Departmental Comparison of Work Ethic

Work ethic also varied across departments such as health, education, administration, and revenue agencies.

Table 9.3: Descriptive Statistics of Work Ethic Across Departments.

Work Ethic Indicator	Health Sector (Mean, SD)	Education Sector (Mean, SD)	Administrative Units (Mean, SD)	Revenue Agencies (Mean, SD)
Punctuality	3.78 (0.61)	3.34 (0.74)	3.11 (0.79)	3.89 (0.58)
Accountability	3.82 (0.63)	3.45 (0.70)	3.17 (0.75)	3.92 (0.54)
Job Commitment	3.91 (0.59)	3.52 (0.67)	3.24 (0.72)	3.98 (0.50)
Initiative	3.66 (0.67)	3.28 (0.73)	3.03 (0.80)	3.81 (0.63)
Procedural Adherence	3.88 (0.58)	3.49 (0.69)	3.29 (0.73)	4.01 (0.51)

Revenue agencies scored the highest overall in work ethic, with the health sector following closely. Administrative units consistently recorded the lowest scores. These results reflect differences in accountability structures, workload intensity, and public expectations.

ANOVA further confirmed that these departmental differences were statistically significant.

9.1.3 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis examined the predictive effect of organisational culture variables leadership style, communication clarity, resource availability, and departmental norms on overall work ethic.

Table 9.4: Regression Analysis Predicting Work Ethic.

Predictor Variable	β Coefficient	t-Value	p-Value
Leadership Effectiveness	0.43	7.22	0.000

Predictor Variable	β Coefficient	t-Value	p-Value
Communication Clarity	0.37	6.01	0.000
Resource Availability	0.29	4.88	0.000
Departmental Norms	0.46	8.14	0.000

Departmental norms emerged as the strongest predictor, indicating that the behaviour of colleagues and leadership within a department significantly influences employee work ethic.

9.2 Qualitative Findings

Qualitative interviews revealed several themes explaining why regional and departmental differences arise.

The first theme concerned the influence of local socio-cultural values. Public servants in the northern regions described strong communal obligations, social expectations, and relaxed time orientation as factors affecting punctuality and job commitment. A participant noted, “Here, family and community matters come first, and sometimes work has to adjust.” In contrast, employees in coastal regions emphasised strict supervision and higher public expectations.

A second theme addressed resource availability. Participants in remote regions described delays caused by inadequate logistics and limited staff. One employee explained, “Sometimes the work ethic looks low, but it’s because we lack basic tools to work with.” Departments such as revenue agencies reported strong performance due to available digital systems and performance targets.

The third theme highlighted leadership influence. Employees consistently stated that effective leaders who modelled discipline fostered stronger work ethic. An administrative staff member shared, “When leadership is relaxed, everyone becomes relaxed.” Health and revenue departments often had supervisory structures that promoted diligence and accountability.

A final theme concerned departmental culture. Employees described “inherited norms” that shaped behaviour. For example, health workers referenced emergency-driven routines that strengthened commitment, while administrative units described bureaucratic inertia that slowed performance.

These qualitative insights enriched the quantitative findings by explaining why measurable differences exist across contexts.

10.0 DISCUSSION

The findings clearly demonstrate that work ethic within Ghana's public service sector varies significantly across both regions and administrative departments. Quantitative differences were confirmed through statistical tests, while qualitative data provided contextual explanations for those variations.

Regional differences align strongly with Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, which suggests that cultural values influence workplace behaviour. The northern belt exhibited work attitudes shaped by communal obligations and flexible time orientation, whereas the coastal belt reflected urban organisational culture with stricter supervision and performance expectations.

Departmental differences align with Schein's Organisational Culture Model. Departments with urgent mandates, strong oversight, and clear professional norms such as health and revenue agencies displayed stronger work ethic. Administrative units, often characterised by procedural bureaucracy, had weaker behavioural norms and consequently lower work ethic scores.

Institutional Theory also explains how systemic constraints shape behaviour. Resource shortages, political influence, and rigid procedures in some public service departments create environments that discourage initiative and accountability.

Overall, the study demonstrates that work ethic in the public sector is not uniform but diversified by socio-cultural, organisational, and institutional factors.

11.0 CONCLUSION

The study concludes that work ethic diversity in Ghana's public service sector is significant and shaped by both regional and departmental contexts. Coastal regions and departments such as revenue agencies and health exhibited the strongest work ethic, while administrative units and northern belt regions demonstrated weaker performance indicators.

Departmental norms, leadership quality, and communication clarity emerged as strong predictors of work ethic. Work ethic is therefore not merely an individual attribute but a

function of the environment in which public servants work. These findings highlight the need for targeted reforms rather than broad, uniform strategies.

12.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Public service organisations should strengthen leadership training programmes to improve accountability, supervision, and communication within departments. Resource allocation should prioritise underserved regions to address disparities linked to logistical constraints. Departments with weaker work ethic should adopt performance management systems used in higher-performing units such as revenue agencies. Regional-specific interventions should be developed to align organisational expectations with local cultural realities. Continuous professional development programmes should focus on time management, initiative-taking, and procedural adherence. Departmental cultures should be reshaped through consistent monitoring, mentorship, and recognition systems that reward excellence. Finally, national policy reforms should support decentralised management structures that address contextual barriers affecting employee performance across regions.

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