
WORK ETHIC AMONG GHANAIS IN AMERICAN MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES: A STUDY OF ADAPTATION AND EXPECTATION

***Jemima N. A. A. Lomotey**

University of Phoenix, Arizona.

Article Received: 07 November 2025

***Corresponding Author: Jemima N. A. A. Lomotey**

Article Revised: 27 November 2025

University of Phoenix, Arizona. DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.3759>

Published on: 17 December 2025

ABSTRACT

The integration of Ghanaian employees into American multinational companies operating in Ghana presents an important intersection of cultural work values, organisational expectations, and adaptation processes. As American firms bring Western managerial practices, performance systems, and corporate cultures into the Ghanaian context, employees are required to navigate differences between indigenous work ethics and global corporate standards. This study examines how Ghanaian employees adapt to the work expectations of American multinational companies, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they use to reconcile cultural values with foreign organisational norms. Using a mixed-methods approach comprising surveys and semi-structured interviews with employees and managers in selected U.S.-affiliated companies in Accra and Tema, the research explores variations in time orientation, communication styles, leadership expectations, and team collaboration. The findings are expected to highlight areas of work cultural alignment, sources of tension, and the implications for managerial effectiveness, employee performance, and human resource strategies. Insights from this study will guide multinational managers in designing culturally responsive systems that enhance productivity while promoting cross-cultural harmony.

KEYWORDS: work ethic, adaptation, multinational companies, Ghana, organisational culture, cross-cultural management.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The growing presence of American multinational companies in Ghana has introduced new forms of organisational culture, leadership styles, and performance expectations into the Ghanaian work environment. As these companies expand their operations in sectors such as technology, finance, manufacturing, logistics, and telecommunications, the interaction between Western corporate norms and Ghanaian cultural values has become increasingly significant. Understanding how Ghanaian employees adapt to these multinational work cultures is essential for improving productivity, reducing workplace conflict, and enhancing organisational effectiveness.

The work ethic of Ghanaians is influenced by collectivism, respect for hierarchy, interpersonal warmth, flexible time orientation, and strong communal values. In contrast, American corporate work ethic emphasises individual performance, direct communication, low power distance, strict time management, and merit-based decision-making. When these differing value systems converge in the same workplace, employees may face challenges in adjusting to unfamiliar expectations while maintaining their cultural identity. Similarly, managers from the United States may struggle to understand behaviours shaped by Ghanaian culture, leading to misinterpretation or ineffective leadership practices.

This study seeks to explore this important cultural intersection by examining how Ghanaian employees respond to the expectations of American multinational companies, how they interpret organisational norms, and how they modify or maintain their work behaviours in response. The study also investigates the perceptions of American managers operating in Ghana, offering a comprehensive view of adaptation, expectation, and cross-cultural interaction within multinational corporate environments.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Despite the rapid expansion of American multinational companies in Ghana, many organisations continue to experience cultural misalignment between managerial expectations and employee work behaviours. American managers often rely on practices grounded in Western assumptions about work ethic, communication, feedback, and performance management. These assumptions sometimes conflict with Ghanaian cultural norms, resulting in tensions around punctuality, initiative-taking, communication style, and hierarchy.

Ghanaian employees, on the other hand, may struggle to navigate organisational systems that demand directness, assertiveness, rapid decision-making, and strict adherence to time. When these employees attempt to adapt, they may experience role stress, cultural dissonance, or reduced job satisfaction. The absence of structured cultural adaptation frameworks in many multinational firms further complicates the adjustment process.

Although research exists on Ghanaian organisational culture, few studies specifically examine how Ghanaians adapt to American corporate norms within multinational settings. There is a knowledge gap regarding the strategies employees use to cope with foreign organisational expectations and the managerial approaches that facilitate or hinder effective cultural integration. This study addresses this gap by exploring the lived realities and workplace experiences of Ghanaian employees in American multinational companies.

3.0 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the work ethic of Ghanaian employees within American multinational companies and to examine how cultural values, organisational expectations, and adaptation processes influence workplace behaviour. The study aims to identify the challenges employees face, the strategies they use to adapt, and the managerial practices that support successful integration into multinational organisational cultures.

4.0 Research Objectives

General Objective

To examine how Ghanaian employees adapt to the work expectations of American multinational companies and how cultural differences influence workplace behaviour.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify the key cultural values that shape the Ghanaian work ethic.
2. To examine the expectations of American multinational companies regarding work behaviour, communication, and performance.
3. To explore how Ghanaian employees adapt to or resist the organisational norms of American multinationals.
4. To analyse the challenges and opportunities that arise from cross-cultural interactions in these organisations.
5. To provide recommendations for improving cross-cultural management and employee integration in multinational companies in Ghana.

5.0 Research Questions

1. What cultural values shape the work ethic of Ghanaian employees in American multinational companies?
2. What work-related expectations do American multinational companies impose within the Ghanaian work environment?
3. How do Ghanaian employees adapt to, negotiate, or resist these expectations?
4. What challenges and opportunities emerge from cross-cultural interactions between Ghanaian employees and American managers?
5. What strategies can multinational companies adopt to improve cultural integration and enhance organisational effectiveness?

6.0 Theoretical Review

Understanding how Ghanaian employees navigate the expectations of American multinational companies requires a strong theoretical grounding. Three major theoretical perspectives provide the foundation for interpreting the cross-cultural interactions that shape employee behaviour and adaptation: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, and Social Exchange Theory. Taken together, these theories illuminate how cultural values influence organisational behaviour, how employees adjust to foreign work systems, and how relationships within multinational environments affect workplace performance.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory offers a useful framework for analysing the similarities and differences between Ghanaian and American work cultures. Ghanaian society is characterised by collectivism, high power distance, and a relational orientation, which emphasise communal responsibility, respect for hierarchy, and interpersonal harmony. These values influence how employees communicate, respond to authority, and interpret organisational rules. In contrast, American work culture is rooted in individualism, low power distance, and direct communication. American managers typically expect assertiveness, initiative, punctuality, and performance-driven behaviour. When these contrasting cultural norms intersect within multinational companies, employees must negotiate between familiar Ghanaian cultural expectations and imported American workplace standards. Hofstede's theory therefore helps explain the nature of cultural tension and the behaviours employees adopt when navigating divergent organisational systems.

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory further contributes to understanding how Ghanaian employees adjust to the demands of American multinationals. This theory views adaptation as a dynamic and continuous process in which individuals integrate new cultural patterns while maintaining elements of their original cultural identity. adaptation involves psychological adjustment, intercultural learning, and behavioural modification. For Ghanaian employees, adaptation may include adjusting to stricter time discipline, adopting more direct communication, learning to work with less hierarchical supervision, or embracing individual performance metrics. The theory also recognises the possibility of acculturative stress when cultural expectations conflict sharply with personal or societal norms. Thus, Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory provides insight into the challenges, coping mechanisms, and gradual changes that define the Ghanaian employee's experience in an American corporate environment.

Social Exchange Theory complements these perspectives by emphasising the relational dimension of workplace interactions. According to this theory, employees respond positively to organisations when they perceive fairness, respect, and mutual benefit. In the Ghanaian context, where relational warmth and human connection are central cultural values, employees are more likely to perform well when managers exhibit supportive leadership and demonstrate genuine interest in their well-being. Conversely, employees who perceive disrespect, cultural insensitivity, or lack of reciprocity may withdraw effort or resist organisational expectations. This theory helps explain why managerial style has a significant impact on adaptation and productivity within American multinational companies operating in Ghana.

Together, these theoretical frameworks create a holistic lens for understanding how Ghanaian employees interpret, negotiate, and adapt to the expectations of American multinational companies. They highlight cultural value differences, adaptation processes, and relational dynamics that collectively shape the Ghanaian work ethic within global corporate structures.

7.0 Empirical Review

Existing empirical studies provide valuable insights into how cultural norms influence work behaviour, the experiences of employees in multinational settings, and the dynamics of cross-cultural adaptation. Research on Ghanaian workplaces consistently shows that employees highly value interpersonal harmony, respectful communication, and relational leadership. Studies by Ampofo (2019) and Adu-Gyamfi (2020) reveal that Ghanaian employees respond

more favorably to supervisors who demonstrate empathy, fairness, and relational warmth than to those who rely on rigid, impersonal managerial styles. These findings align with the relational expectations rooted in Ghanaian culture and demonstrate their significance in shaping employee behaviour.

Studies focusing specifically on multinational companies highlight the complexities that arise when local and foreign workplace cultures intersect. Osei-Tutu (2018) found that employees in multinational companies operating in Ghana frequently experience cultural tension when navigating Western performance standards, particularly around punctuality, initiative-taking, and direct communication. These challenges are often rooted in the mismatch between Ghanaian collectivist values and American individualist expectations. Employees reported struggling to adapt to strict time management norms and rapid decision-making processes that differed significantly from the flexible and relational orientation typical of Ghanaian workplaces.

Empirical research on cross-cultural management in Africa also reveals that international managers often misinterpret culturally shaped behaviours. For instance, Boateng (2017) observed that expatriates may view deference to authority as a lack of confidence or initiative, while Ghanaian employees see it as a sign of respect. Tensions may arise when American managers expect assertiveness and open expression of disagreement, whereas Ghanaian employees prefer indirect communication to avoid conflict. These cultural misunderstandings can lead to strained working relationships, reduced productivity, and challenges in team collaboration.

Studies on adaptation strategies suggest that Ghanaian employees adopt a range of coping mechanisms in multinational environments. These adaptations include selectively blending Ghanaian relational norms with Western organisational expectations, modifying communication styles, and adjusting their approach to time management. Frempong (2021) noted that employees who are provided with structured orientation programs, supportive management, and opportunities for intercultural learning adapt more successfully than those left to negotiate expectations independently.

Another empirical strand highlights the influence of organisational systems and HR policies. Research by Mensah and Agyeman (2020) indicates that multinational companies that localise their HR strategies by incorporating cultural sensitivity, participatory leadership, and

employee engagement initiatives experience higher levels of productivity and workforce harmony. Policies that acknowledge Ghanaian cultural realities—such as flexible leave for family obligations—foster organisational loyalty and reduce conflict.

Despite these insights, there remains a limited body of research focusing specifically on the experiences of Ghanaian employees within American multinational subsidiaries. Existing studies often examine general multicultural workplaces without addressing the unique juxtaposition of Ghanaian and American corporate cultures. This study therefore fills an important research gap by providing an in-depth exploration of how Ghanaian employees interpret, respond to, and adapt to American managerial expectations.

8.0 Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how Ghanaian employees experience and adapt to the work expectations of American multinational companies. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research seeks to uncover the deeper meanings, subjective interpretations, and lived experiences associated with cross-cultural workplace interactions. Quantitative measures would not capture the nuances of adaptation, cultural negotiation, and perception that are essential to understanding work ethic within multinational contexts. The qualitative design enabled a rich exploration of participants' thoughts, emotions, and reflections in their own words.

The study was conducted in Accra and Tema, where many American multinational companies in sectors such as technology, finance, logistics, and manufacturing have established operations. These locations provided access to diverse organisational settings with significant Ghanaian representation in their workforce. The target population consisted of Ghanaian employees working at various levels of these companies, including entry-level staff, supervisors, and middle-management personnel. In addition, interviews were conducted with expatriate managers to provide insight into organisational expectations and cross-cultural interactions from the managerial perspective.

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who had at least one year of experience working in an American multinational company and could articulate their experiences with adaptation to foreign work expectations. Snowball sampling was also employed, allowing initial participants to recommend colleagues with relevant experience. In total, twenty

employees and five expatriate managers participated in the study, providing diverse perspectives that enriched the data.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews lasting between forty and sixty minutes. The interview guide explored participants' perceptions of work ethic, organisational expectations, adaptation challenges, communication experiences, and cultural negotiation strategies. Interviews were conducted in English, recorded with participants' consent, and supplemented with field notes capturing non-verbal cues and contextual observations. The semi-structured format allowed participants to speak freely while ensuring that the core areas of inquiry were consistently addressed.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, read multiple times to allow for familiarisation, and coded inductively to identify recurring patterns. Codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories that reflected emerging concepts related to cultural values, organisational expectations, adaptation processes, and cross-cultural dynamics. Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately captured the essence of participants' experiences. The interpretive process adhered to qualitative rigor by grounding findings in participants' actual narratives.

Throughout the study, trustworthiness was maintained through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, in which participants reviewed preliminary interpretations. Dependability was supported by maintaining detailed documentation of the research process. Transferability was strengthened by providing thick descriptions of the organisational and cultural context. Confirmability was achieved through reflexive journaling, which allowed the researcher to remain aware of potential biases.

Ethical clearance was obtained from a recognised institutional review board. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and notified of their right to withdraw at any point. Pseudonyms were used to protect identities, and all data were stored securely to maintain privacy.

9.0 Findings

The findings from this qualitative study revealed four major themes that describe how Ghanaian employees interpret and adapt to the expectations of American multinational companies.

The first prominent theme was the negotiation between Ghanaian cultural values and American organisational expectations. Ghanaian employees described experiencing a constant balancing act between their own cultural norms and the performance-driven, individualistic expectations characteristic of American corporate systems. Many participants indicated that American companies expected punctuality, assertiveness, independence, and direct communication, which often contrasted with Ghana's collectivist, relational, and hierarchical cultural orientation. One employee explained, "In our culture, you don't just speak out directly, especially to someone in authority. But here, they want you to say what you think without fear. It took me a long time to adjust to that" (Ama, 29). Another participant noted that adapting to strict time discipline felt challenging but necessary, stating, "Back home, time is flexible, but here they take it very seriously. If a meeting says ten, they mean exactly ten" (Yaw, 33). This theme illustrates the cultural tension employees navigate daily.

A second theme centred on perceived pressures associated with American managerial styles. Participants described American managers as straightforward, highly metrics-driven, and inclined toward rapid decision-making. Some employees appreciated this clarity and structure, while others felt pressured by what they perceived as unrelenting expectations. One employee mentioned, "They want everything fast, and they want it done exactly their way. Sometimes it feels like we are always rushing" (Selorm, 31). Others expressed discomfort with direct criticism from American supervisors, describing it as abrupt or culturally insensitive. An employee reflected, "When they give feedback, it's very direct. They don't sugar-coat anything. At first, it felt harsh because we are not used to that style" (Akua, 27). This theme highlights the adjustment difficulties employees face in environments where American communication norms dominate.

A third theme concerned employee resilience and adaptive strategies. Despite the challenges, many Ghanaian employees described proactive efforts to adapt to American corporate culture. Strategies included learning to communicate more directly, improving time management, and seeking mentorship from colleagues experienced in multinational settings.

One participant described her adaptation process as transformative, stating, “I had to unlearn some things and pick up new habits. Over time, I learned how to express myself more confidently” (Grace, 34). Another remarked, “I realised if I wanted to grow here, I had to meet their expectations. So I started watching how others communicate in meetings, and I tried to follow” (Kwame, 30). These narratives illustrate that adaptation is both cognitive and behavioural, requiring continuous effort and self-awareness.

A final theme highlighted the importance of relational support and workplace belonging. Employees consistently emphasised that adaptation was easier when managers and colleagues demonstrated cultural sensitivity and provided support. Employees who received mentoring or cross-cultural orientation reported smoother integration. One participant expressed, “My manager took time to understand my background. When someone makes that effort, you feel more comfortable adjusting” (Nana, 28). Another explained, “We Ghanaians like to feel connected at work. When the environment is friendly, we give our best” (Kofi, 40). This theme underscores the relational foundation of Ghanaian work ethic and its role in facilitating cross-cultural adaptation.

Together, these themes suggest that adaptation in American multinational companies is neither automatic nor uniform but shaped by cultural contrasts, organisational demands, and employee resilience. The findings offer insight into how Ghanaian employees construct meaning from their workplace experiences and negotiate cultural expectations in global corporate environments.

10.0 DISCUSSION

The study’s findings reinforce the relevance of Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory by demonstrating how contrasting cultural norms shape workplace behaviour. Ghanaian employees’ collectivist orientation and respect for hierarchy stand in contrast to the individualistic and egalitarian culture of American companies. This mismatch helps explain employees’ discomfort with direct communication and assertive leadership styles, as well as their preference for relational interactions. The findings also support the dimension of uncertainty avoidance, as many employees expressed challenges adapting to the fast-paced, decision-driven environment of American companies.

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory is also strongly reflected in the narratives. Adaptation emerged as a gradual, multifaceted process involving emotional, behavioural, and cognitive

shifts. Employees described moments of cultural tension, confusion, and stress before eventually learning to align their behaviours with organisational expectations. This process required personal resilience, openness to learning, and support from management. The findings demonstrate that adaptation is not merely compliance but an active negotiation of identity and expectations.

Social Exchange Theory appears in the emphasis employees placed on relational support and fairness. Employees reported stronger motivation and smoother adaptation when managers demonstrated respect, empathy, and cultural sensitivity. When relationships were perceived as reciprocal and supportive, employees willingly adjusted to American work norms. Conversely, when employees felt misunderstood or undervalued, adaptation was slow and often incomplete. This underscores the importance of managerial behaviour in shaping employee engagement and satisfaction.

Overall, the findings indicate that successful integration of Ghanaian employees into American multinational companies depends on mutual cultural understanding, effective intercultural communication, and supportive managerial practices. Adaptation is facilitated not only by employee effort but also by organisational structures that acknowledge and respect cultural differences.

11.0 CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Ghanaian employees working in American multinational companies experience a complex process of adaptation shaped by cultural values, organisational expectations, and interpersonal relationships. Employees navigate significant differences between Ghanaian and American work ethics, particularly in areas such as communication style, time discipline, power distance, and performance expectations. Despite these challenges, many Ghanaian employees demonstrate resilience, flexibility, and eagerness to grow within multinational environments. The presence of culturally sensitive leadership, mentoring, and supportive HR systems significantly enhances adaptation and contributes to stronger organisational outcomes.

The study highlights that cultural awareness is essential for both employees and managers. For employees, adaptation involves acquiring new competencies while maintaining cultural identity. For American managers, recognising the cultural context of Ghanaian employees helps prevent misinterpretation, promotes collaboration, and enhances workplace harmony.

The findings underscore the need for a balanced, culturally responsive approach to management in multinational settings.

12.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Organisations should prioritise culturally informed leadership training to equip expatriate managers with the skills to understand and effectively manage Ghanaian employees. They should implement structured cross-cultural orientation programs for both managers and employees to reduce misunderstandings and facilitate smoother adaptation. Multinational companies should consider blending American performance systems with culturally sensitive HR practices that acknowledge communal obligations and relational work styles. Emphasis should be placed on developing mentorship and coaching programs that support Ghanaian employees as they navigate unfamiliar work expectations. Organisations should also cultivate workplace cultures that balance efficiency with relational warmth, thereby improving motivation and retention. Finally, continuous research and internal assessment should be encouraged to deepen understanding of cross-cultural dynamics within multinational corporate environments.

13.0 REFERENCE

1. Adu-Gyamfi, S. (2020). Cultural influences on employee motivation in Ghanaian organisations. *Ghana Journal of Human Resource Development*, 8(1), 33–49.
2. Afful-Broni, A. (2018). Leadership styles and employee commitment in multicultural organisations. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 14(2), 101–118.
3. Ampofo, J. (2019). Communication norms and work behaviour among Ghanaian employees. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Communication*, 17(2), 57–70.
4. Blau, P. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. Wiley.
5. Boateng, K. (2017). Managerial perceptions and employee behaviour in multinational corporations in Ghana. *African Journal of Management Research*, 10(3), 22–39.
6. Frempong, M. (2021). Adaptation strategies of employees in multinational companies in West Africa. *International Journal of African Business Studies*, 9(1), 14–29.
7. Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Sage.
8. Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Sage.

9. Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Sage.
10. Mensah, P., & Agyeman, J. (2020). Human resource localization and cultural adaptation in multinational companies. *Journal of Global HR Practices*, 6(4), 49–65.
11. Ofori, D. (2017). Socio-economic influences on employee performance in Ghana's corporate sector. *Journal of Development Studies in Africa*, 9(2), 88–103.
12. Osei-Tutu, E. (2018). Cultural challenges in multinational organisations in Ghana: A managerial perspective. *Ghana Management Review*, 5(1), 72–89.
13. Selmer, J. (2006). Cultural adjustment of host-country employees in multinational corporations. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 6(1), 39–57.
14. Tutu, R. (2021). Resource limitations and organisational behaviour in African workplaces. *African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 15(1), 54–71.
15. Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock* (2nd ed.). Routledge.