

# Exploring Work Values of Low-Wage Workers in Public and Private Higher Education Institutions



THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL

Imani Rankins | Faculty Advisor: Dr. Arne Kalleberg | Honors Thesis: Management and Society

## Abstract

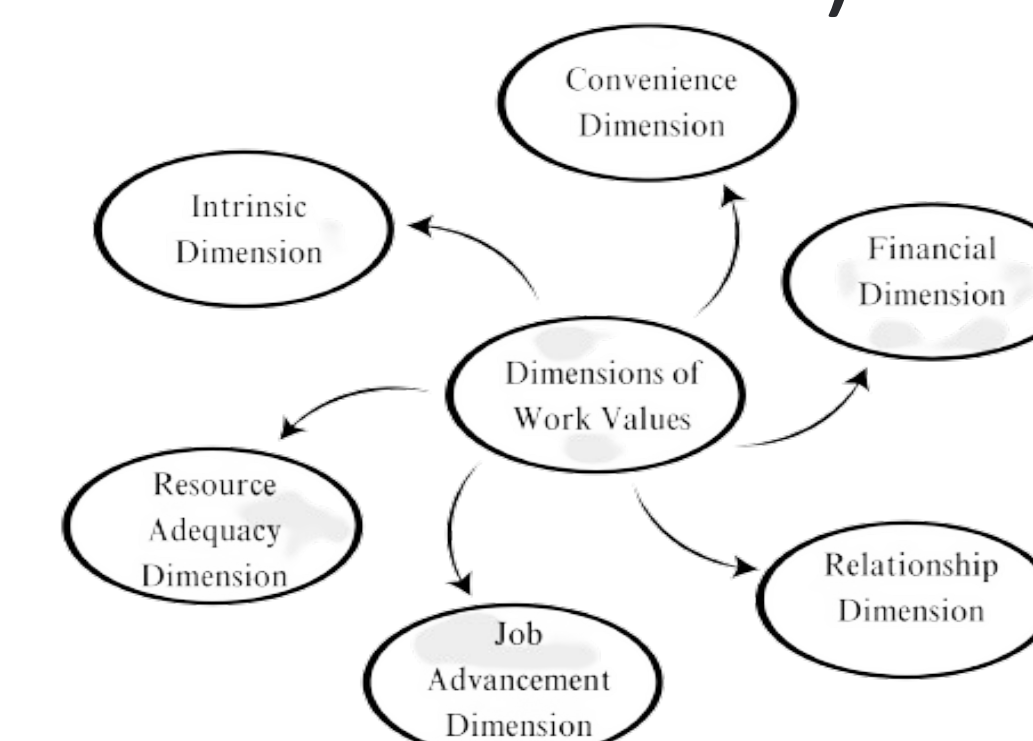
Job quality within the American labor force has progressively taken a downturn, as many Americans experience worsening conditions and stagnant wages. This leaves American workers insecure. Work values are identified by various labor sociologists a mode for workers to understand their workplace, find satisfaction from their work, and substantiate the universal work value of dignity. The present work aims to examine the difference between work values of people employed in the two employment sectors of low wage work. Current legislation in North Carolina, General Statue § 95-98 prohibits state and local workers from entering into collective bargaining agreements with their employers. This reality leave few avenues for workers to challenge and hold their employers accountable in the public sector. This study draws upon interviews with Housekeepers employed by public and private higher education institutions in the Research Triangle Park area to examine how work values and dignity differ between these two sectors. I consider how previous job experience, race, class, and gender influence ideas of worker satisfaction through what work values are emphasized. I coded the prevalence of keywords of satisfaction and dissatisfaction through the qualitative coding platform Dedoose, to compare the prevalence of work values between the two sectors for further comparison. Through this analysis, I found that workers within the public and private sector differ largely in the work values they prioritize and how they navigate the workplace. Workers also emphasize the importance of feeling dignity within through their work values and feeling less dignified when work values are not met.

## Research Questions

- 1.) How do work values that workers have formed overtime help workers navigate their workplace?
- 2.) Do workers employed in the public and private sector differ in their work values?
- 3.) How does the inability to legally hold your employer accountable to working conditions affect your dignity while working?

## Background Themes

- **The Great Divide:** North Carolina GS § 95-98 prohibits workers employed by public sectors cannot collectively bargain with their employer. Workers employed by the private sector do not have the same restriction (Okun 1980)
- **Dignity at Work:** Dignity is a universal work value that all workers attempt to achieve. Dignity underscores motivation and satisfaction. When dignity is not met conflict can arise (Hodson 2001)
- **Housekeeping as Low Wage Work:** In North Carolina, the median salary for housekeeping is \$26,820 a year, or \$13.41 per hour. ( O\*Net Online: Bureau of Labor Statistics)
- **Work Values:** Work values communicate the desirability of a job for workers. Work Values have six dimensions (Kalleberg and Marsden: 2013).



## Methodology

- **Qualitative Semi-Formal Interviews** ranging from 30-45 minutes
- **UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke University housekeeping departments**
- Dedoose **qualitative analysis** measuring the frequency of work values mentioned with collected interview notes
- Comparative analysis themes
  - **Prioritization of work values**
  - **Compatibility of work values in the workplace**
  - **Maintenance of Work Values within the workplace**

## Findings

- **Prioritization of Work Values**
  - Public Housekeepers emphasize the importance of values for that meet the need of work, while Private Housekeepers prioritize connection
- **Compatibility of Work Values in the workplace**
  - Both private and public housekeepers believe their work values are not compatible with their workplace. But private workers experience more optimism in resolving the issue
- **Maintenance of Work Values within the workplace**
  - Public housekeepers must employ direct action with no real safety net that changes will be implemented. Resulting in frustration and a lack dignity. Private housekeepers have legal backing but the process to bargaining can take multiple rounds and as long as six months.

## Conclusion

Every Housekeeper displayed a desire to feel dignity in their workplace and work values played a large part. Work values are more communal as you work within groups to maintenance them. Without the inability to maintenance work values properly leads to overall frustration and potential removal from the profession.

Worker Group	Feels Dignity	Does Not Feel Dignity
Public Housekeeper(UNC-Chapel Hill)	60%	40%
Private Housekeeper (Duke University)	77.7%	22.2%

## References

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