



Organizações & Sociedade Journal  
2022, 29(103), 724-749

© Author(s) 2022

DOI 10.1590/1984-92302022v29n0035EN

ISSN 1984-9230

www.revistaoes.ufba.br

NPGA, School of Management

Federal University of Bahia

Associate Editor:

Claudia Antonello

Received: 06/12/2021

Accepted: 05/07/2022

# Reduced Working Time as Political, Management and Control Instrument

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## Abstract

Reduced working time is a topic widely discussed in organization studies, mainly its benefits. However, the literature does not deeply emphasize the power and control dynamics oftentimes observed in its implementation by organizations. The aim of the current article is to help fulfilling this gap by exploring different concepts about reduced working time in place in Brazilian federal educational institutions that have adopted the thirty-hour workweek as standard for their technical-administrative employees. A case study was carried out through observation, documental analysis and eighteen semi-structured interviews conducted with both workers subjected to shorter working hours and managers working under the conventional forty-hour week standard. Based on the results, despite its notable benefits for the work/life balance, the reduced working time has three interrelated purposes, namely: political, management, and control instrument. This research made it possible to reveal how management and control instruments can be incorporated to a policy focused on reduced working time, to highlight the complexity and controversy of power relation, as well as contributed to organization studies, based on rationalization about life and its temporal dimensions.

**Keywords:** work day; working time; power relation; control at work; public service.

## Introduction

The concepts of power and control are relevant for organization studies. At some extent all organizations have control over processes, strategies, structures and, most of all, over workers to assert their power relations and to achieve their goals (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). Accordingly, working time is now core element in organizational analysis, since it is decisive for relationships among society, labor and workers (Dal Rosso, 2017; Tonelli, 2008) and symbolizes a life rationalization factor (Weber, 2004; Gorz, 2003). Theoretically, even more worker-friendly arrangements, such as reduced working time, do not escape the power dynamics established in organizations. On the other hand, these arrangements can hold more subtle, hidden and seductive organization-control forms (Faria, 2004a).

Working time reduction can be conceived as the working class' historical claim (Veal, 2020). This topic was addressed in national and international studies carried out in different fields from several theoretical-methodological perspectives, based on its economic (Husson, 2015) and socio-environmental effects (Gunderson, 2019) and on its implications for both the organizations (Burdin & Pérotin, 2019) and workers (Lepinteur, 2019). Organization studies have focused on investigating the benefits of the aforementioned measure, with emphasis on the possibility of higher quality jobs, which provide better work-life balance (Veal, 2020), in addition to greater well-being and quality of life (Lepinteur, 2019).

However, less attention has been paid to how reduced working time policies can be conceived and implemented in organizations, including their power and control dynamics. Some studies addressing this topic have pointed out that reduced hours can be associated with work intensification (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010), with increased control over workers – disguised into greater flexibility (Nascimento, Damasceno, & Neves, 2016) - and with reduced income and job security (Lepinteur, 2019). Studies have shown that it can be used as placebo measure for poor organizational conditions disconnected from human resource management policies aimed at improving quality of life at work (Cardoso, 2013; Carneiro & Ferreira, 2007; Mocelin, 2011).

Accordingly, the aim of the present article is to explore different concepts of how reduced working time can be implemented by organizations. A case study was carried out in a Brazilian federal educational institution (IFE) that has implemented the thirty-hour workweek in 2013 as standard for its technical-administrative education employees (TAEs). This policy allowed servants to work six hours a day, rather than the usual eight hours adopted for the public services, without any income reduction. Overall, it is a discretionary granting by the institution, because, although legally foreseen, it is essentially linked to a management policy, but not to rights of public servants.

This discussion is relevant given the gaps observed in the literature about this topic. Research on this subject in Brazil has emphasized the private sector scope and professional categories that, for long, were subjected to different working time, depending on the features and peculiarities of their functions, such as bank employees (Nascimento et al., 2016), health professionals (Felli, 2012) and executives (Kim, Tonelli, & Silva, 2017).

With respect to IFEs, the literature on TAEs' labor activity is scarce in comparison to professors; furthermore, it is distributed among several topics, such as motivation (Silva & Barros, 2018), quality of life (Garcia, 2017), health and stress (Coutinho, Diogo, & Joaquim, 2011), among others. Studies on reduced working time focused on these workers are scarce and limited to a

monothematic view of this policy's implications to quality of life (Daehn, 2020; Colnago, 2012; Sousa, 2018), or on its particularities, such as management knowledge (Klein, Cogo, & Pereira, 2020). However, IFEs are fruitful spaces for complex and contradictory power struggles that mainly shape interpersonal relationships between TAEs and professors (Tessarini & Saltorato, 2021). These disputes are historically rooted in the bureaucratic culture of institutions where professors hold the highest positions and control decision-making power (Nunes, Santos, & Tolfo, 2018), a fact that gives TAEs perception about invisibility (Loureiro, Mendes, & Silva, 2018) and about being mere appendices of the organizational structure (Ribeiro, 2012).

Thus, this article can make contributions by introducing a critical discussion about contradictions and conflicts, and about the hidden and manifest aspects linked to workers' labor environment in the assessed institution based on the influence of the reduced working time policy. The present discussion was carried out based on authors' theoretical approaches and articulations from different epistemic perspectives, such as studies on work time by Dal Rosso (2017), on rationalization by Weber (2004), on the dialectical and historical materialism observed in the theory of political economy of power (Faria, 2004a, 2004b), and on Foucault's concept of power (Foucault, 2013). Assumingly, organization studies should focus on the power and control dynamics, mainly when they are incorporated by management policies and practices seen as positive and desired by workers. Furthermore, the present article addresses an empirical field little assessed in power relations' research by outlining the discussion at public service and IFEs scope.

## **Work time and life rationalization**

Tonelli (2008) emphasized how the technological imperative influenced successive paradigms aimed at reorganizing labor based on historical analysis applied to both evolution and changes observed in meanings given to time and to work time. This author highlighted the invention of the mechanical clock that enabled disciplinary labor control based on linear clock-wise time, which has been witnessed by the industrial society from the 19th century onwards. Accordingly, working day was historically conceived to institutionalize linear and standardized temporal measures (Faria & Ramos, 2014). Its immediate purpose lies on rationalization about working time (Tonelli, 2008). However, from a broader perspective, work time represents the true organization of daily life, which can be divided into two moments, namely: working time and non-working time (Dal Rosso, 2017).

Working time can be understood as the time when workers are at work, and it corresponds to both formal working day and its surpluses. Working time also includes the time workers spend looking for information about their work, commuting to work, telecommuting, among others. Overall, the time available to employers exceeds that necessary to meet the working time; in other words, the time when workers produce the equivalent to their own value. Historically, the appropriation of surplus labor time used by the capitalist production mode to reproduce itself (Dal Rosso, 2017; Faria & Ramos, 2014; Tonelli, 2008). Thus, authors of different epistemic orientations advocate for working reduction since it is a counterpoint to time surplus value absorption by the capital (Antunes, 2018; Gorz, 2003).

According to Dal Rosso (2017), working time is composed of three main dimensions: (a) duration: effective working time on a daily, weekly and yearly basis, among others; (b) distribution:

related to the time when work is performed within a given period-of-time and its degree of flexibility; and (c) intensity: physical, intellectual or emotional effort to perform a work. From this perspective, Cardoso (2013) highlights that intensity emerges as the most complex analysis dimension, since, unlike other dimensions, there is no legislation, or a single measure, that determines the level of effort workers must adopt during their working time.

Non-working time, on the other hand, corresponds to the time workers have free to themselves to socialize, to enjoy leisure experiences, to seek education, to rest, among others (Dal Rosso, 2017; Faria & Ramos, 2014; Tonelli, 2008).

The duality working time *versus* non-working time is expressed as normative principle of the capitalist society; furthermore, it is seen as element of life rationalization. According to Decca (1982), such a rationalization is core subject in narratives that relate time to money and that crystallize social norms, values and the sense of time as the very currency of the labor market. This context echoes the expression “time is money”, by Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), who was used as reference by Weber (2004) in his reflection about life rationalization/bureaucratization during the capitalist development. Weber sought to apprehend such development as the root of modern culture, a life or spirit conduct, rather than just an economic system or production mode. Based on the aforementioned author, the temporal dimension is core element for the organized and rational capitalist spirit linked to the Protestant ethic.

Weber (2004) realized that profession, dedication to work and the rational use of time became ends in themselves, and it goes against the traditional view that has conceived them as means to survival. Yet, according to the author, the excessive appreciation of work and moral discipline is a way to ensure salvation, and it has contributed to the phenomenon known as disenchantment with the world or as life ‘demagicalization’, which includes religion centrality loss in modern life. According to Weber, these dynamics drive human incarceration forces in its “steel cage” (Weber, 2004, p. 165), which is the consequence of a broad modern Western rationalization process.

Gorz (2003) corroborated Weber when he explored this same process by highlighting that until 1830, in Great Britain, and by late 19th century, in the rest of Europe, material production was not ruled by economic rationality. According to this author, weaving was for weavers more than a “breadwinner, it was a way of life” (Gorz, 2003, p. 24) driven by traditions, customs and values that, although perceived by capitalists as irrational economic viewpoint, were respected by them. Merchants did not even consider the possibility of rationalizing weavers’ work by introducing competition between them, or by rationally and systematically seeking higher profit when they seek to reconcile the interests of those involved in such a dynamic.

Suddenly, this social organization was disrupted even before the mechanical or factory system became operational. The process to break up with the prevailing traditional logic and to legitimize a rational lifestyle, according to which, maximum dedication to professional life became one of the most characteristic elements of the capitalist culture (Weber, 2004). According to Gorz (2003), workers' refusal to dedicate long hours of their day to work in factories was one of the reasons for the failure of the first experiences in this field. Therefore, employers increasingly lowered the wages to force workers to work for longer periods-of-time to ensure their survival. He argues that wage-lowering did not only aim at reducing production costs, but mainly at increasing

both control over work and worker dependence to longer working time. Weber explores a pre-capitalist disposition that is culturally rooted in workers; according to him, “working less” would be more attractive than “earning more”. This process reflexes on the way to weigh on “how much do I need to work a day to earn enough [money] to afford my needs?” in contrast to the question “how much can I earn per day if I work as hard as possible?”.

Economic rationality subverted lifestyles, values, customs, social relationships and association with time and nature, by shifting the space available to productive activity as “aspect of life” to the “means of earning a living.” The “economic rationalization of work, therefore, overcame the resistance of old ideas about existential freedom and autonomy” (Gorz, 2003, p. 31). Accordingly, “working time and time off were disconnected from each other; work, its tools and products acquired a reality separated from the worker and it now concerns decisions that were alien to it” (Gorz, 2003, p. 30).

## Working time, power and control

The French philosopher Michel Foucault, who was also professor and psychologist, explored the rationalization of processes observed in modern Western societies. Foucault featured rationality as instance accountable for regulating human conduct, and it allows inferring such a rationalization closely related to the sense of power (Freire, 2019). Foucault’s approach conceives power as a set of historically-built social practices. According to Foucault (2013), these operation/acting practices were dissolved into a web/structure of social relationships. Control devices are widely distributed in these relationships and they exert power in a diffuse and asymmetrical way that is sometimes more explicitly, sometimes more subtle, and that seeks what the author called ‘docile bodies’.

Based on Foucault (2013), power relations form government ways of the self and of others. Domination mechanisms underlying these relationships exert control through what the aforementioned author conceptualizes as discourses of truth, such as professional speech, scientific statements, dominant ideologies, standards, rules, shared beliefs and/or customs, among other narratives that are considered legitimate (Foucault, 2010). These discourses operate by changing attitudes, by adapting and reproducing behaviors, by influencing ideas or by subjecting/‘docilizing’ bodies to sophisticated control mechanisms.

The sense of control within the organization studies’ context is mostly seen from a functionalist perspective, and it aims at guaranteeing and improving the organizational system (Martins, 2006). Likewise, power is oftentimes approached from the Weberian bias of instrumental rationality, which is linked to individuals’ skill to achieve certain external goals (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). However, both conceptions are not enough to explain organizations’ complexity and the relationships established in them (Faria, 2004a).

The concept observed in the political economy of power (EPP) is adopted through the acknowledgement of other applicable approaches (Faria, 2004a, 2004b). Based on the EPP, power is a *praxis* based (a) on the interaction between collective people (and their complex and controversial relationships) and (b) on the ability to mobilize and put in place objective and subjective interests. Power is always relational because it is not an attribute of individuals, but a manifestation observed in relationships set between them; therefore, it can only be exercised in collectivity (Faria, 2004a). Still, from the EPP perspective, control is the very basis of organizations’

domination, since organizations seeks to legitimize and perpetuate power relations at three interdependent levels: (a) economic, which is related to work and production relationships and processes; (b) political-ideological, which is related to ideas, standards and to the institutionalization of production relationships that legitimize actions; and (c) psychosocial, which concerns relationships between humans, individuals and the collectively. The psychosocial level is divided into seven categories: physical, normative, finalistic, shared or participatory, symbolic-imaginary, bonds and monopolistic seduction (Faria, 2004b).

Conceptions and contradictions inherent to both working and non-working time are core elements to power relations. They represent emblematic examples of subtle and seductive control mechanisms adopted by organizations after “the work time control is also control over work” (Faria & Ramos, 2014, p. 56). Accordingly, time control, as economic rationality element, is the social order observed in power relations that seek to discipline workers’ body and mind (Harvey, 1992).

Thus, Decca (1982) considered factories as disciplinary sphere of work and highlighted the “insertion of a moral clock in the heart of each worker” (p. 10) because, at early 17th century, technological innovations were widespread. According to this author, such a moral clock opened room for the rise of a social control moored in self-discipline and criticism towards idleness. Foucault (2002) investigated the history of social control over the body and stated that if, until the 18th century, individuals’ body was essentially marked by torture and punishment, from the 19th century onwards, it underwent reformulations, became a receiver of new aptitudes that qualified it as able to work. Accordingly, discourses about the positive profile of labor became one of the main ways to exercise power.

The Taylorism-Fordism binomial reconfigured industrial labor organization overtime by imposing a new temporal and spatial discipline, and by controlling and standardizing time and movements (Harvey, 1992). However, if the threshold of industrial society’s control was mostly exercised based on the physical domain of body, space and the work activity, based on the flexible accumulation era, the control perspective extrapolated this dimension and was outspread through more sophisticated and symbolic elements, so that workers are often not aware of their existence (Faria & Ramos, 2014; Harvey, 1992). Consequently, the so-called management power co-opts and involves workers through the manipulative ideology of management and by its narratives, such as productivity, performance culture and self-management as the only way to achieve success; these narratives are driven by fallacious discourses of freedom and autonomy at work (Gaulejac, 2007).

Management power does not concern body control much, but the psychic mobilization invested in power relations. It seeks to encourage workers to engage in spending too much time and effort in serving the company's targets. “Repression is replaced by seduction, imposition by adhesion and obedience by recognition” (Gaulejac, 2007, p. 109). Thus, the construction of individuals’ subjectivity is shaped. No matter the perception about how this dynamic operates, the subjection to these sophisticated control devices will be more painless (Foucault, 2013). Understanding the diffusion of these elements is EPP’s first purpose (Faria, 2004b). Its aim is to clarify how the “hidden” instances (which operate in organizational backstage, in subjective relationships and in individual unconscious) and overt ones (including, and mainly, those referring to rules and structures)” configure the organizational control forms (Faria, 2014, p. 82).

Critical studies, although notably scarce, show how working time, including shorter work day, uses power and control mechanisms in organizations. Kelliher and Anderson (2010) surveyed workers in the British private sector and identified three factors leading to labor intensification in the reduced working time context. The first factor, intensification, happens when the demand for working under reduced working time does not decrease. As for the second factor, working less on a daily/weekly basis can make workers feel less tired and stressed; indirectly, the reverse scenario means energy and additional disposition to help increased work intensity. The last factor concerns workers' reciprocity; these workers can increase their work efforts to thank employers for the possibility of working reduced hours. Nascimento et al. (2016) analyzed how the flexibility discourse and practices can be used to control bank workers by leading them to work intensely and to submit to organizational pressure.

According to Faria (2014b), and in compliance with the current study, organization studies should focus on issues related to power and control as the way to understand organizations' very existence and purposes. We herein seek to both discuss and provide new theoretical-empirical contributions by articulating the critical thematic fields of working time, and power relations, to a complex and controversial empirical field. Emphasis is given to meanings individuals attribute to the peculiar way of implementing reduced working time in their daily lives. Thus, the question is: how can a policy focused on reducing working hours be conceived and interpreted within the organizational context?

## Methodological procedures

The present article introduces a case study based on a qualitative, descriptive, exploratory and constructivist approach (Stake, 1998). The choice made for this approach is first of all justified by the features of the reduced working time to thirty hours a week within the investigated context (IFE); it assumes the process to feature administrative concession, rather than a right conquered by workers. Secondly, it is justified by the interest in understanding this particular reality and in building knowledge, based on it. Assumingly, this empirical context requires the adoption of hermeneutic-comprehensive attitude and of a critical-reflective position. Focus lies on understanding the multiple meanings attributed by participants to question and unveil the contradictions, meanings and implications of a phenomenon that, although historically conceived as object of the working class' struggles, can open room for other manifestations in the organizational context.

### *Featuring the case study: institution and reduced working time*

The case study was carried out in a Brazilian IFE campus that houses two main categories of civil servants: professors and TAEs. In total, 36 TAEs and 65 permanent professors were working in the campus at data collection time. TAEs are civil servants accountable for a set of tasks and duties that, depending on their position, range from routine administrative and educational support activities to management functions and specialized activities that require higher education, such as psychologists, pedagogues, and accountants, among others.

Although the thirty-hour workweek is a legal measure provided on Decree N. 1,590 (1995) from 1995, its implementation in the institution only happened in 2013. According to documental

research, at the time of data collection, its main features and rules were: (a) servants could work six hours a day by taking turns in shifts; (b) no wage reduction; (c) sectors where these civil servants work in should remain open to the public for at least twelve straight hours; (d) all TAEs could adhere to the reduction, except for those occupying management positions; and (e) its granting was discretionary and based on the authorization by both the chancellor and the general directors of each *campus* .

### *Data collection and analysis*

According to the approach proposed by Stake (1998), three evidence sources were used for data collection: observation, interviews and documental research.

Participant observation was carried out at three stages through active participation by one of the researchers in the field. The first observation took place from February to March 2019; it was an initial approach aimed at identifying general aspects observed in the empirical context, such as the conditions and ways to organize labor. Subsequently, between May and August 2019, observations included aspects closely related to the research question, such as compliance with rules established by the reduced working time regulation, work demands, work division, in addition to formal and informal interactions between workers. Finally, a last observation stage was carried out along with interviews in order to find additional evidence and examples, as well as to corroborate the achieved results.

The documental research was carried out with public documents, such as laws and decrees, issued by the Federal Government, internal documents issued by the assessed institution, such as ordinances, resolutions, meeting minutes, memos, official letters and publications available at its official website. These documents supported the carried out interviews and, later on, data analysis mainly focused on understanding the features and rules of reduced working time and of its historical implementation process.

Interviews conducted between August and early October 2019 were the main primary data collection method. In total, 18 civil servants belonging to two groups were interviewed, in separate: (a) eleven TAEs working under reduced shift of thirty-hours per week; and (b) seven managers working under conventional forty-hour week (Table 1). It is noteworthy that participants were chosen based on some objective representativeness criteria, such as gender, service length in the institution (including new servants and veterans), different activity sectors and academic backgrounds. The idea was to include workers who meet all institutional diversity and who could contribute with multiple views about the subject.

Table 1  
**Participants' featuring**

Identification	Gender*	Age	Service Length	Weekly working time
TAE 01	Woman	39	Less than 1 year	30h
TAE 02	Man	37	Between 5 and 10 years	30h
TAE 03	Woman	57	Between 5 and 10 years	30h
TAE 04	Woman	43	Between 1 and 5 years	30h
TAE 05	Man	44	Less than 1 year	30h
TAE 06	Woman	51	Between 5 and 10 years	30h
TAE 07	Woman	36	Between 1 and 5 years	30h
TAE 08	Man	40	More than 10 years	30h
TAE 09	Woman	40	More than 10 years	30h
TAE 10	Man	28	Less than 1 year	30h
TAE 11	Woman	33	Between 5 and 10 years	30h
GES 01	Man	57	Between 5 and 10 years	40h
GES 02	Woman	44	Between 5 and 10 years	40h
GES 03	Man	30	Between 5 and 10 years	40h
GES 04	Woman	34	Between 5 and 10 years	40h
GES 05	Man	41	More than 10 years	40h
GES 06	Man	45	More than 10 years	40h
GES 07	Woman	33	Between 1 and 5 years	40h

Source: authors.

\*all respondents declared themselves as cisgender.

A semi-structured script was prepared based on an inductive approach to conduct the interviews, based on observations made in the field. This script included issues related to (a) work context: including the demand for tasks, organization modes and labor division, and socio-professional relationships; and (b) reduced working time: understanding its features, implementation, implications to both the institution and workers (both personal and professional), mainly meanings attributed by interviewees based on their work environment.

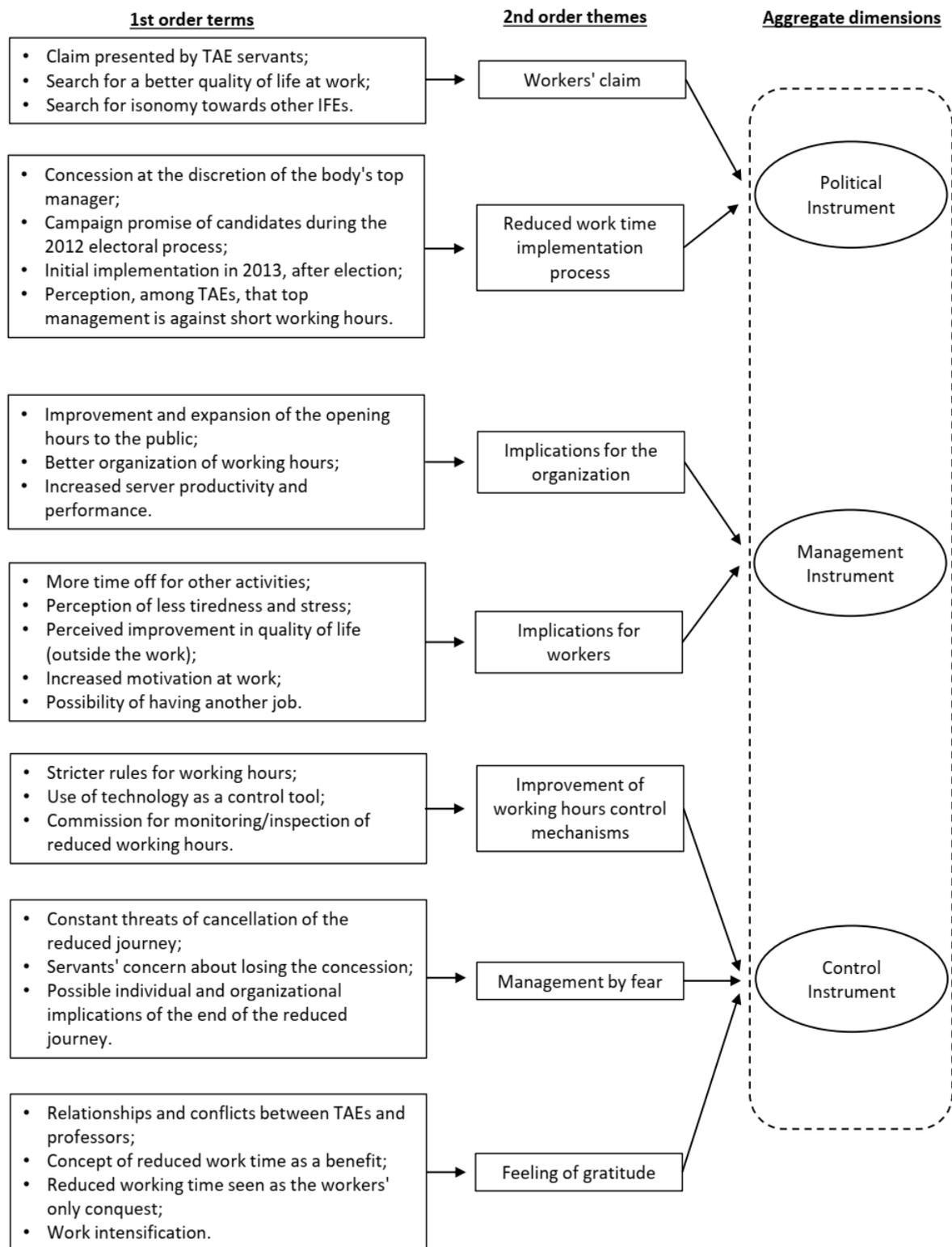
Researchers informed participants about the research purpose and formally asked for their consent. All interviews were recorded; they totaled approximately a 12-hour recording. The number of interviews was not previously fixed, but it was defined during data collection based on the "theoretical saturation" criterion. In practical terms, when the participants' speech contents began to be repeated, decision was made to conclude the collection, as they did not add any new/discriminating elements that could theoretically justify the conduction of other interviews.

Collected data were interpreted through the inductive model by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013). It is an adapted grounded theory approach aimed at constituting a successive and integrative process to build inductive analytical categories.

Initially, the full transcription of all interviews was carried out and their exploration through the exhaustive and repetitive reading of each statement was supported by repeated audio listening, by theoretical frameworks, documents and records made during the interviews, and interview comments. Interviewees' speeches were coded by nomenclature assigned by the researchers, themselves. These codes were refined and reanalyzed in a new round of analyses, and it totaled 25 analyses grouped into a set of 1st-order terms that represent the primary evidence that features interviewees' speech contents and the assessed documents. Subsequently, these themes were grouped into seven 2nd-order themes that bring together groups common-feature elements and that allow a better description, abstraction and explanation of the investigated phenomenon. Finally, these themes were gathered in three aggregated dimensions due to their empirical proximity and to their discussion about the consulted theory. All analytical steps were manually performed by the researchers to get closer approximation to data. However, the Excel package was adopted to make the initial coding process easier.

## **Results**

Three categories were constructed based on data analysis. They represent the distinct, but interrelated, configurations taken by reduced working time in the organizational context: (a) political, (b) management, and (c) control instruments (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Results overview

Source: authors.

### *Reduced working time as political instrument*

The first concept of reduced working time was consolidated based on reasons identified in IFE's decision to grant participants with the thirty-hour working time after years of its provision in law. The main mentioned aspect lied on the measure aimed at meeting a political interest:

*It was a campaign promise from the chancellor, it was there in his folder at thirty o'clock. He made it very clear that he would comply . . . And he had to comply, because everyone who voted for him was because of that, because it was the only proposal for TAEs. (GES 04)*

*The fear [of losing the reduced workday] comes already in this context: when the mandate [of the chancellor at the time] ends, will another one come, and will the other chancellor keep the reduced workday? Since this is not a right, then this is the fear, because it was something political, correct? (TAE 01)*

*In fact, they grant [the reduction] on account of political games, aiming at an election: "have a few crumbs and then you'll be happy and stop [complaining]". (TAE 07)*

The political aspect associated with reduced working time can be understood based on its main feature: reduction to thirty-hour per week at the discretion of the organization's top manager (Decree No. 1,590, 1995). Accordingly, it is possible tracing a historical overview of its implementation process. According to interviewees' reports, a great TAE-servants movement in favor of implementing this measure in the institution emerged in 2010 and claimed that it would provide workers with better quality of life and better services to attendees. In addition, it would represent isonomy between IFEs, since reduced hours were already in place, in other institutions. In 2012, this movement reached its peak during the electoral process to choose the institution's managers - almost all candidates proposed the implementation of the thirty-hour working time. The elected candidate granted this benefit to TAEs.

Year after year, the maintenance of reduced working time became a captive promise among candidates/managers in further elections. However, TAEs understood that, actually, the institution's top managers were not favorable to it:

*Any candidate for chancellor or director who declares himself openly against it at thirty-hours does not win [the election] by the TAEs. (GES 03)*

*They say they are in favor to win votes, but they don't really like it. (GES 04)*

*There are managers who are against it, who understand the reduction as a salary increase, right? Because your salary hasn't changed, but you work fewer hours. It's like you got a pay raise, so that's used as a bargaining chip. (GES 02)*

Although the process to choose managers is legitimate and democratic, it is possible noticing how a claim by civil servants was appropriate for “electoral purposes” (GES 06).

### *Reduced working time as management instrument*

Reduced working time as management instrument embodies two interrelated conditions: (a) providing better labor environment balance; and (b) increasing TAEs productivity and performance. Thus, it was possible featuring a management policy that would theoretically provide mutual benefits to both the institution and the workers.

The most often mentioned benefit regarding the assessed institution was configured by the formal justification for granting servants with the thirty-hour working time: longer opening hours for attendees (mainly for students). This process provided active workers during all IFE’s operational shifts (morning, afternoon, and night) – it did not happen before the new working time system. Yet, TAEs’ working time schedule was better organized, since they took six-hour shift turns a day.

Improved servants’ performance was another highlighted benefit. It was based on the premise that servants were happier, and more satisfied, with their reduced workload; therefore, they were more engaged in, and productive at work:

*We notice that, even because of the shorter time, the server must give a faster response . . . He won't be able to keep [a task] waiting much longer, for a long time. Improves worker productivity. (GES 06)*

As for workers’ implications, longer time off for their personal tasks was the element most often mentioned by servants. They also mentioned (a) health care; (b) the possibility of studying (both in formal education courses, mainly in post-graduation courses, and preparation for other civil service tenders); (c) exercising, cultural and leisure activities; and (d) the possibility of dedicating more time to the family, as indicated by some reports:

*For me, the most important thing about the thirty hours in my private life is that I can be with my daughter in the morning, that I wake up and not have to leave her in bed, that she wakes up with a strange person. (TAE 09)*

*Working less gives you the opportunity to do other things, have a moment of leisure, a moment for you to also dedicate yourself to studies, go to the gym, go for a walk, practice a sport. (TAE 10)*

*The worker's life can't just be about work, right? So, he, the worker, gets sick, has a child, it is through this reduction that he will have a little more quality of life, daily. (TAE 07)*

Finally, the possibility of having more free time leads to the perception that workers were (a) more motivated; (b) happier with their jobs; (c) less stressed; (d) less tired; and (e) that they had higher quality of life.

### *Reduced working time as control instrument*

Reduced working time, as the last analytical category, became an organizational control instrument implemented to broaden organizational and labor processes. The herein assessed institution adopt it to improve its control mechanisms and check whether TAEs were assiduous and punctual in their daily working hours and to ensure that its reduction to thirty hours a week would not jeopardize institutional activities and goals.

Among these mechanisms, one finds (a) the sectors' lack of ability to interrupt their customer services, even for internal services; (b) mandatory attendance registration through electronic means; (c) requirement for periodic reduced working time evaluations by students, professors and the community outside the institution – there was the possibility of canceling this new system in case of low evaluation scores; and (d) creation of committees to monitor/inspect the working time a daily basis - nomenclature changes depending on the interviewees' critical position. Although these work control mechanisms are not atypical, according to participants, their use in the institution was a novelty that, somehow, was conflicting with other public servants (managers and/or professors) who remained working under simpler working time control rules:

*The sector coordinator can even work forty hours, but he has more flexibility, because those who work thirty hours must punch the clock in and out [of work]. The coordinator, not, he can get to work whenever he wants and leave whenever he wants, he can have lunch whenever he wants, because he only punches the clock once a day. (TAE 11)*

*The professor complained about me to my immediate boss [because she wasn't in the sector]: "where was I that I wasn't in the room?". I had left a warning: "I'm in such a place". But because there was no worker at that moment, she complained about me and then my boss gave me a warning because of that. (TAE 07)*

Based on interviewees' speeches, reduction in working hours met a less objective and clear purpose, namely: individual behaviors' adjustment to group behaviors and to behaviors that are culturally desired/imposed by the institution. Most interviewees (including managers) expressed their concern with and fear towards the possibility of losing the opportunity of working under the reduced working time system, mainly due to its negative influence on non-work time. This fear encouraged workers to adopt self-control and co-workers' control attitudes and behaviors, and these are aspects that seemed to have been naturalized in the organizational routine already:

*Losing the reduction system would be very disruptive, it would kind of limit my study, my time. Both my private life and my work performance. There will be little time left for research, to stay home with my family. (TAE 03)*

[The reduced working time] is actually a control form over you, it's something granted, but it has a lot of rules. That's why everyone has to do their part so that we don't lose this opportunity, so there's this "plot", one watching the other, sticking to work and schedules . . . And because it is a concession, we are afraid, that's why we have to make the most of it, because at any moment [reduced working time] can be canceled, and it's scary. (TAE 01)

When interviewees tried to understand the cause of their fear, they revealed that more than a natural desire not to lose something they see as conquer, it was fostered by power demonstrations and constant threats (this term was used many times by participants). This constant fear condition was herein called "management by fear" (Figure 1). The threats aimed at making sure that tasks would be fulfilled, that institutional demands would be met, that workers would comply with their schedule, and that they would work extra hours, among other expectations:

*I think it always has that connotation of a favor that has been granted and is temporary, correct? I think there's nothing worse for a human being than a threat, saying "look, one hour or another the reduction will fall". So, all the time we are reminded that we work thirty hours, but it is not our right. (TAE 04)*

*It became a kind of bargain: "look, if you don't do this, we [top management] will take away the thirty hours". (TAE 08)*

*I've seen threats like: "the guy isn't complying with the thirty-hour rules, let's take it away from everyone". Indirectly, it's a way of putting pressure on all TAEs to cover what they're not doing, or it will be taken away from everyone else. Unfortunately, it happens. (GES 07)*

This dynamic was also expressed by the conflicting relationships between TAEs and professors, and it made the power relations in the organizational environment even more complex. The relationships between these two actors are troubled, mainly when it comes in interviewees' perception about the dominance exerted by professors, which is based on the status position resulting from their academic titles: Master's and PhD Degree. Thus, reduced working time (thirty hours) was a benefit granted to TAEs that separated them from professors. According to interviewees, it has potentiated conflicts and surveillance dynamics, as well as the control exerted by professors:

*While professors are much more desiring beings, we TAEs have only thirty hours . . . And then comes this psychological violence, a benefit that can be taken away at any time, having that view that we are always subordinated to any kind of power, the power of the faculty, of managers. (TAE 07)*

*Professors hate the reduced working time. Even their evaluations, that the committees present to us, are that their position is negative. They say that the sectors did not provide enough service, this is obviously a criticism towards the thirty-hour system. (GES 04)*

Accordingly, the reduced working time became TAEs' exclusive "achievement", and the sense of gratefulness to the institution and to its managers spread among workers. Somehow, this gratitude made them work harder and longer to prove to the institution that the reduction of the working hours was positive; therefore, it should be maintained:

*[Thirty hours] makes me more productive because it's a concession, and because of that I feel more motivated to accomplish everything that I would do in forty hours in thirty. (TAE 08)*

*What attracted me to the institution was exactly the short workday. It is an attraction, a motivator, we do not find everywhere. (TAE 01)*

*I am in favor of [the reduced workday] because I see results, because those who work thirty hours show willpower, they are always willing to help, something that those who work forty hours are not as motivated as those who work thirty. (GES 04)*

Interviewees reported that the reduced working hours was not accompanied by lower workload. Actually, there was gradual increase in demands, mainly because of (a) the institution's growth in recent years; (b) the decentralization of the dean's office tasks to other units in the institution; and (c) the reduced number of TAE servants. This last aspect was further aggravated by high turnover, since TAEs often leave their positions after being approved in other public tenders or even to work in the private sector.

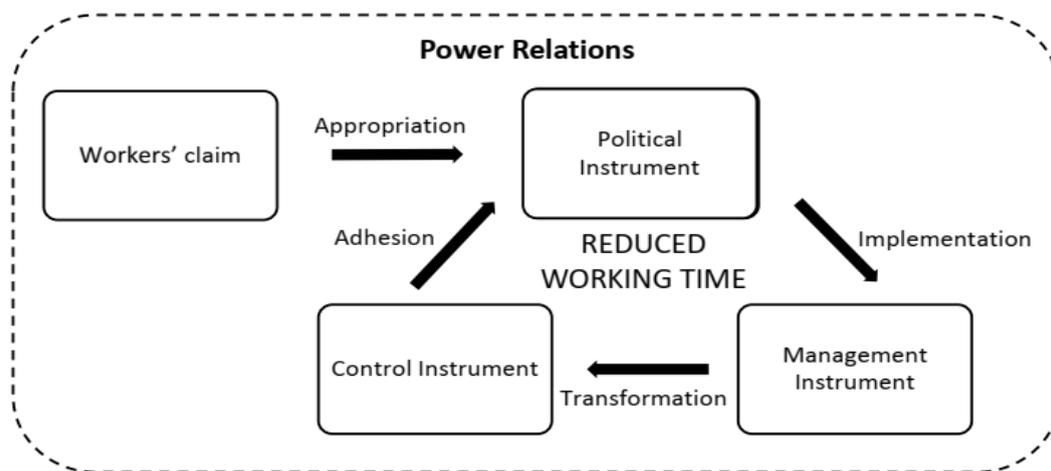
## Discussion

Initially, reduced working time resulted in numerous benefits, both for the institution and for workers, mainly when it comes to longer time off for personal activities. These benefits mainly accounted for the broad acceptance and defense of the thirty-hours, even among those who held a management position, and might not like it. This aspect complies with studies, according to which, shorter working hours, and other flexible ways to organize them, lead to a better work-life balance (Bayazit & Bayazit, 2019; Brauner, Wöhrmann, Frank, & Michel, 2019).

These results corroborate studies that have analyzed the association between reduced working time and workers' quality of life, including TAEs servants. Colnago (2012) conducted a study with TAEs of University of Brasília (UnB), and most servants mentioned the reduced working time as positive to improve their quality of life. Similar evidence was shown by Sousa (2018) in a study conducted at Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN).

However, it is necessary pointing out the criticism towards the trend to the conclusion that the reduced working time leads to better quality of life and leaves aside, rather than towards this research's outcomes. The first aspect left aside regards quality of life improvement outside work, which does not necessarily mean quality of life improvement at work, including labor conditions, features and meanings, among others. The second aspect regards the struggle to get better jobs, which must go hand in hand with that to reduce the working time in order to achieve emancipatory activities that allow individuals to thrive in profession, psychological, financial and emotional terms (Antunes, 2018; Carneiro & Ferreira, 2007; Faria & Ramos, 2014; Mocelin, 2011).

Thus, understanding the reduced working time system, based on a critical-reflexive instance, means understanding what is beyond its phenomenal appearance. Thus, based on EPP assumptions (Faria, 2004a, 2004b), it is possible stating that the reduced working time is part of a complex game of interests, symbolic disputes and contradictions: a game of power. Figure 2 offers an analytical synthesis of this context.



**Figure 2.** Analytical synthesis of reduced working time concepts

Source: authors.

The so-called 'power game' refers to the combination of management and control instruments to subtle and explicit operations incorporated to the policy focused on reduce working hours. These instruments are the effective foundation for the exercise of power in the herein assessed institution, including workers' adherence to this game. Firstly, the reduced working time, which was a workers' claim, at first, faced an appropriation process to meet political-electoral purposes. Secondly, its implementation took place as management instrument to efficiently provide mutual benefits to both civil servants and the institution.

However, several studies have shown how TAEs' work is marked by high demands and non-ideal structural, organizational and cultural conditions that are intensified by the adoption of the reduced working time, and it requires the use of defense mechanisms to resist daily pressures caused by it (Loureiro et al., 2018; Bedin, Fontes, & Braatz, 2020; Tessarini & Saltorato, 2021). These

aspects harm workers' health and the quality of the service provided by IFEs (Coutinho et al., 2011; Garcia, 2017).

Work activities remained tiring or stressful, they got more intense due to the reduced working time, since tasks got harder and the demand for better results increased. Therefore, it is possible understanding how the reduced workday emerged as placebo, and it did not solve all difficulties experienced in daily life, although it aims at making workers' relationship with their work activities more pleasant (Carneiro & Ferreira, 2007). Not by chance, public servants fear the possibility of losing their new working time system - which is the main contribution of the present study.

Findings in the current study allowed understanding how power relations were in the assessed institution and how the the reduced working time mobilized different instances and actors: TAEs, professors and managers. Although differently, these relationships were substantiated by three concepts, according to which, reduced working day was implemented in organizational context. This feature turned traces of the Foucauldian conception of power into an instrument by using the social structuring focused on these agents. According to Foucault (2010), individuals are products of both complex power relations and objectification dynamics observed in networks that capture, divide and classify them.

On the one hand, TAEs perceived themselves as hostages to a routine whose surveillance mechanisms that range from the most subtle to the most violent, in symbolic terms (Bourdieu, 1989). On the other hand, managers implemented and maintained the positive profile of this measure in their speeches and actions, in order to aim their interests. Thus, the analysis applied to benefits pointed out in interviewees' statements showed that servants' perceptions were moored to a rationalization system that was embodied by each group (Foucault, 2013). Such rationalization is expressed by the differentiation among groups and by fixing them to certain positions and roles within the organizational hierarchy associated with possible and expected modes of conduct. This separation makes it possible for power relations to be continuously and circularly exerted, legitimized, kept stable or enhanced.

Based on interviewees' speeches, the reduced working hours became a control instrument that was institutionalized by a kind of "management by fear" policy. IFE top management has the power to grant and cancel the thirty-hour working day, but it, somehow, appropriated workers' fear, as pointed out by Kelliher and Anderson (2010), and subtly forced servants to work more attentively and to be more committed, to increase work intensity, to remain available to the institution in their time off, and to make them control themselves and their workmates. No matter if workers followed "inspection committees" or if they applied "informal surveillance" over each other to make sure that reduced working time rules are followed, according to Faria (2004b), what really happens is the so-called 'shared or participatory control'; in other words, the attempt to involve workers in the decision-making process or in the command system itself, so they get fully integrated to the organization and to its imperatives. According to Gaulejac (2007), control and surveillance, in contemporary organizations, focus on "the work results more than on its modalities. If freedom increases in [...] the tasks to be accomplished, [...] its counterpart [...] is the drastic demand for results" (p. 110). It was also observed in the herein assessed institution. Workers were granted with more "freedom" to enjoy their time off, but it brought along a great demand for accomplishing tasks and improving their work performance.

As defined by Faria (2004b), the concept of reduced working time as control instrument took place through symbolic-imaginary mechanisms and affective bonds. The institution was not really intending to cancel the reduced working time system since such an action would be neither necessary nor interesting, if one takes into consideration its political profile. Actually, it was just a strategy to make TAEs work harder and join the “game”. The constant threats reported by interviewees are an emblematic example of the aforementioned statement; it is a coercion apparatus that represents the strongest power basis. Although, power is explicitly exerted in the present example, its effectiveness is linked to an imaginary adhesion process; simultaneously, it is linked to the “establishment of intervention apparatuses that work by threatening to use force and by demonstrations of domination over the coercive apparatuses, without the need of using them” (Faria, 2004b, p. 130).

At the same time, gratitude is reverberated by TAEs, even when it comes to political issues. This gratitude is expressed in two main ways: (a) every four years, when they vote to choose new directors; and (b) on a daily basis, when they work harder, either in the institution (within their six hours a day) or outside it (informally). There is a paradox: to be grateful and respond with more work when the servant has the opportunity to work less. These findings are associated with research carried out in different organizational contexts. Kelliher and Anderson (2010) highlighted workers’ increased efforts in gratitude to the possibility of working in reduced hours granted by employers. Nascimento et al. (2016) pointed out how workers under more flexible working arrangements easily submit to organizational pressures and imperatives. This evidence demonstrates, as pointed out Fracalanza (2001) pointed out, that this is the evidence that workers are more open to accept changes in their work routines when they work in reduced working hours.

Yet, based on the concept of reduced working time as a control instrument, it is possible stating that the distinctions between groups of professors and TAEs have gained relevance. Associations between the two assessed categories have their own power dynamics, which is expressed through conflicts (Tessarini & Saltorato, 2021), invisibility (Loureiro et al., 2018) and the sense of inferiority felt by TAEs in relation to professors (Nunes et al., 2018). These intricate dynamics gained new contours due to the shorter working time system, when reports and claims were legitimized as control mechanisms, even among TAEs, themselves, and it established a culture of general surveillance in the work environment. Surveillance among TAEs aimed at maintaining the reduced working time by curbing situations that could blur the merits of such an achievement; thus, surveillance by professors, managers and external users (although rare) could act in the opposite direction.

By conceiving the circularity and transience of power mechanisms, Foucault recognizes the constant dispute and rearrangement (a) of subjectivities as product of power and domination relations; (b) of truth speeches and (c) of resistance strategies (Braghin, 2017). Thus, on the one hand, the current classification system (as a management instrument) operates by differentiating TAEs from professors when it comes to wage, culture, rights, attributions, workload and functions. On the other hand, if the concept of reduced working time is taken as political instrument, TAEs find themselves in the position, according to which, it is likely implementing their interests and social (and power) relationships, due to IFE’s political orientation. Just as manager threatened to cancel the reduced working time, it was up to TAEs to reorder their resistance and to face strategies pointing towards the opposite direction.

If one takes the set of evidences into consideration, reduced working time featuring as political, management and control instrument broadens the discussions about power relations in organizations, mainly when it comes to working time. The appropriation and transformation of a struggle object of the working class into a management and power instrument means a kind of “freely consented submission” (Gaulejac, 2007, p. 122). If workers have one of their main claims met, how can they not express gratitude? How can one face, or even question, organizational imperatives? How cannot one join a game where, apparently, everyone wins? Although they recognize the difficulty in organizing work activities and although the political and control purposes are observed in shorter working hours, it seems natural that workers minimize such aspects to get what they believe to be the only benefit. Here's the rationalization: a mental process of means-end calculation took in to consideration the benefits of reduced hours in non-working time versus adversities observed in working time. Thus, one of the interviewees summarized her assessment of the reduced working day and defined the essence of its daily experience: *“it is bad with it, but it is much worse without it”* (TAE 07).

From the Foucauldian perspective, power results from force relationship, and it cannot be only explained by its repressive aspect. Submission, in power relations, is not just a repressive subjection, but it also involves the desire to act according to power designs that operate in themselves (Foucault, 2002). Thus, the psychic mobilization apparatus seeks workers' voluntary adhesion to a paradoxical power. On the one hand, it happens through the exercise of power, which is the process to channel servants' gratitude, engagement, commitment, aspirations, fears and anxieties, since it was implemented to help the achievement of organizational and political goals. However, simultaneously, those who hold such a power grant a wish to workers, and increasingly lead them to legitimize and intensify this same process. Again, from the EPP perspective, the power and control instruments incorporated to such a benefit, more than controlling schedules and tasks, ensure that the “game” keeps on running, that workers remain grateful, that they continue to dedicate themselves to the institution from “body and soul” and to believe in an illusory reality that the reduced working time system is a gift given by employers as a symbol of gratitude for servants' good services (Faria, 2004b, p. 121).

This research is not a guilty sentence towards the institution. Human resource management policies aim at fostering motivation, commitment and productivity. However, this aspect must be followed by collective and organizational awareness of these policies' purposes. Banning the struggle to reduce working time should not be reduced to fighting for reducing working hours. Struggles to reconfigure all (re)productive activity is necessary and urgent to improve working conditions, to structure emancipated and autonomous work, to be truly free at times off, and the consolidation of activities that allow individuals to develop their multiple dimensions (social, psychological, emotional, among others) through (but not only) labor. Otherwise, as some interviewees referred to the thirty-hour working time, management policies and practices face the risk of becoming *“bargaining chips or crumbs”*.

## Conclusion

The present article addressed the different concepts of reduced working time policy adopted by a given organization. The aim of this article was to better understand how domination

by control mechanisms applied to work time is operationalized from the Weberian reflections on life rationalization, on its temporal dimension and on chaining different power concepts in organizations, mainly from both the Foucauldian approach and the political economy of power; this domination is the constant sophistication of these mechanisms and the basis to subject workers to them.

The theoretical contribution of the current article lies on expanding perceptions and discussions about the reduced working time phenomenon by inserting analysis elements so far taken as the likely appropriation of a political instrument and, subsequently, of its transformation into a management and control instrument to be used against workers. Although this concept rises from a single case study, it contributes to new reflections on the topic based on a critical-interpretative approach. This research goes beyond the rising phenomenon to bring out its essence and contradictions in order to understand power dynamics, since it pointed out management and control instruments that were added to the reduced working time policy.

Assumingly, working time reduction has positive implications to the assessed institution and to workers, moreover, it can contribute to the work-life balance - these aspects are broadly addressed in the literature. However, it is necessary to conduct further studies on this topic and to incorporate the present data to their investigation objects based on how the reduced working time system is conceived and implemented, since it can worsen poor labor conditions and work as power strategy to support 'not-so-obvious' interests and to contradict the beautiful speeches intended to promote quality of life.

The limitations of this study lie on the fact that it was not possible comparing daily work, before and after the implementation of the new system, although it would allow better understanding the changes and impacts of this measure. In addition, data collection was only carried out in one of the institution's *campi*. Therefore, it may have been influenced by particularities of this unit, and it may not be observed in the rest of this IFE. Furthermore, present findings were limited to the analyzed period; thus, they did not incorporate changes experienced in the organizational routine after the end of data collection procedure.

Accordingly, it is possible suggesting future studies aimed at comparing analyses applied to reduced working time featuring and impacts on other public and/or private organizations. Additional elements, such as productivity, well-being, engagement, gender, among others, can be taken into consideration from a critical and transdisciplinary perspective. Finally, the work performed by the technical-administrative staff - although extremely relevant for IFEs - remains as object of study similar to that of professors. New research can contribute by allowing a broader view of these professionals' daily life experiences if one takes into consideration the multiple features of this activity, both when it comes to management policies and tasks, as well as to meanings of work.

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## Funding

The authors did not receive financial support for the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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## Conflict of interests

The authors have stated that there is no conflict of interest.

## Authors' contribution

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