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ESTUDO EM UMA UNIVERSIDADE PÚBLICA NA AMAZÔNIA**  
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ARTIGO

## MEDIATION STRATEGIES IN TEACHING WORK: A STUDY IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN THE AMAZON

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**ABSTRACT:** The research intended to identify mediation strategies used by Higher Public Education professors in the Amazon region, as well as positive aspects, difficulties at work and suggestions to lessen them. A descriptive study that mixed analysis with frequency and content analysis. It was applied a sociodemographic and work questionnaire with 52 professors, that identified as positive aspects: to have satisfactory relationships with colleagues (33%), the possibilities for research, teaching and extension (31%), the dynamism of the time (23%) and the relationship established with students (19%). And about difficulties, the problems in the infrastructure of the institution (59.7%), the socio-professional relationship (50%), workload (19.2%), and bureaucracy

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in the flow of administrative services (15, 4%). Defensive strategies used more often were rationalization, isolation, and compensation. The subjective mobilization had to be more individual than collective. Despite the use of strategies, professors have not been able to modify the work environment marked by the low number of professors in activity.

**Keywords:** Psychodynamics of work; Public sector; Teaching work; Universities.

## **ESTRATÉGIAS DE MEDIAÇÃO NO TRABALHO DOCENTE: UM ESTUDO EM UMA UNIVERSIDADE PÚBLICA NA AMAZÔNIA**

**RESUMO:** A pesquisa procurou identificar estratégias de mediação no trabalho utilizadas por docentes de Ensino Superior Público, na região amazônica. Além de aspectos positivos, dificuldades no trabalho e sugestões para amenizá-las. Estudo descritivo, de análise mista com frequência e análise de conteúdo. Foi aplicado um questionário sociodemográfico e laboral com 52 docentes, que identificaram como positivo: ter relações satisfatórias com colegas (33%), possibilidades em pesquisa, ensino e extensão (31%), a flexibilidade no horário (23%) e a relação estabelecida com os alunos (19%). E como dificuldades os problemas na infraestrutura da Instituição (59,7%), nas relações socioprofissionais (50%), a sobrecarga de trabalho (19,2%), e a burocracia no fluxo de serviços administrativos (15,4%). As estratégias defensivas frequentes foram racionalização, isolamento e compensação. A mobilização subjetiva apresentou-se mais individual do que coletiva. Apesar do uso de estratégias, os docentes não têm conseguido modificar o contexto de trabalho marcado pelo baixo número de docentes em atividade.

**Palavras-chave:** Psicodinâmica do trabalho; Setor público; Trabalho docente; Universidades.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The expansion of Federal Universities was marked by a historical process in Brazilian education, with the creation of the Restructuring and Expansion Program of Federal Universities - REUNI (BRASIL, 2007). Its beginning took place in 2003 and went through some stages of implementation - such as Pre-Expansion or Pre-Reuni, Expansion I, Reuni and Post-Reuni -, which sought the expansion of Federal University campuses to smaller cities inland (BRASIL, 2010).

The overall goal of REUNI, according to Decree N. 6,096, Art. 1º §1 (BRASIL, 2007), was to gradually increase the completion rate of undergraduate courses to 90% and the ratio of 18 students per professors in five years. Since then, the Government attempts to maintain both this goal and the Program's guidelines, which are: reduction of dropout, student mobility, academic structure, the hiring

of professors, among others (BRASIL, 2007). However, the reduction of job vacancies, budget difficulties, and especially the intensification of teaching have hindered the program's implementation, thus resulting in a precarious work (Sindicato Nacional dos Docentes das Instituições de Ensino Superior [ANDES-SN], 2013).

The opposition of professors and their union marked, over the years, the adherence to the program by the Universities. This question refers to the criticism that the program limits, at some level, the autonomy of professors and prioritizes graduation with low quality, allowing public education to incorporate characteristics associated with the commodification of education into its management. For example, focusing only on increasing the number of students, without considering the quality of teaching offered (MEDEIROS, 2012).

In a study carried out on four campuses in the Northern Region that joined REUNI, Medeiros (2012) sought to analyze the policy of restructuring and expansion of Higher Education. The following results were highlighted: the guidelines were not followed; the discrepancy between the progress of campus reconstruction and the increase in the number enrollments of students/courses; the overload of teaching work and the naturalization of academic productivism. This region has been marked, as well as others, by difficulties concerning the relation of the number of students to the number of professors in exercise. The struggles in managing post-graduation leave processes and the increasing number of professor removals have provoked the so-called "functional void" in many campuses, especially in those located in regions farthest from large urban centers (ANDES-SN, 2013).

The analysis of the expansion of the Federal Universities between 2003 and 2012 registers a growth in the Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES) of approximately 44% of professors, and after the implementation of REUNI, in 2008, there was a reduction of 64% of substitutes (BRASIL, 2012). However, the contradiction occurs in the fact that, in the years after, the subcontracting of labor is still registered to supply immediate demands in the collegiate. As an example, Law No. 12.425 / 2011 increased the percentage from 10% to 20% (of all faculty members) with the possibility of hiring substitutes without public tender (BRASIL, 2011). This demonstrates the continuity of precarious teaching work, which is even supported by such legislation (GUIMARÃES, 2013).

Despite the access to the university for many young people and the advances in research and technology, it has become necessary

to reflect on how the university expansion is happening. The major concern in this context is that political demands of higher education do not become a condescending chaos with neoliberal policies which aim at maintaining macroeconomic stability and implementing pro-market structural reforms (MORAES & SAAD-FILHO, 2011).

Following the logic of capitalism, that is, with a policy based on mercantilism, Vieira (2013) characterized the precariousness of teaching work in the Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES). While carrying out a bibliographical review on the subject, he analyzed that researches have identified that the work conditions relate to the perspective of “savage” capitalism, when investigating the historical, political and social dimension of the professor.

When analyzing the teaching work, it is necessary to understand that this worker needs to be considered in his singularity and needs to have access to working conditions that provide him with mental health. Freitas and Facas (2013) reinforce that there is a dialectical process between the worker (providing meaning to the work) and the work situations that impact him. Through the theoretical constructs of the Clinic of Psychodynamic of Work (DEJOURS, 1993/2004), this individual is understood in a broad dimension as capable of having both sources of pleasure and suffering at work, and they are not exclusive.

Pleasure in work can arise in the sources of the work context. It is a mobilizer and puts the worker to search for freedom, recognition, gratification, and valorization. However, suffering differentiates itself by being linked to experiences of emotional exhaustion - frustration, uselessness, weariness, and stress - and lack of recognition, exemplified by injustice, indignation, devaluation. In this context, there is a dialectical construction between the worker who seeks to give meaning to his activity and, on the other hand, the work with situations that impact him in his work context (FREITAS & FACAS, 2013; MENDES & MULLER, 2012).

Suffering can be classified into pathological or creative suffering. The first is related to inflexible and rigid experiences, occurring when there is no possibility of negotiation and transformation, destabilizing the psychic apparatus and leading to decompensation and illness (MENDES, 2008). On the other hand, creative suffering happens when the subject produces solutions which are favorable to his health at work, using ingenuity, driven to search for solutions, benefiting the organization and allowing personal fulfillment (MORAES, 2013b).

The studies about pleasure-suffering with professors of public education have identified both positive and negative experiences, but

the latter has prevailed. Freitas and Facas (2013) found pathogenic suffering as the most present, analyzing the work context through interviews with four groups of professors from a region of the Federal District.

The poor working conditions and personal isolation were also identified for Professors of a university, by Cupertino, Garcia, and Honório (2015). This study found suffering as a result of competitiveness and productivity requirements, despite experiences of pleasure related to the organization of that work context.

Because of the precariousness at work, many workers are driven by the struggle for survival and thus need to face suffering in some way (BARROS & MENDES, 2003). It seeks to account for the prescribed work and to respond to the demands of the organization using the so-called mediation strategies. The Psychodynamics of Work refers that workers need to develop strategies of mediation that enable the maintenance of mental health at work, whether protecting oneself from what causes suffering or transforming suffering into pleasure. Therefore, mediation strategies include both defensive and confrontation strategies. These can be classified as collective or individual and occur, for the most part, unconsciously (MORAES, 2013a).

Defensive strategies (DEJOURS, 1994) are rules of conduct constructed by workers to bear suffering without illness, which are marked by subtlety, ingenuity, diversity, and inventiveness (MENDES, 2007a). Defensive strategies can be classified as: of protection, of adaptation or based on the exploration. The protection defenses are based on rationalization and occur when workers use compensatory ways of thinking, feeling and acting, and then, in situations of suffering, they rationalize it. After some time and with the increasing precariousness of work, these defenses can be exhausted, since the worker does not face his suffering, either act on the organization of work, which can lead to his illness (DEJOURS, 1993/2004; MENDES, 2007B; DEJOURS, 2011; MORAES, 2013c). Examples of protection defenses, besides rationalization, would be isolation, resistance, and passivity (MENDES, 2007B; DEJOURS, 2011). In a study with higher education professors working in a virtual environment, defensive strategies such as control, rationalization, and compensation were found (FREITAS, 2006).

About the defenses of adaptation and exploitation, both are based on the denial of suffering and submission to the desire for production. Workers assume goals as their own and are taken over by a process of alienation. In these defenses, the workers do

not take their desires into account. There is a whole physical and socio-psychic investment that can lead them to neurotic behavior and cause them to exhaust more quickly (DEJOURS, 2011; MENDES, 2007B; MORAES, 2013c). In fact, it is possible to say that they are complementary, that is, in denying their suffering and trying to remain productive, the worker starts to be exploited (LOPES, 2010). Regarding the adaptation strategies, the examples are negation, resignation, and compensation (MORAES, 2013c; DEJOURS, 2011). When investigating experiences of pleasure-suffering of professors, Freitas and Facas (2013) identified defensive strategies and the use of subjective mobilization that has transformed some aspects of work but have not been able to expressively change the context of this work. This study analyzed that professors, despite the conscience of the suffering at work, endure the uncomfortable situations as they can through their defenses.

Defensive strategies are the resources of workers to deal with suffering, to avoid illness and to continue working. Workers can also make use of collective strategies, but these strategies require an agreement among the group to function as a rule and protection factor. However, these tactics used in a group support adaptation rather than transformation of the factors of suffering (MORAES, 2013c).

The confrontation strategies, a concept proposed by Mendes (2007b), are characterized as a way of resistance and of gaining pleasure at work. They act in the cause and not in the effect of suffering, so they have a transgressive dimension. They are based on practical intelligence (acquired knowledge) and can be enhanced by subjective mobilization (MORAES, 2013c). They occur through the engagement of the worker in his work, using his practical intelligence to transform situations that cause suffering. To happen, they often require cooperation among workers and a space for discussion, so that they can collectively express their suffering and seek joint alternatives to overcome it (MENDES, 2007a).

In an intervention research that resulted in a process of listening to professors, it was identified that, despite the suffering reported in their daily lives, there was identification with the profession through the pleasure of teaching and being recognized by the students. Subjective mobilization was found in the capacity to tolerate suffering and to invest in attempts until reaching a solution (MENDES & ARAÚJO, 2012). When studying professors, Freitas and Facas (2013) identified a group work in which these workers exchanged ideas to solve daily problems. Thus, it was found that, in



this group, there was a public space of discussion and transformation of the work experienced by them.

Given these considerations, the present study sought to identify the positive aspects (related to pleasure) and the main difficulties (suffering sources) found in teaching on a campus of a public university. Suggestions for mitigating or modifying the difficulties described were also investigated. In addition, it aimed to describe the mediation strategies (defensive and/or confrontation) used by professors.

## METHOD

### DELIMITATION

This is a mixed study with a descriptive design and concurrent nested strategy (CRESWELL, 2010). The data were collected through quantitative and qualitative methods simultaneously, which are gathered in data analysis to seek a broader perspective of different types of data.

### PARTICIPANTS

Through the census method, questionnaires were given to the universe of 64 professors in the exercise of their activities, obtaining a return of 52 respondents, of which the ratio of males (51.9%) was slightly higher than females (48.1%). The participants' ages ranged from 23 to 58 years ( $M = 37.2$ ). Professors from the north were identified (51.9%) followed by the other regions (center-west, southeast, and south) with 32.7%, and the northeast represented by 15.4%. The predominant level of education of the participants was Master's degree (55.8%).

Regarding marital status, 48.1% are married or live in common-law marriage and 40.4% have declared themselves unmarried. The working time at the current University varied between 06 months to 23 years ( $M = 3.9$ ), and 51.9% of participants declared to have children. The exclusion criterion was professors in a license for health treatment or private interest license, the latter are other types of licenses granted, but not quantitatively predictable since they are eventual.

### INSTRUMENTS

A self-administered sociodemographic and labor questionnaire was used. This instrument was initially set up through a preliminary study with interviews with five professors for convenience, seeking to understand the relationship between pleasure and suffering at work. This pilot action helped the elaboration of the questions for



the questionnaire. The study evaluated the sociodemographic and labor characterization under the following categories: gender, age, region of origin, schooling, time of profession, university work time, marital status, family configuration, and issues related to health leave.

The open questions investigated issues related to teaching work, such as 1) which are the main positive aspects; 2) which are the main difficulties; 3) which strategies are used to deal with each difficulty at work; 4) which suggestions are made to soften or modify the difficulties encountered.

#### **ETHICAL AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

The research was submitted, evaluated and approved by the Unisinos Research Ethics Committee, under CAAE 47719315.0.0000.5344. The first contact was made with the direction of the university campus to notify about the data collection stage, through a letter and a meeting to explain all the research procedures. The participants were invited via e-mail, and the listing and electronic addresses were provided by the Institution.

The content of the e-mail related to the purpose of the research and collection procedures. When the professors agreed to participate, they received the questionnaire in person and the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE). The material was returned by the participants themselves, who deposited them in two separate ballot boxes (one for the questionnaires and another for the TCLE), both located in the secretary office of the health sector on campus. The initial deadline for return was one week. However, the beginning of the collection was marked by a strike period, and therefore the instruments were returned in greater quantity only when the professors returned to work.

It was explained to the participants that if they would need some psychological care for discomfort when filling out the research data, this would be done through referral to the Psychology services of the municipality. Two participants had to be referred since they had some symptoms of psychological distress.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE**

Mixed method studies (Creswell, 2010), have two types of analyzes. The quantitative analysis was performed by grouping similar responses and calculating the frequency (percentage), considering the total answers obtained for the items of the questionnaire: a) positive aspects found at work; b) main difficulties encountered at work; and c)

suggestions for mitigating or modifying the difficulties encountered.

The qualitative data analysis was organized according to content analysis (Bardin, 1977), into categories that described the strategies used by professors to deal with each difficulty at work. It started with *a priori* categories, seeking to identify defensive and confrontation strategies. These categories were based on the already presented concepts of Work Psychodynamics, emphasizing their validity and relevance (DEJOURS, 1993/2004; MORAES, 1999).

Following this, considering the possibility of using individual and/or collective defensive strategies, the research used categories and subcategories: a) *Protection*: rationalization and isolation; b) *Adaptation and Exploration*: denial, resignation, and compensation. And the category of individual and/or collective confrontation strategy (DEJOURS, 1993/2004; DEJOURS, 2011; MENDES, 2007b; MORAES, 2013c).

Two judges were used to carry out a content analysis, considering the categories listed *a priori*. This type of analysis is called *consensus or reproducibility*, where the test-test procedure is used. That is, the judges assigned the same category instructions to the same material, but independently (LIMA, 2013). A third judge was used when there was disagreement between the codings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### POSITIVE ASPECTS AT WORK

According to the quantitative analysis of the positive aspects of teaching work, the first relevant factor was to have satisfactory relations with colleagues (33%), exemplified by “good relations with collegiate colleagues” and a “favorable working environment”. Besides being “well accepted in several sectors of the Institution”. Possibilities found in research, teaching and extension activities represented 31% of the answers and the professors cited as examples: “the freedom to conduct scientific projects”; “To contribute effectively to projects for improving the University and the city”; “The freedom to be able to articulate theory and practice, bringing knowledge and exchanging life experiences”.

The third factor in evidence was the flexibility in the schedule (23%) and, in this case, emphasized the “practicality of scheduling”; “Adequacy of schedules for planning” and “availability of schedule to carry out activities of teaching, research and extension”. The relationship with the students represented 19% of the answers, taking as an example the “acquaintanceship”, “exchange of experiences”

and the “accomplishment of academic activities committed to the transformation of society in a humanitarian way”.

Professors’ autonomy (17%) was related to “autonomy in the process of conducting activities”; “Freedom in pedagogical choices”; and “freedom of expression”. The financial stability represented 11% and was exemplified in “being stable” and “being paid on the right day”. In addition to the expansion and construction of knowledge, which also represented 11%, as well as “the possibility of contributing to the intellectual and behavioral development of students” and the “opportunity to share knowledge with students and colleagues.”

The items that were less representative were grouped in the category “others”, meaning 17% of the professors’ answers. In these items, the professors mentioned questions related to the campus being in an inland city, the job promotions, the activity of teaching and the professional recognition.

The sources of pleasure cited as autonomy, the flexibility of time, the possibility of research, financial stability, may be related to professional achievement and freedom of expression as found in the study of Freitas (2006). He also identified professors who are proud to work in a new area (virtual environment), appreciation by the Institution as well as sources of pleasure related to freedom and autonomy to organize their work schedule and their tasks.

The results also corroborate the findings of Cupertino, Garcia, and Honório (2015) who found pride, identification with tasks and personal gratification as sources of pleasure for professors of an IFES in Minas Gerais/BR. The study also highlighted the good relationship with the students and the personal fulfillment in the teaching activity. Pleasing relationships with co-workers and students were also results in the study by Coutinho, Magro, and Budde (2011). An example is that they can be an opportunity for exchanges, interaction and interpersonal relationships that mitigate the other sources of suffering at work.

These positive results refer to pleasure in work which, for Dejours (1993/2004), is not inseparable from suffering. In other words, through work, it is possible to subvert suffering into pleasure. In this combination, there is the history of the individual and his relation to the organization of work. Pleasure is a mobilizing principle that places the subject in the search for recognition and this is allowed through subjective mobilization when he uses practical intelligence, being benefited when there is a public space of discussion and the construction of a collective, using cooperation and recognition. According to the Psychodynamics of Work, pleasure is the result of

the confrontation between the reality of work and the advantage of the worker to overcome the resistances of the real and to resignify the suffering (MENDES & MULLER, 2012).

#### DIFFICULTIES AT WORK

Regarding the difficulties encountered at work, participants cited problems in the Institution's infrastructure (59.7%), and the difficulties with the Internet stood out the most. Others were exemplified: "lack of laboratory, Projector does not work, lack of telephones"; "The pedagogical structure is inadequate for the accomplishment of certain practical activities" and "The lack of didactic material, like books and acquisition of laboratory materials".

Socio-professional relations - which involve relationships between colleagues and students - accounted for 50% of the difficulties. In this question, the professors considered the relations with colleagues the most conflicted, as found in answers like: "extremely difficult interpersonal relations"; "Lack of interest and respect from students, conflicting relationships in the workplace meetings, with frequent disrespect, culminating in wear and tear for all". Also, "living with people who seem to be selfish, vain and loveless," and "people seem angry and often sick".

The work overload (19.2%) was marked as a difficulty at work, due to the diversity and quantity of demand. This is exemplified by the answers: "amount of bachelor's thesis orientations, in addition to the four courses that I minister"; "Activities that require hours of dedication above the limit suggested and admitted by the Institution", and "work overload beyond what the institutional resolution advocates".

Another factor identified as a difficulty at work was the bureaucracy of administrative processes/services, represented by 15.4%. This situation was found in the "delay in sending and receiving documents"; "lack of standard flow in administrative processes"; "low resolution of administrative problems" and "difficult access to information". Regarding the lack of financial resources for the execution of projects/activities (13.5%), these were presented through the "frequent cuts of funds for education carried out by the Federal Government"; "Difficulty in carrying out research and extension due to lack of funds" and "few financial resources to research and develop projects".

The factors responsible for the other difficulties were grouped and represented a total of 15.3%. These are exemplified by the difficulty in logistics in the region, that is, the matter of distance to access the city; by the absence of the family, because some professors do not have close relatives in that region; and by poor medical care.

The difficulties at work are related in this study as sources of suffering for these professors, according to Psychodynamic of Work. When the infrastructure of an institution is precarious, these workers find themselves in difficulties in working conditions. These conditions, according to Mendes (2007b), include the physical environment, equipment, instruments. In other words, all the necessary organizational support for professors to perform their activities. The inland expansion of Federal Universities intended to increase access to higher education (BRASIL, 2007), but it is necessary that the infrastructure provided in these campuses is adequate for quality education, resulting in better working conditions for professors.

The lack of didactic and financial resources and inadequate infrastructure for some courses (such as lack of laboratory and experimental farm, exemplified by professors) leads to the reflection cited by Libâneo (2011, p. 28), that learning, understood only as the accumulation of knowledge, should not last in contemporaneity. For the author, the mediation of the subject with other knowledge and meanings that students bring to the classroom is important, and the professor can enhance the achievement of these educational goals, provided that he has adequate conditions for this. As one professor states: “*Classrooms for visual arts must have multimedia resources because it is difficult to speak of art without using the image of great works of art history (...)*”.

Another important factor was the socio-professional relations, which were also presented as difficulties. However, these had already been highlighted as the first relevant positive factor: having satisfactory relationships with colleagues. The fact that socio-professional relations present themselves as positive for one and as difficulties for others depends on how and with whom they are established. These relationships, according to Mendes (2007b), are the ways of work management, the forms of communication and the interaction between workers. Considering the results found in the present study, there were positive relationships with some colleagues and managers, but the participants emphasized the satisfactory relationship with the students and technicians. On the other hand, with some co-workers, these relationships have also been reported to be difficult, conflicting, and competitive.

Competition arises in work situations in which the worker fears losing something (the job, the admiration of the boss, the recognition, and compliments for a job well done) because he/she believes that the colleague can be better, do better and occupy a space that until then it belonged to him. When there is competition, the behaviors are

individualistic, the information is centralized and used for the benefit of the individual and not of the collective, prevailing the distrust in relationships (BRUCH & MONTEIRO, 2011). According to Dejours (2003), trust is of paramount importance for the promotion and maintenance of mental health. It is evident that when the subject is faced with a social culture and an organizational dynamic that stimulate individualism and competition, relationships are threatened and insecurity and suffering are installed in the work environment. According to Mendes (2007a), conflict in labor relations generates suffering for the worker and consequently generates problems for the Institution, since its evolution and frequency can turn into violence at work and in moral harassment.

The work overload situation was also evident, being previously identified by the low number of professors in actual exercise. This situation causes more workload, both for effective and substitute professors. It is important to point out the fact that 34 professors are away for postgraduate and the campus is overloaded with activities beyond the limit allowed by the teaching legislation.

This picture is related to the study of Guimarães (2013), which identified, in a University in the northern region, that the work of substitute professors is inadequately used, not only on a temporary basis, as provided by legislation, and that it reveals the precariousness in the teaching work. In the meantime, he also found professors in full exercise of activities with an obvious overload of work, because they are replacing professors away.

The participants, when citing difficulties in the teaching work, were also asked to suggest what to do to mitigate/modify this situation (Table 1). After analyzing the responses, suggestions were found related to the institution's infrastructure, socio-professional relations, bureaucracy in the flow of administrative processes/services and work overload. Given the context of work in the IFES and, specifically in the campus investigated, it is relevant to think about the possibility of seeking joint strategies for the presented difficulties. Some of the suggestions pointed out by the professors are of simple applicability as, for example, redistribution of physical space; standard flow for documents and hold discussions about the immediate and future yearnings of the courses, while others would involve the need for more planned collective action in the medium / long term such as fighting bullying and increasing staffing.

**TABLE 1.** Difficulties at work and suggestions/solutions of professors

Main difficulties at work	Frequency of responses	Solutions suggested by professors
Institution Infrastructure	59,7% (N = 31)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- institutional planning;</li> <li>- redistribution of physical spaces;</li> <li>- better management that seeks partnerships;</li> <li>- make available technological resources and expand library assets;</li> <li>- hold discussions on the immediate and future yearnings of the courses;</li> <li>- improve the quality of the internet service;</li> </ul>
Socio-professional relations	50% (N = 26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- university therapy groups;</li> <li>- respect for peers;</li> <li>- greater rigidity combating harassment;</li> <li>- develop activities to unite and promote personal and group development;</li> </ul>
Work overload	19,2% (N = 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- increase staff for the equitable distribution of tasks;</li> <li>- tabulation of teaching, research and extension hours, according to reality;</li> <li>- to think more seriously about the functionality of the courses in relation to policies of release for graduation;</li> </ul>
Bureaucracy of administrative processes/services	15,4% (N = 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- definition of standard flows for documents;</li> <li>- “debureaucratize”, as much as possible;</li> <li>- definition of an activities schedule;</li> <li>- create new sectors to relieve those who are overburdened;</li> <li>- transparency in decisions;</li> </ul>
Financial resources to execute projects/activities	13,5% (N = 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- public education to be a real priority with incomes starting at 10% of GDP;</li> <li>- greater autonomy for campus budget;</li> <li>- independence to solve certain issues.</li> </ul>
Logistics of the region	7,7% (N = 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- subsidy of locality aid;</li> <li>- improve communication with headquarters;</li> </ul>
Family absence	3,8% (N = 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- solve financial difficulties to be able to visit family more frequently;</li> <li>- subsidy for travel expenses.</li> </ul>
Precarious medical care	3,8% (N = 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- greater local coverage of health plan;</li> <li>- more investments in health.</li> </ul>

Source: Table drawn by the authors.



Among the various problems experienced by professors was the bureaucracy of processes, as well as the geographical location of the campus, which is in the inland of the Amazon region, the lack of autonomy with financial resources, considering that this campus is not yet classified as a management unit, because its financial management is still tied to the capital's campus. Although universities have their strategic planning, one should seek to critically analyze the objectives, the role of the Dean and the director, the academic strategy, and others (HARDY & FACHIN, 2000), in order to reflect on the social role of a public university. The commercialization model of university education has often been part of the history of these institutions in Brazil, and it is present to this day, as evidenced in researches about university reality.

## MEDIATION STRATEGIES AT WORK

The qualitative analysis of the mediation strategies (defensive and confrontation strategies) was carried out from the content analysis of the answers regarding the question of how the professors deal with each difficulty found in their work, considering also the concepts related to the strategies based on the Psychodynamics of Work. That said, the defensive strategies of protection were the most cited, which came before the use of rationalization regarding the difficulty of resources, for example: “working with the principle that if others have already performed in adverse conditions, we can do” and “Because of the lack of resources and infrastructure, I try not to worry about trying to offer quality education”. The rationalization, according to Dejours, Abdoucheli, and Jayet (1994), would be the search for an explanation that justifies and explains the reasons that cause the suffering.

The professors also presented the *rationalization* regarding the difficulty of socio-professional relations when referring that “I do not get involved in fights, and I avoid positions of direction, because they are very requested and the fights are frequent to harm the other” and “I do not expose myself, and I try not to express myself in larger groups”. Another situation in this category is the difficulty in trusting other people, such as the fact that a professor reports: “All documents delivered are copied and stored for further proof in case of loss”.

The use of *isolation* was identified regarding socio-professional relations in the responses exemplified by: “I do my work individually, I develop the projects myself”; “Turning away from activities where unethical people are involved” and “I have chosen to be invisible

because I have tried several times to participate and have always been hindered by institutional norms”. Dejours (2004) emphasizes that the isolation and disaggregation of living together potentiate the aggravation of contemporary mental pathologies, such as the pathologies of overload, violence, and loneliness.

The use of *passivity* was also observed in professors’ reports and was related to the difficulties of bureaucracy and material/financial resources, for example: “Develop patience and await the development of the process”; “There is no way to overcome these difficulties, the result is that I cannot do better work” and “there is nothing to be done about bureaucracy”. Passivity, as a way of relieving suffering, was observed in Perez’s study (2012) of university professors who discredited the changes in their work context, presented as a strategy to avoid the feeling of anguish, which arises from the sensations of fear, insecurity and incompleteness (Dejours, Abdoucheli, & Jayet, 1994).

The strategies of *adaptation* and *exploration* were marked by responses of *resignation* and *compensation*, regarding the difficulties related mainly to the Institution’s infrastructure. This first one appeared in the answers of the professors when they affirm: “There is no way, I have to make it happen”; “In relation to the lack of an adequate work environment, I try to follow the laws, to do ‘politics’ and to do my work within the possibilities (even if it is less of what it should be)”.

Regarding the *compensation*, this occurred when the participants reported the “Purchase of internet package on my own, sending documents on my own, buying equipment to teach, making calls on personal phone to the campus of the capital, purchase of personal projector for use at work, purchase of office supplies”; “I anticipate the preparation for multimedia features. I try to work with more accessible materials, considering the social reality of the students” and “Because of the work overload, I end up working, too, outside working hours, weekends and in my spare time”. The compensation was also found in a qualitative study that analyzed the perceptions of pleasure and suffering in professors of an IFES in Minas Gerais (CUPERTINO, GARCIA & HONÓRIO, 2015).

It was observed in this latter strategy that professors use compensation often. This is a red alert since for the Psychodynamics of Work, the repeated use of defensive strategies can lead workers to a defensive ideology as well as can result in the worker’s alienation process (DEJOURS, 1987). Defensive ideology is designed to combat real dangers and aims to mask a more severe anxiety in a specific group (Mendes, 2007b).

For Dejours (1987), defensive strategies occur as a form of protection for this worker to minimize the causes of suffering. Therefore, they can enable some balance of mental health to this individual. The Psychodynamics of Work understands that these defensive strategies can occur individually or collectively. In the case of this study, we observed a greater tendency to individual strategies used by the professors at work.

Regarding confrontation strategies, which are potentialized by subjective mobilization, they take place to fill the gap between the prescribed and the actual work, with the worker's engagement and the transformation of his/her suffering reality (MENDES & ARAÚJO, 2012). The use of individual mobilization and practical intelligence was identified in the following responses: "Reorganization of time for each activity, prioritization of activities of greater urgency, maintenance of balance for the friendly establishment of social relations"; "To act showing that certain attitudes are unnecessary, because conflicts must exist, as divergences of ideas and opinions, but disrespect affects people and work" (strategies reported to deal with the difficulties of overload and conflicts in relationships); "I try to carry out my work with the highest quality, listening to students, using creativity in all classes" (used in the absence of interest on the part of the students) and "for every activity, I always search and try to elaborate a second alternative" (strategy reported against various difficulties).

Few collective confrontation strategies were found. Regarding this, only two answers were listed: "I expose the difficulty in the professors' meetings, proposing to think of viable solutions, signaling the difficulties and possibilities" and "Considering the overload of work, we try to share tasks with other colleagues, but this is not always possible". It is noticed that there are few attempts of collective mobilization by the professors, and that individual approaches occurred more frequently. Mendes and Araújo (2012) point out that to maximize the use of confrontation strategies, there must previously be a collective work. And for that, there must be trust and cooperation, so that it is possible to establish agreements between different perspectives and personal arrangements. Therefore, the collective work is not consistent with the competition, a factor that was highlighted by the participants as difficulties encountered in the work.

In addition, the results showed that group deliberations were very rare. This situation can be exemplified by the neoliberal policies

that have been taking shape throughout this process of university implementation. In other words, the mechanisms of mobilization end up being exhausted, what makes the professors more and more individualized. And even facing diversity and quantity of demands, causing scarcity of time. If there was a present collective mobilization, barriers could be reduced, engagement could occur through subjectivity, practical intelligence, and collective work. And then there could be greater possibilities for transforming such situations that generate suffering (MENDES, 2007b).

## CONCLUSIONS

This study identified positive aspects and difficulties in teaching work, defensive and confrontation strategies, as well as suggestions on how to seek improvements in the difficulties encountered. The results showed positive aspects such as having good relationships with colleagues; possibilities of research, teaching, and extension; satisfactory relations with students and the dynamism in the schedule. However, the difficulties encountered were also associated with socio-professional relations, especially with more individualistic and competitive colleagues, as well as with other issues related to the institution's infrastructure and work overload. The confrontation still seems incipient, because when the subjective mobilization occurs, it is more individual than collective. As for defensive strategies, individual strategies were also predominant, where the most evident were protection and adaptation, with a greater emphasis on compensation and, finally, resignation.

The study of mediation strategies in the teaching work gave an opportunity to understand the ways these workers have confronted reality and the difficulties faced by the conflicting context in the IFES investigated. Thus, the research highlighted the prevalence of defensive strategies at the expense of confrontation strategies. It is emphasized that the continuous use of these strategies can lead to both alienation and illness. The results also show that, facing the university expansion, the risks of the commercialization of education need to be tackled, avoiding the loss of the social function that universities aim to establish. The need for improvements in physical structure and support resources in the studied context was evidenced. This latter aspect could be enhanced by the strengthening of cooperative ties between colleagues and the more effective participation of workers in work management.

It is noteworthy that this study was carried out only in one campus of an IFES in the Amazon region, demonstrating a reality of a specific work context. Therefore, the authors suggest extending the research to other groups of different regions, for comparing how the reality of the inland expansion of Universities has impacted on professors.

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