

Ethics in the Federal Institutes: an analysis of the educational actions of the sectoral commission's in Brazil's northeast region

A ética nos Institutos Federais: uma análise das ações educativas das comissões setoriais na região nordeste do Brasil

Ética en los Institutos Federales: un análisis de las acciones educativas de las comisiones sectoriales en la región nordeste de Brasil

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the educational and preventive actions developed by the Federal Institutes' (FIs) Sectoral Ethics Commissions (EC) from Brazil's Northeastern, in the years of 2020 and 2021. It presents a qualitative approach, with descriptive and analytical objectives, developed through bibliographic and documentary research. The research apprehended the ECs institutionalized in 9 states of Brazilian Northeast Region, in which 11 Federal Institutions were investigated. As the research instruments, we organized a specific guideline to analyze documents and a structural-analytical framework. The technique of documentary analysis consisted on the dialogue between the regulatory devices that found the theme and the information contained in the respective codes and action plans, focusing on the educational and preventive actions that are planned and executed by the sectoral ECs. This work verified the primary need for promotion and update of the ECs' information (structure, composition, code of ethics and action plans) in the institutional websites of the investigated FIs, facilitating the knowledge accessibility by the employees, students and people in general. Another restricting factor for the research was that we only verified three Codes of Ethics, a document of unquestionable importance for the ECs, because it is the guiding instrument of this commission's whole work. Finally, we conclude stating that the four institutes' (IFAL, IFMA, IF Sertão PE and IFRN) educational and preventive actions, analyzed by the present research, fulfill their role by guiding, conducting and promoting education and ethical behavior, spreading fundamental values and principles in the public service.

Keywords: Ethics; Educational actions; Public service; Federal Institution.

Resumo

Esta pesquisa tem a finalidade de analisar as ações educativas e preventivas desenvolvidas pelas Comissões de Ética (CE) setoriais dos Institutos Federais (IFs) da Região Nordeste do país, nos anos de 2020 e 2021. Apresenta abordagem qualitativa, com finalidade descritiva e analítica, desenvolvida por meio de pesquisas bibliográfica e documental. O universo da pesquisa compreendeu as CE institucionalizadas em 9 estados da região nordeste do Brasil, sendo 11 Institutos Federais investigados. A técnica de análise documental consistiu na interlocução dos dispositivos normativos que fundamentam a temática com as informações contidas nos respectivos códigos e planos de ação, com destaque às ações de natureza educativa e preventiva planejadas e executadas pelas CE setoriais. A pesquisa constatou a necessidade primária de divulgação e atualização das informações das CE (estrutura, composição, código de ética e planos de ação) dos IFs investigados em seus sites institucionais, de modo a facilitar o acesso ao conhecimento por parte dos servidores, discentes e comunidade em geral. Outro fator limitante da pesquisa foi a localização de apenas três Códigos de Ética, documento de importância indiscutível para as CE, pois este é o instrumento norteador de todo trabalho dessa Comissão. Por fim, conclui-se afirmando que as ações educativas e preventivas de quatro Institutos (IFAL, IFMA, IF Sertão PE e IFRN) analisados pela presente pesquisa cumprem seu

papel ao orientar, conduzir e promover a educação e o comportamento ético, disseminando os valores e os princípios fundamentais no serviço público.

Palavras-chave: Ética; Ações educativas; Serviço público; Instituto Federal.

Resumen

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo analizar las acciones educativas y preventivas desarrolladas por los Comités de Ética (CE) sectoriales de los Institutos Federales (IF) de la Región Nordeste del país, en los años 2020 y 2021. Presenta un abordaje cualitativo, con carácter descriptivo, y propósito analítico, desarrollado a través de la investigación bibliográfica y documental. El universo de investigación comprendió EC institucionalizados en 9 estados de la región nordeste de Brasil, siendo investigados 11 Institutos Federales. La técnica de análisis documental consistió en la interlocución de los dispositivos normativos que fundamentan el tema con las informaciones contenidas en los respectivos códigos y planes de acción, con énfasis en las acciones educativas y preventivas planificadas y ejecutadas por la CE sectorial. La encuesta encontró la necesidad primaria de difundir y actualizar la información de CE (estructura, composición, código de ética y planes de acción) de las IF investigadas en sus sitios web institucionales, con el fin de facilitar el acceso al conocimiento por parte de los empleados, estudiantes y comunidad en general. Otro factor limitante de la investigación fue la ubicación de sólo tres Códigos de Ética, documento de indiscutible importancia para la CE, por ser este el instrumento rector de todo el trabajo de esta Comisión. Finalmente, concluye afirmando que las acciones educativas y preventivas de cuatro Institutos (IFAL, IFMA, IF Sertão PE e IFRN) analizados por esta investigación cumplen su papel en la orientación, conducción y promoción de la educación y el comportamiento ético, la difusión de los valores y principios fundamentales en el servicio público.

Palabras clave: Ética; Acciones educativas; Servicio publico; Instituto Federal.

1. Introduction

Why is it so important to talk about ethics? What is the ethical standard's image of the Brazilian public service? Ethics is present in all dimensions of our lives, especially in the interaction between specific fields, like economy, politics, culture, religion, among others.

Public service requires commitment and conveys a noble professional vocation to serve society and provide the common welfare. It also demands intellectual and emotional competence, because it is an activity that involves interpersonal relations, in which individual likes and preferences cannot intervene on what has to be done during the exercise of this function (Dias & Rego, 2020).

Based on this reflection, we expect, in the same way society does, an upright and honorable posture of a public servant. This professional must follow the rules of conduct that are manifested on the *Manual de conduta do agente público civil do poder executivo federal*¹ (Brasil, Ministério da Economia, & Secretaria de Gestão e Desempenho de Pessoal, 2020) and on the *Código de Ética do Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Maranhão*² – IFMA (Resolução nº 018, 2012).

The aforementioned instruments are fundamental references in the sectoral Ethics Commissions work in the institutions entities from the Federal Executive Branch. These commissions are entitled to apply the Code of Ethics and act in the educative, preventive, consultive, investigative, representative, administrative and reproachful instances, being able to apply the maximum penalty, which is the ethical reprimand.

The regulatory devices aim to guide, conduct and promote the professional and civic behavior regarding society's performance, integrity and reliance in the public service, strengthening the organizational culture based on principles and values essential to the exercise of public functions and they are fundamental references in the sectoral Ethics Commissions' work in the institutions' entities from the Federal Executive Branch (Brasil, Ministério da Economia, & Secretaria de Gestão e Desempenho de Pessoal, 2020; Decreto nº 1.171, 1994; Resolução nº 10, 2008; Resolução nº 018, 2012).

¹ TN: Manual of the civil public agent's conduct from the Federal Executive Branch.

² TN: Code of Ethics of the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology from Maranhão.

The IFMA's sectoral Ethics Commission started its activities in 2012, simultaneously to the promulgation of its Code of Ethics, and has been developed its functions focusing on the educative and preventive role by promoting the code and guiding ethical-professional behavioral principles and conducts, as foreseen in the legal orders (Brasil, Ministério da Economia, & Secretaria de Gestão e Desempenho de Pessoal, 2020; Decreto nº 1.171, 1994; Decreto nº 6.029, 2007; Resolução nº 10, 2008; Resolução nº 018, 2012).

Since then, the referred commission has developed a lot of educative and preventive campaigns, namely: 1) in a partnership with the IFMA's Communication Accessory (ASSCOM) – publication of a guidebook for ethical conducts during the electoral process along with the central commission and realization of lectures in induction ceremonies and in pedagogical weeks in many campuses; 2) in collaboration with the Pro-rectory of Institutional Planning and Development (PROPLADI), Division of Capacitation and Qualification (DCQ) and the Center of Servant's Formation (CFS) – realization of the I Course of Ethics for managers of IFMA and the I Course of Ethical Conduct in the public service; 3) in association with the Public Ethics' Commission (CEP) – participation in the VI Contest of Good Practices in Ethics' Management executed by the Ethic's Commission of the Republic Presidency (CEP) and the involvement in the CEP's E-book of Good Practices (Secretaria-Executiva da Comissão de Ética Pública, 2021).

In front of the presented context, the study's issue creates the following question: What are the main educational and preventive actions developed by the ECs? This way, we aim to analyze these actions developed by the sectoral ECs of the Federal Institutes from the Northeast Region of Brazil, in the years of 2020 and 2021.

Based on that explanation, we justify the development of this research with the need to investigate the main educational and preventive action of the sectoral ECs from the eleven FIs of Brazil's Northeast Region (IFAL, IFBA, IF Baiano, IFCE, IFMA, IFPB, IFPE, IF Sertão PE, IFPI, IFRN e IFS). Surely, the knowledge produced by this research will open the professional and personal horizons regarding the handling of ethics in the public service, especially in the FIs and will stimulate new perspectives of work/activities enabled by the observation and analysis of the educational and preventive actions of the other FIs' sectoral ECs.

We justify the publication of the article named "Ethics in the Federal Institutes: an analysis of the educational actions of the sectoral commissions in Brazil's Northeast Region", resulting from the research developed in Secondary School PIBIC, by CNPq, validity 2021/2022, of authorship of the scholarship holder D'avilly Soanny da Silva Rocha Oliveira, young researcher, attending the 3rd year of the IFMA's Agribusiness Integrated Course in the Campus of Buriticupu, for acknowledge the responsibility and commitment with the developed investigation, starting from the documentary research performed in the sectoral Ethics Commissions of the eleven Federal Institutes in Brazilian Northeastern, namely: IFAL, IFBA, IF Baiano, IFCE, IFMA, IFPB, IFPE, IF Sertão PE, IFPI, IFRN and IFS.

Based on this understanding, we believe that the production and promotions of studies and researches for the technical-scientific community and the general community, surely, will expand the professional and personal horizons regarding the handling of ethics in the public service, especially in the Federal Institutes and that will stimulate new perspectives of work/actions enable by the observance and analysis of educational and preventive actions of other sectoral Ethics Commissions in the institutional sphere.

We thanks to everyone who, somehow, collaborated with this research's elaborations, especially, to the Pro-Rectory of Research, Post-graduation and Innovation at the Federal Institute of Maranhão (PRPGI/IFMA) and the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), for providing the scholarship and promoting the scientific initiation.

2. Methodology

Aiming to answer the questions that promoted the research and to observe the proposed objective, we elected the qualitative approach with a descriptive and analytical purpose. We will develop this research's methodological proposal from the combination of the bibliographical research, regarding the data sources, and documentary research, regarding the procedures for data collection. The sectoral ECs from the Northeast Region of Brazil compose this research's scope of investigation.

We based this research's qualitative approach in Sampieri, Collado and Lúcio (2013), having as a goal to describe, understand and interpret the sectoral ECs' performance, through the perception and the meanings produced by their educational and preventive actions in all the eleven FIs from the Northeast Region of Brazil: Federal Institute of Alagoas (IFAL), Federal Institute of Bahia (IFBA), Federal Institute Baiano (IF Baiano), Federal Institute of Ceará (IFCE), Federal Institute of Maranhão (IFMA), Federal Institute of Paraíba (IFPB), Federal Institute of Pernambuco (IFPE), Federal Institute of Sertão Pernambucano (IF Sertão PE), Federal Institute of Piauí (IFPI), Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte (IFRN) and Federal Institute of Sergipe (IFS) (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Federal Institutes from Northeast Region.



Source: Our own elaboration.

Regarding the objectives, the research has a descriptive and analytical purpose (Vergara, 2006). The descriptive research handles the survey of the known characteristics that composes the process, that is to say, it intends to expose the specificities of the structure and composition of the commissions, of the Code of Ethics, of the Plan of Action, of the main educational and preventive actions developed by the Ethics Commissions. The analytical research explains the studied phenomenon, that is, it enables a relation of cause and effect, in the sense to endorse this process' singularities.

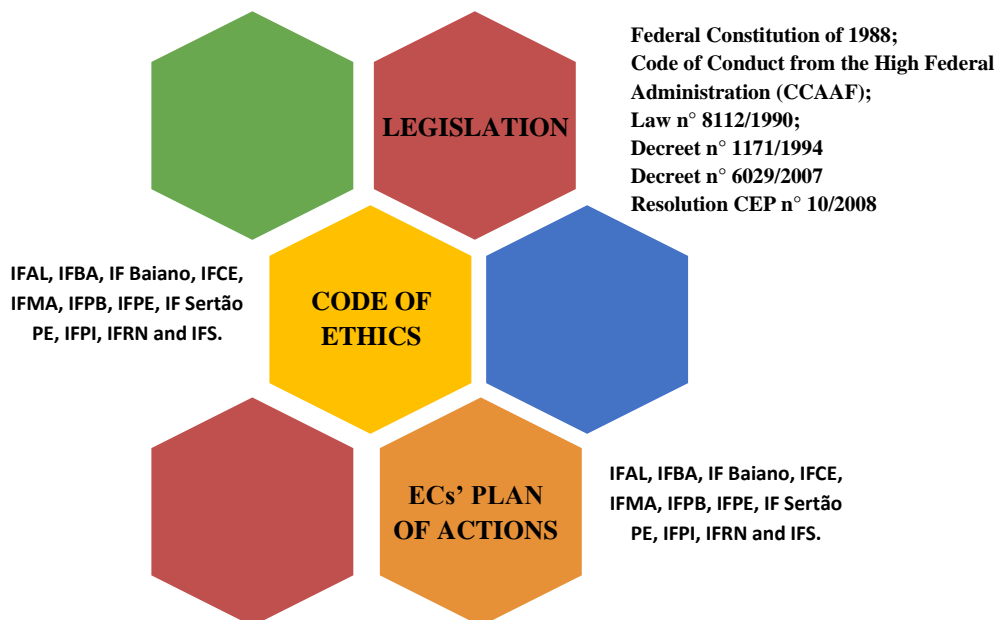
According to Gil (2016), the bibliographic research is the first step to develop, aiming to expand the range of information, besides helping in the survey and mapping of knowledge regarding the investigated thematic that will assist in the

construction and better definition of the conceptual framework that involves the proposed object of study, in this case, ethics in the public service. This way, we explored, in the theoretical Brazilian production, the academic literature related to ethics in the public service, of which we performed the reading and analysis of the scientific texts available in different sources. This base allowed a wide vision of the previously developed studies.

Regarding the procedure to collect data, we opted for the documentary research, because we understand its importance as a primary source in which its contents, generally, do not receive any analytical treatment, what characterizes them as raw material, from which the researcher developed the investigation and analysis (Lakatos; Marconi, 1986; Severino, 2007).

The documentary research consisted in the exploration of data in different sources, as we can see exposed on the Figure 2: 1) regulatory devices that compose the legal basis for the creation and conduct of the ECs; 2) Code of Ethics of the investigated FIs; 3) annual Plan of Action (2020 and 2021) elaborated by the ECs of the FIs from the Northeast Region.

Figure 2 – Source of documentary research.



Source: Our own elaboration.

The Ethics' regulatory devices and the Code of Ethics were collected in specific websites of the researched FIs in the period of September and December, 2021, while the annual plans of action (2020 and 2021) were required to the sectoral ECs' representatives in December of 2021, through the institutional e-mail, to all the eleven investigated FIs. However, only five FIs (IFAL, IFMA, IF Sertão PE, IF Baiano e IFRN) answered the contact with the required information, which corresponds to this investigation's corpus.

To develop the technique of documentary analysis (Cellard, 2014), we elaborated an specific guideline to documentary analysis (the code of ethics and plans of action of the FIs' commissions) and a structural-analytical framework about the main educational and preventive actions developed by the ECs in the years of 2020 and 2021, favoring the communication between the regulatory devices that sustain the thematic with the described informations in the respective codes and plans of action, focusing on the educational and preventive actions planned and performed by the sectoral ECs of the FIs from the Northeast Region of Brazil.

3. Results and Discussion

Ethics is a complex area of study, because it handles many concepts and philosophical propositions, besides being manifested in different cultures and traditions that also require actions based in rules and social values considered rights, because, as the German educator and philosopher Immanuel Kant stated “agir bem é agir com base no dever”³ (Escola Nacional de Administração Pública, 2016, p. 15). An action will only be ethically right if it came specifically from a good intention, calling attention to the action performed, having in mind what must be really done.

Once we analyze this thought and connect it to the work of the ECs of the FIs, we can deduce that to act based on the duty is the only way to act correctly.

A manual of conduct is a dynamic and living social construction and must be part of the integrity sphere of any organization that wants to be successful in its objectives. This way, the manual of conducts is destined to all public agents, including the commissioned servants, permanent servants, temporary employees, outsourced ones and the staff from entities of the direct administration and indirect local and foundational administration. Beyond that, the recommended basic principles were introduced for the professional performance of the public agent. These principles are: lawfulness, impersonality, morality, publicity/transparency, efficiency, justice, honesty, cooperation, discipline, responsibility, respect and humility.

The conduct rules help us to choose the best way to act, allowing that each person has the option to decide the right paths. This way, we can know what actions are ethically right and politically appropriated. It is worth saying that it is of great importance that the employees understand the public servant’s basic principles of conduct, considering that it is with those principles that one can know how to properly behave.

In this aspect, ethics is of great importance both in the daily life and in the public service’s conduct, considering that a public servant must be aware of one’s attitudes. This way, ethical conduct is not only a matter of how to behave in accordance with what is allowed. The essence of a conduct is the internal guidance provided to the actions: the motivation, the carefulness, the feeling acquired by who works to fulfill one's duties or to do more than what is expected for the position. Besides that, it is important to establish the conduct rules, because it is essential to improve its guidelines. The fundamental rules of ethical conduct are divided between constitutive and imperative (Dias; Rego, 2020).

With the COVID-19 pandemics, there was a considerable intensification of the distance working not only in the Federal Public Administration, but in the other public and private organizations. Therefore, it is essential to highlight that all the rules of the ethical and disciplinary spheres stay valid to this work modality.

That said, we observe that Ethics is being used as a guiding instrument for the public servant regarding the decision making and this is what constitutes ethical decision making. Considering the focus on the rules and values that have to lead actions and decisions (Bedor, 2019).

The commission of public ethics was created due to this process to form a public servant aware of one’s attitudes. The commission is formed by seven Brazilians that fit the requirements for moral quality, fair reputation and vast experience in public administration, all of them indicated by the Federal President. Because of the many responsibilities that need to be fulfilled, this commission is helped by the ethical network, which aims to maintain the adequate conduct in its respective organizations.

According to the CEP Resolution n°10/2008 (Resolução n° 10, 2008) the sectoral EC must be composed of three standing members and the respective alternate members, permanent servants designated by the act of the institution’s top director. It will also have an executive office, indicated by the EC’s members, which will function as technical and material support regarding the fulfillment of the commission’s actions. The performance on the EC does not present financial benefits,

³ TN: “To act well is to act according to duty”. (Our own translation)

but must be registered on the servant's functional memorial, being considered as a notable activity of great relevance regarding the public service (ENAP, 2020). It is important to state that the members leave the commission by the end of the mandate, by voluntary renouncement (when one of the members asks to leave before the mandate's end) or when there is an ethical or disciplinary deviation.

This way, when we investigated the structure and compositions of all the eleven ECs of the FIs from the Northeast Region in their institutional websites, we verified that the ECs from IFAL, IF Baiano, IFCE, IFMA, IF Sertão PE, IFPI and IFRN present a complex structure with the nominal relation of all the standing and alternate members, the executive secretary and the EC's president. The other ones have incomplete data, as, for instance: the IFBA informs only two of the alternate members; the IFPB just has the name of the EC's president; the IFPE does not say if it has an executive secretary; the IFS states the all the positions are filled, but does not indicate the executive secretary.

It was not possible to verify the date for the electronic informations' update on the FIs' institutionalized websites. The data from the IFPI and IF Sertão PE's ECs were updated in 2020, the IFPE's data was updated in 2018 and the data from IFRN in 2019. The most updated data were verified in the IFMA, the IF Baiano, the IFAL and the IFBA, being updated at the end of 2021.

Generally, this picture prevents an analysis more faithful to the structures and compositions of the ECs of the investigated FIs, considering that these informations may be outdated and do not reflect the current state of the composition and functioning of the ECs in those FIs. We can highlight, as an example, the situation of the IF Baiano's EC that, even though having their informations updated in the institutional website, has informed us (through letter) about the suspension of this Commission's activities from the beginning of pandemics (March/2020) and, for this reason, they do not have the working plans of 2020 and 2021.

The Code of Ethics in the Public Service highlights itself as a set of principles, publicly opened, that guide specific activities, according to the social desires for honesty, solidarity and correction. This document must be related on one hand to the law, on the other hand with morality in a wider sense. A code of ethics cannot, obviously, be outside or beyond the law, it cannot be used as an excuse or mean to validate behaviors that are prohibited by law (Escola Nacional de Administração Pública, 2016).

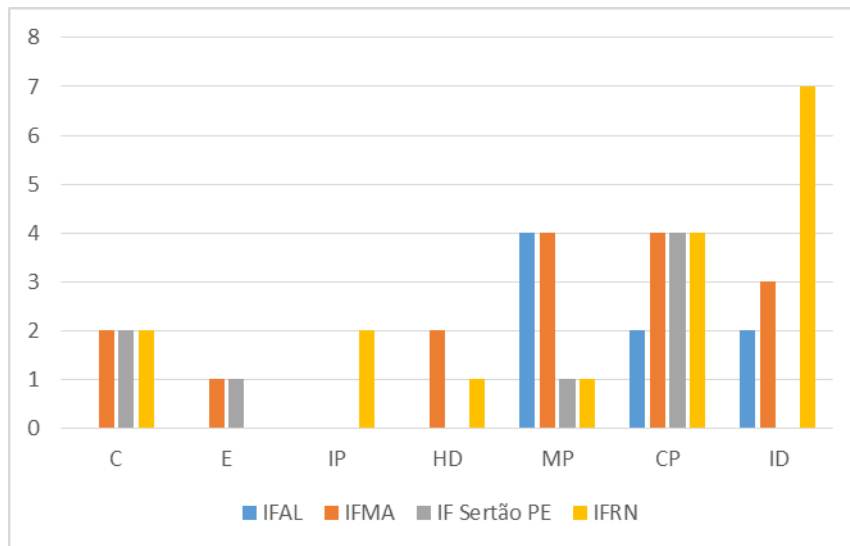
This way, regarding the Code of Ethics, the fundamental elements that have to compose this device are: principles and rules for conduct; rights; duties and prohibitions; what is up to the Commission of Ethics; the penalties; the final and transitory dispositions. That said, we could locate six Codes of Ethics constituted by all the elements previously quoted. The codes belonged to the ECs from IFAL, IFCE, IFMA, IFPB, IFPE, and IFRN.

It is worth saying that the IFMA's Code of Ethics is different from the other, considering that thoroughly describes the following themes: the purpose of the code of ethics, the principles and values, the EC's competences, what is up to the EC's president, the EC's functioning, the procedure to determine violation of the Code of Ethics, the EC's responsibilities and duties and the punishments. This Code presents two well distinct parts that differ it from the other consulted ones: the first part describes the servant's principles and rules of conduct and the second part presents specific information of the EC's functioning.

The analysis of the annual plan of action (2020 and 2021) of the ECs from the eleven investigated FIs depended, exclusively, on the answer to the requirement through institutional e-mail, according to what was described in the methodology, once this document was not available in the respective websites of the institutes. We sent the first requirement (December/2021) and the posterior reinforcement calling attention to the request (January/2022), we were answered by five ECs: IFAL, IFMA, IF Sertão PE, IF Baiano (it did not elaborate a plan due to the suspension of the ECs' activities) and IFRN.

We elaborated a structural-analytical framework to facilitate the documentary analysis of these plans of action containing the name of the FI, the year of the plan, the description of the educational and preventive actions and the analytical categories that emerged from the thoroughly investigation of those documents, namely, according to Graphic 1: Capacitation (C); Events (E); Institutional Partnership (IP); Handling the Denounce (HD); Material Production (MP); Communication and Promotion (CP); Institutional Document (ID).

Graphic 1 – Analytical categories present in the plans of action of 2020 and 2021.



Source: Our own elaboration.

In this graphic shows the educational and preventive actions planned for the years of 2020 and 2021, highlighting the activities of Communication and Promotion and Material Production contained in the EC’s plans of the four investigated FIs, totaling 14 and 10 actions, respectively.

We can observe that the IFAL’s EC developed more actions related to the Material Production category with the elaboration of four guidebooks containing the themes: Digital Ethics, Code of Ethics, Procedures of the EC and Local Representatives. It is worth saying that the IFPI contains this category, considering that it developed a report about the acts that happened in the Ethics Commission.

The IFBA presents, in its institutional website, actions related to Communication and Promotion, having a podcast as its main platform of promotion. Besides that, the institute has its own integrity plan. Another FI that disposes of a integrity plan is the IFCE, being important to highlight that this FI stands out in terms of capacitance, because it developed actions regarding this content (capacitation about ethics in the public service). In this context, it is important to focus the new version of the Plan of Integrity from the IFMA, which was elaborated by a commission coordinated by the head of the Unit of Integrity’s Management (UIM), the professor Francisco Sousa, and count with the servants from other units of the institute, like the Commission of Ethics, the Institutional Ombudsman, the Internal Audit, Comptroller, among others.

The IFMA and the IF Sertão PE stood out in the actions related to Communication and Promotion. In the IFMA’s EC, they developed the following actions: the improvement of the link for the IFMA’s EC in the institutional website, the broadcasting of informations from the channel *Minuto da Ética*⁴ in social media and the realization of campaigns about the means for denunciation. In the IF Sertão PE’s EC, they have: promotion of the EC’s role and importance in the sphere of an

⁴ TN: Minute for Ethics. (Our own translation).

institutional organization, the publicity of the EC's actions, diversification of the attendance channels and the actualization of the EC's information in the institution's website.

The IFRN, different from the others, developed more actions related to the category Institutional Document, totaling 7 actions, excelling for organization and transparency in the meeting minute, handling of the received processes, actualization of the Code of Ethics and the Internal Regulation and the elaboration of an EC's local representative in the campuses. We noted that the IFRN's EC was the only one to elaborate strategies of Institutional Partnership in its working plan, according to Graphic 1.

4. Conclusion

By the end of this research, which analyzed the educational and preventive actions developed by the sectoral ECs of the FIs from the Brazilian Northeastern, in the years of 2020 and 2021, it was possible to answer the question that promoted it and to register some difficulties faced during the investigation, mainly, related to the access of the ECs' specific information.

The research verifies the primary need for promotion and update of the ECs' information (structure, composition, code of ethics and plan of action) from the investigated FIs in their institutional websites, in a way to facilitate the access to the knowledge by the servants, students and the general community. When these informations are not available, an obstacle appears, one that complicates the development of educational and preventive actions, because they do not offer the minimum expected from the ECs that is transparency, communication and promotion of knowledge that directs the ethical conducts of the public servant (Duarte; Pereira, 2019). Another restricting factor for the research was that we only detected six Codes of Ethics, a document of unquestionable importance for the ECs, because it is the guiding instrument of this commission's whole work. In this context, it is worth saying that not all the FIs have their own Code of Ethics, using other regulatory devices to guide the ethical conduct in the organizational sphere.

Finally, we conclude this work stating that the educational and preventive actions of all the analyzed institutes fulfill their role of guiding, conducting and promoting education and ethical behavior, spreading fundamental values and principles to the public servant.

It is important to note the continuity of research on public ethics carried out by the sectoral Ethics Commissions of the Federal Institutes in other regions of Brazil, with the purpose of establishing a work environment based on conduct and behavior free of any type of violence.

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