

# THE EVALUATION OF MANAGERIAL CONTINGENCY OF SMEs IN THE CONTEXT OF HEALTH CRISIS: AN ANALYSIS UNDER THE PRISM OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**Abstract:** This article, which is on the resilience of SMEs following the damage caused by COVID-19, has a double ambition. Firstly, it aims at exploring the response process of Cameroonian SMEs to the COVID-19 health crisis. Secondly, it intends to highlight the adaptive techniques of personnel management in the context of crisis. Based on an epistemological stand called ‘moderate interpretivist’, the methodological approach adopted is hybrid with a strong exploratory and qualitative connotation. The qualitative part of the research is based on a sample of 4 SMEs from which data are collected from semi-structured interviews and then processed using thematic content analysis with the help of Nvivo 12.0 software. The quantitative aspect of the study is based on a sample of 74 SMEs from which data are collected from a survey questionnaire and then analyzed using SPSS 20 software. The results of this mixed study are in two fold. Firstly, the security measures observed by all the actors as an interpretation of certain barrier measures enacted by the WHO and relayed by the Cameroonian Government are viewed as managerial tactics. Secondly, the behavior of most SMEs consists of waiting for decisions taken by the Government, donors and international partners in order to build a reliable survival strategy. Finally, it emerges that the personnel management techniques adopted by these SMEs depend on institutional arrangements, managerial innovations and are mostly of a tactical and strategic nature.

**Keywords:** personnel management, SME, Covid-19 pandemic, health response, resilience

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The economic and organizational instability caused by the COVID-19 pandemic which shook the world in the first quarter of 2020 (Manuti, 2020; Gigauri, 2020) and the increased competitiveness in most sectors of activities pushed companies to take into account the place of personnel in their organizations. According to Sinapin (2020), reinventing the organization, adapting it, readjusting it, putting it in the image of the world of today and tomorrow and above all allowing it to survive, are the challenges that this crisis has made possible to identify. For a long time, human resources management (HRM) was considered as a support activity for other functions of the organization. Added to that, it is now seen as the function that allows a company to stand out from its competitors (Becker and Gerhart, 1996). In order to improve their performance and their competitive position (Delaney and Huselid, 1996; Schuler and Jackson, 1998), companies have to revise their ways of doing things in the traditional human resource management activities such as manpower, recruitment, training, staffing or even career management, but above all to innovate by developing effective human resources management practices adapted to the context. Among these practices, telework is characterized as a particularly striking phenomenon of change in organizations in times of confinement (Etoundi, 2020). According to him, no organization escapes it in reality whether in the private sector or in the public sector. The use of telework confronts managers with the challenges of remote management. The actions of companies have always been considered as the result of choices made under constraint. Since then, researchers have been interested in studying the conditions that constrain the action of companies through the institutional theory on one hand (Biwolé, 2020) and the contingency theory (Burns and Stakler, 1961; Woodward, 1965; Lawrence and Lorch, 1969; Galbraith, 1977; Miles and Snow, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979) on the other hand. These theories are used in our study to explain the process of adaptation of companies to the Covid-19 pandemic and also to explain how companies have developed different HR practices to adapt to the context of the pandemic respectively.

Regarding the definition of human resource practice, this study sees the field of human resource management as a set of activities or practices that concern the acquisition of human capital, its allocation, its organization, its development and its evaluation (Deyer and Holder, 1988, Guérin and Wils, 1992, Delery and Doty, 1996, Dayan 1999). The categorization of human resources management practices is done either according to the skills required of the specialists who take care of them: recruitment, staffing, training, evaluation and remuneration of the workforce (Dyer and Holder, 1988); or according to the specific objectives to which these practices contribute: acquisition, stimulation and development of skills (Besseyre des Horts, 1988). Among the human resource management practices listed by researchers in the field, a consensus has been established to consider seven of them: 1) planning, 2) organization of work, 3) recruitment and staffing, 4) performance appraisal, 5) compensation, 6) labor relations, and 7) training (Dayan, 1999, Dolan, Saba, Jackson and Schuler, 2002, Guérin and Wils, 1990).

In the literature, three approaches emerge from institutional analysis. The first considers that the interaction between the state and companies questions the nature of state intervention in the market (David, 1817; Smith, 1776), particularly through the tax system and the banking system. The second approach concerns the analysis of the appearance of organizational forms resulting from competition and the behavior of both companies and state regulations. According to Biwolé, (2020, p.160) this competitive analysis borrowed from Marshall (1920) explains why some companies choose one organizational form over another. The third approach relates to the microeconomic vision of institutional arrangements. This perspective takes into account the requirements of state regulation, other institutions (the public choice theory of Buchanna and Tullock 1962) and the response to the behavior of other economic actors. It is then a question of assessing their strategies including legal requirements, unforeseen events and other behaviors depending on the assessment they have of information from external phenomena. From this perspective, several motivations justify the adaptation of companies. Firstly, there is a quest to survive, to adjust to an environmental phenomenon (Mintzberg, 1999), to occupy a comfortable competitive position (Porter, 1982), to embrace technology or to engage in diversification (Chandler, 1962). Secondly, it is a question of conforming to institutional and social pressures for the sake of legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Regarding the process of homogenization, it varies from institutionalization (Weber, 1922) to the repetitive character of the actions of organizations (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; North, 1990; Oliver, 1991).

This study attempts to identify and measure the degree of implementation of HR practices by Cameroonian SMEs with regard to the Covid-19 pandemic. Two objectives are pursued in this study; firstly, to explain the process of adaptation of Cameroonian SMEs to the COVID-19 pandemic; and secondly, to identify adaptation to HR practices and measure the degree of implementation of these HR practices within these SMEs. Our development begins with a clarification of the concept of HR practices, and then we will review the theoretical foundations of business adaptation, before presenting the methodology of the exploratory research based on the results of 4 semi-direct interviews carried out and a survey of 74 Cameroonian SMEs. Based on these interviews, HR adaptation practices are identified. A discussion of the contributions and limitations of our research will constitute the last section of the article.

## 2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The theoretical backbone of this study rests on two theories which are the contingency theory and institutional theory.

### 2.1. The contingency theory

The contingency theory applied to HRM has mainly highlighted two forms of alignment: vertical alignment and horizontal alignment (Delery and Doty 1996, quoted by Chrétien, Arcand, Tellier and Arcand, 2005). Vertical alignment, through the behavioral perspective, suggests that each external strategy (business strategy, corporate environment) requires specific behaviors and that the role of HRM is precisely to stimulate these behaviors (Schuler and Jackson 1987). On the other hand, horizontal alignment supports the idea that it is the company's internal strategies that are the source of a competitive advantage and that consistency between remuneration policies and human resources systems (organization of work, quality management, and organizational culture) would be more decisive than the consistency between compensation practices and business strategies (Baird and Meshoulam 1988). The Strategic Human Resources Management approach seeks to set up a coherent model of HR practices, capable of bringing employees to work in the direction of the company's priorities. This design uses

what has been called 'strategic alignment of Human Resources'. In fact, several theories attempt to explain and demonstrate the strategic role currently played by "Human Resources", thus making the strategic alignment of HR possible and indisputable. Going by the theory, the effectiveness of a mode of management and organization of a firm depends strictly on the environmental context. Successful companies are those that have succeeded in adapting their policies to current circumstances, thus mastering changes and competitive turbulence.

## 2.2. Institutional theory

Institutional theory presents an interesting framework for assessing the adaptation of companies to Covid-19. Since the appearance of this pandemic, we have observed an imperative regulation by the State requiring compliance with the directives making it possible to stop the spread of the disease. Likewise, there is a clear need for companies to comply with these requirements and to keep their commercial environment. Several institutions are then active. We apprehend the institution here as the set of rules, procedures that must be respected and the behavioral norms of a moral or ethical nature designed to constrain the behavior of individuals in order to maximize the wealth or the utility of the leaders (North, 1981, cited by Biwolé, p. 161). Two approaches to institutional theory emerge from the literature; the economic approach and the sociological approach. The former insists on the intentionality of institutions while the latter focuses on their efficiency.

### 2.2.1. The economic approach to institutional theory

The institutional framework refers to a set of rules and organizational forms of a society. North (1990) recognizes that institutions can influence economic performance by reducing uncertainty in the way daily life is structured and by reducing transaction costs. Institutions can be spontaneous structures such as the family, community or clan or more structured bodies such as the state that have the mandate to regulate political, legal, social and cultural life. Added to this category is unions and other dedicated organizations that have given themselves the moral or ethical mandate to issue standards aimed at influencing behavior. Base on this, if the institutions are strong, they will lead to a natural selection that would exclude from the commercial environment organizations that do not conform to the established standards.

In Cameroon, the pandemic finds the state already weakened by an economic crisis, social and security crises. It has also had a significant impact on the turnover of companies. A survey conducted by GICAM (2020) underlines that between April and June 2020, the proportion of companies negatively impacted by the Covid-19 Crisis increased, from 92% to 96.6%. This assessment is obtained on the basis of a sample of more than 250 companies consulted between May 22 and June 22, 2020; of which 25% were large companies and 75% SMEs. The increase in the impact of the crisis is also accompanied by an increase in its depth: a proportion of 61.5% of companies saw their situation being worsen and only 10.8% of them had an improvement. These general trends concern companies, regardless of their size, but are more pronounced in the Accommodation and catering (88.9%), Food industries (80.0%), Financial and insurance services (71.4%) and Computers and telecommunications (70.0%). This resulted in lower turnover for 78% of companies in April 2020 compared to April 2019. This corresponds nearly to a reduction in tax revenue and social contributions by 51.5 billion FCFA from these companies to the state and its branches. Over the year as a whole, 81.7% of companies anticipate a drop in turnover.

Regarding the impact of this pandemic on human resources, this survey highlights that the Covid-19 crisis greatly affects the employment situation in modern companies in Cameroon. In total, 46.5% of companies had to lay off 42.6% of their permanent. These rates reach 88.9% in the accommodation and catering branch. The unstable nature of jobs is more pronounced among smaller companies; 54.3% of small enterprises and 47.5% of medium enterprises were involved in technical layoffs. According to estimates, 53,346 permanent employees have been victims of technical layoffs (13.6% of the total number of permanent employees in modern enterprises) and 13,834 permanent employees made redundant due to the crisis (3.5% of the workforce). Through rotating systems (44.6%) and the use of telework (26.2%), the vast majority of companies have tried to adapt to the situation with varying degrees of success from case to another. In the IT & telecommunications branch, telework concerned, on average, more than half of the workforce. Overall, the use of telework concerned 70,036 employees, or 17.8% of the workforce.

This context is aggravated by hazardous manner in which the public institutions manage the crisis. The implementation of government directives to respond to Covid-19 is weakened by the scattered interpretations and initiatives by members of the Government to the point where the Prime Minister, Head of Government had to recall certain principles relating to the organization of government work. He then noted ‘the multiplication of personal and isolated initiatives on the part of members of the Government’. These actions concern, among other things, the signing of the related regulatory acts. Weak coordination then appears, reflecting the fragility of the institution in charge of the response to Covid-19 in its ability to influence or guide business strategies. This observation has been noted by researchers with regard to the compliance of companies with the requirements of corporate social responsibility (Fouda, 2014; Sangué Fotso, 2018; Spence et al., 2011). It is on the basis of this reality that the sociological approach of institutional theory is preferred in this article to appreciate how organizations have adapted to Covid-19.

**2.2.3. Sociological approach to institutional theory**

The standards laid down by the sociological approach to institutional theory guide the behavior of companies, if they find them effective. This efficiency is obtained through various institutional arrangements which make it possible to reduce transaction costs (Williamson, 1985), or arrangements which insist more on incentives than obligations (North, 1990). In this context, corporate behavior can be influenced by a variety of institutions that complement each other. These institutions are formal (State, union, dedicated bodies, employers' groups) and non-formal (practices, habits, conventions). The adaptation of companies is therefore backed by several rationalities. Cyert and March (1963) posit that the adaptation of companies is explained by the quest for survival when the results of the company are lower than the objectives set.

Porter (1982) opposes this thesis and maintains that an efficient company from the point of view of achieving its results can engage in a process of change to preserve them as much as to assume its strategic positioning (control the new competitors or seize new opportunities). Thus, change can result from a constraint (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967), a deliberate intention (Perret, 1996) or a scrupulous planning (Collerette, 2008). Here, emphasis is placed on change conditioned both by state measures and by the behavior of other companies. The article focuses on the mechanisms that have led to these changes in the current context of Covid-19.

**4. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The determinants of business adaptation in a situation of a global pandemic leading to a recession are still poorly understood; due to the fact COVID-19 is a new phenomenon. This is what justifies the inductive approach of this study in which data was collected via the use of semi-structured interviews carried out with 4 SMEs (see Table 1); the questions in the guide are as follows: what HR practices were in place within the company before the COVID-19 pandemic? What are the adaptation practices during the pandemic? What do you think of these practices? What mode of communication do you prefer? Also questionnaires were sent to 74 SMEs, the distribution by sector of activity is as follows: 38 in the transport sector, 14 in the accommodation sector, 6 in general trade, 2 in trade, 2 in the banking sector and 12 in import-export.

**Table 1: Characteristics of enterprises retained for the interview**

Names	Sector of activity	Geographical situation	Date of Creation	Enrolment
APM maritime (E1)	Maritime service	Douala	1951	250
SAWA Hotel (E3)	Lodging and restoration	Douala	2004	230 before 200 current
BLISS (E4)	Placement of personnel	Douala	2009	30
CAMBUILD (E2)	Building	Douala	2010	46

Source: the author

The epistemological assumption said to be the ‘moderate interpretivism’ was adopted in this study to better understand the organizational changes made within selected companies. Moderate interpretivism is used here because the study concerns analyzing a phenomenon based on the experience of the actors (Biwolé, 2020, p.167). The interviews were analyzed in such a way as to preserve the richness of the statements in the verbatim and to minimize erroneous interpretations. The data was then analyzed using thematic content analysis with Nvivo 12.0 software. This permitted us to identify the different HR practices implemented in these SMEs. The results obtained are presented below.

## 5. PRESENTATION OF RESULT

The findings obtained from the qualitative and quantitative analyses of this study is presented and discussed thereof.

### 5.1. Results of the Qualitative Analysis

The result of the qualitative analysis was obtained thanks to the thematic content analysis carried out on the responses of the interviewees.

#### 5.1.1. Practices prior to the covid-19 pandemic

We present here the HR practices identified in the companies in our sample before the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 2: Number of occurrences**

Word	Length	Number	Percentage average (%)
Training	10	11	1.77
Recruitment	11	3	0.48
Development	13	2	0.32
Enterprise	10	2	0.32
The enterprise	13	2	0.32
Environment	12	2	0.32
The interview	11	2	0.32
Professional	16	2	0.32
Remuneration	12	2	0.32

Source: Data analysis with NVIVO 12.0

The occurrences table above gives the number of times interviewees indicated the practice of HRM that was carried out within their companies prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. These are: practices related to training (11 times, representing 1.7%) and recruitment (3 times, representing 0.48%). We also note practices related to remuneration, HR development, and the practice of maintenance which appear twice for a rate of 0.32%. It was found that the most important words are practices related to training, recruitment, compensation and HR development and telephone interviewing. This is how the manager of the E1 company told us that *‘Before the pandemic, HR practices were classic practices, in terms of recruitment, we conducted the interview of candidates, the study of candidate files, the counting and finally the final interview. Then we proceeded to the selection of the successful candidate permanently and it takes service some time later. In addition, we had other policies such as payroll processing, career management, and employee complaints. Regarding development practices before COVID-19, being in a dynamic environment, a constantly changing environment, there is external training within our organization such as on the CAMSIS software; then, we have qualifying training courses that allow us to better understand their job description; finally we have certifying training, because to be competitive’*.

#### 5.1.2. Adaptation of human resource practices to the covid-19 pandemic

The task here, consist of presenting the HR adaptation practices identified in the companies of our sample during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3: Number of occurrences

Word	Length	Number	Percentage average (%)
Training	9	37	0.69
Recruitment	11	17	0.33
Remuneration	12	15	0.29
Communication	13	14	0.27
Tele-work	11	14	0.27
Carrier	8	9	0.17
Video-conference	15	11	0.21
Quarantine	19	5	0.10
Evaluation	10	4	0.08
Selection	9	4	0.08
Interview	9	3	0.07

Source: Data analysis with NVIVO 12.0

The table of occurrences above gives the number of times that interviewees indicated the HRM Practices that have been put in place to adapt to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. These are: practices related to recruitment 17 occurrences (0.33%) which was materialized through telephone interview practices, videoconferencing 11 occurrences (0.21%), selection 4 occurrences (0.08%), face-to-face or face-to-face interviews in compliance with barrier measures 3 occurrences (0.29%); then practices related to HR conservation such as compensation 15 occurrences (0.29%), career management 9 occurrences (0.17%), safe practices such as washing hands with water or disinfectants such as hand sanitizers, respect for social distancing of 1.5 M which appears 10 times (1.29%). We can also list electronic communication and working from home or telework 14 occurrences per practice, i.e. 0.27% each, management based objective 9 occurrences (0.17%) for employees working from home, dismissal 4 occurrences (0.04%), quarantine of asymptomatic employees 5 occurrences (0.10%), transfer team rotation (practice of internal mobility) and control 2 occurrences (0.04%). Finally, with regard to HR development practices, we have online training (certifying and qualifying) 34 occurrences (0.69%), assessment 4 occurrences (0.08%).

The HR manager of the company E3 notes some measures taken to adapt to the context 'Reduced staff, congestion, separation, technical leave (06 months). Rather, the recruitment process has not changed the on boarding process. There are things we have tried to do, especially the development of skills (behaviours and ways of communicating)'. Along the same lines, the HR manager of company E2 underlines that 'The first aspect put forward was the security aspect because it was necessary to respect the barrier measures. With regard to the administrative management of personnel, it was necessary to automatically reduce the number of employees, which forced us to adopt the rotation system while giving leave to new employees. However, this measure was beneficial because it allowed employees to rest despite the technical unemployment of some employees. In telework, we also had to review our communications system and we provided technical staff with the appropriate equipment to ensure good synergy between employees. Recruitment practice had changed; all external contact had to be avoided. It therefore had to be managed internally. This allowed us to internally deploy and review employee career development. Remuneration also took a hit; it had to be readjusted according to performance. We had to remove certain cultures from the company such as: the Christmas tree, thirteenth month and others'. The HR manager of the company E1 mentions that 'When COVID arrived, we created shift work, that is to say that we divided the workforce into two teams and each teamwork two weeks in the office and during this time the other team works from home so that there is continuity of service. In addition, every Monday we had videoconferences, we used the Microsoft team software, which allowed us to meet in videoconference and then the work remained the same, since even being at home they continued to give the best of themselves'.

### 5.1.3. Conservation of human resource practices in the context of COVID-19 pandemic

The task here consists of presenting the HR conservation practices identified in the companies of our sample during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 5.1.3.1. Electronic communication

The frequency of the use of electronic communication within the companies that constituted our sample increased considerably during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is in this perspective that the HR manager of company E2

points out that: *‘Communication was already in the form of reports. We are already talking about engineers here. Before the crisis, we managed face-to-face, but during the crisis we had to adapt by creating a platform and increasing the number of videoconferences and telephone calls in order to limit physical contact. This facilitated monitoring and evaluation’*. In the same line, the HR manager of company E4 told us that *‘Since all the employees were not grouped together within the company, we favored electronic communication via platforms such as Whats.App groups, email group. Clearly, we favored electronic communication’*.

**5.1.3.2. The practice of telework**

The task here, consist of presenting the frequency at which the practice of telework was put in place by SMEs following the out break of COVID-19.

**Table 4: Number of occurrences**

Word	Length	Number	Percentage average (%)
Tele-work	11	6	1.41
Pandemics	8	3	0.70
Distance	8	2	0.47
Domicile	8	2	0.47
Practice	9	2	0.47

Source: Data analysis with NVIVO 12.0

The table of occurrences above gives the number of times that interviewees indicated that the practice of telework was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic within the companies of our sample. This practice thus appears 6 times representing a rate of 1.41%. moreover, its synonyms, in particular remote work and home work, appear twice for a rate of 0.47%. This is how the HR manager of company E1 told us that *‘We worked in a shift system, 2 weeks at home and 2 weeks in the office’*. Following the latter, the HR manager of company E3 notes that *‘telework was focused on the technical staff who aimed to coordinate meetings’*.

**5.1.3.3. The dismissal**

The task here, consist of presenting the frequency at which employees were dismissed in SMEs following the out break of COVID-19.

**Table 5: Number of occurrences**

Word	Length	Number	Percentage average (%)
Layoffs	13	6	1.90
Employees	10	2	0.63
Organisation	12	2	0.63
Quarantine	11	2	0.63
Recruitment	12	2	0.63
Satisfaction	12		0.63

Source: Data analysis with NVIVO 12.0

The occurrence table above gives the number of times interviewees indicated the layoff some employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus the practice of dismissal appears 6 times representing 1.90%. Next to this we find the practice of quarantine 2 occurrences (0.63%). This is how the HR manager of company E1 reveals that *‘Of course the layoffs always take place within each organization, but the layoffs that took place during this period had nothing to do with COVID-19. These employees were terminated for misconduct. It is with this type of employees that we separated. Indeed, to maintain customer satisfaction, we are hiring and laying off staff, but that had nothing to do with the COVID pandemic. It important to mention that, we did not lay off an employee because he had COVID’*. On the other hand, the HR manager of the company E3 insists that *‘We were forced to lay off 30 employees but the reduction was made in strategic positions subject to a prior study according to the needs’*.

5.1.4. Human resource development practices in the context of COVID

We aim at presenting the HR development practices identified in the companies of our sample during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 6: Number of occurrences

Word	Length	Number	Percentage average (%)
Security	8	10	1.29
Communication	13	12	1.16
Assistance	12	9	1.16
Training	10	8	0.77
Evaluation	8	4	0.51
Electronics	12	3	0.39
Environment	13	2	0.26
Software	8	2	0.26
Remuneration	12	2	0.26

Source: Data analysis with NVIVO 12.0

The occurrence table above gives the number of times interviewees indicated the different HR development practices being practiced during the COVID-19 pandemic. These are: security-related practices 10 occurrences (1.29%), communication 12 occurrences (1.16%), assistance 9 occurrences (1.16%), online training 8 occurrences (0.77%), evaluation 4 occurrences (0.51%), remuneration 2 occurrences (0.26%). It was noticed that the most important words are practices related to safety, communication, assistance, training, evaluation, remuneration. It is in this context that the HR manager of company E1 confides to us that ‘COVID has allowed us to use our electronic functionalities, with regard to training, we have favored online training. In fact, I was trained in occupational health and safety because it was a question of implementing the occupational health and safety committee and managing it from start to finish. So I had to follow online training by videoconference via Microsoft team software and everyone was taking online training’.

5.2. Results of the Quantitative Analysis

In this sub section we will present some practices identified following the qualitative analysis of the data. It comprises of the following:

5.2.1. Telephone interview practice

We intend to measure the degree of implementation of telephone interviews in the companies of our sample in relation to the age and the size of the company.

5.2.1.1. Practice of telephone interviews and the age of the company

At this level, the task consists of measuring the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of telephone interviews in the SMEs of our sample in relation to the age of the company. According to the analysis from the table of frequencies, we find that companies whose age varies between 06 and 10 years have practiced telephone interviews the most, with an average of 3.67% followed by companies with the age ranging between 1 and 05 years old, with an average of 3.60%. While those whose age group is between 11 and 15 years old practiced less telephone interviews, with an average of 3.00%.

Table 7: Practice of telephone and videoconference interviews before recruitment (1-factor ANNOVA)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	5.641	4	1.410	0.681	.608
Intra-groups	142.900	69	2.071		
Total	148.541	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20



From the table above, the difference between the five (05) groups is however not significant ( $F=0.681$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.608$ ). Hence, we can conclude that the age of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of telephone interviews and videoconference before recruitment in the SMEs of our sample.

### 3.2.1.2. Practice of telephone interviews and the size of the company

At this level, we aim at testing the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of telephone interviews in the SMEs of our sample with regard to the size of the company. Thus, reading the table of frequencies shows that companies whose size falls within 251 and 300 employees per year have practiced telephone interviews much more, with an average of 4.00%, followed by companies whose size is between 151 and 200 employees, with an average of 3.88%. While those whose size is between 201 and 250 employees practiced less telephone interviews before recruitment, with an average of 2.50%.

**Table 8: Practice of telephone and videoconference interviews before recruitment (1-factor ANNOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	7.522	9	.836	.379	.941
Intra-groups	141.019	64	2.203		
Total	148.541	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20

From the table above, the difference between the ten (10) groups is however not significant ( $F=0.379$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.941$ ). Thus, we can conclude that the size or the workforce of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of telephone and videoconference interviews before recruitment in the SMEs in our sample.

### 5.2.2. Practice of the shift system in working time management

In this part it is a question of measuring the degree of implementation of the shift system in the companies of our sample in relation to the age and the size of the company.

#### 5.2.2.1. Practice of the shift system and the age of the company

It consists of measuring the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of the shift system in the SMEs of our sample in relation to the age of the company. Thus, reading the table of frequencies indicates that companies whose age varies between 6 and 10 years have practiced the system of shifts in the management of working time the most, with an average of 4.70%, followed by companies whose age group is between 16 and 20 years old, with an average of 4.25%. While those whose age group is between 20 and over practice the shift system in the management of the company's working time the least, with an average of 3.54%.

**Table 9: Practice of the shift system in working time management (1-factor ANNOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	11.371	4	2.843	1.657	.170
Intra-groups	118.413	69	1.716		
Total	129.784	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20

The difference between the five (05) groups is however not significant ( $F=1.657$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.170$ ). As a result, we can conclude that the age of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of the shift system in the management of working time in the SMEs in our sample.

5.2.2.2. Practice of the shift system and company workforce

The aim here is to test the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of the shift system in the SMEs of our sample in relation to the age of the company. The frequency table indicates that companies whose size is between 251 and 300 employees have practiced the shift system in work management the most, with an average of 5.00%, followed by companies whose size is between 51 to 100 employees, with an average of 4.50%. While those whose size is between 101 to 150 employees practice the shift system less in work management, with an average of 3.00%.

Table 10: Practice of the shift system in working time management (1-factor ANNOVA)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	15.209	9	1.690	.944	.494
Intra-groups	114.575	64	1.790		
Total	129.784	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20

The difference between the ten (10) groups is however not significant ( $F=0.944$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.494$ ). Thus, we can conclude that the size or the workforce of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of the shift system in the management of working time in the SMEs in our sample.

5.2.3. Partial leave practice

The goal comprises measuring the degree of implementation of the partial leave in the companies of our sample in relation to the age and the size of the company.

5.2.3.1. Practice of technical or partial leave and the age of the company

We aim at finding the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of partial leave in the SMEs of our sample in relation to the age of the company. Thus, the table of frequencies indicates that companies whose age is between 6 and 10 years practiced technical or partial leave have the most, with an average of 2.90%, followed by companies whose age group age is between 1 to 5 years, with an average of 2.88%. Whereas, those whose age group is between 20 years and over practice less technical or partial leave, with an average of 2.17%.

Table 11: Practice of placing certain employees on technical or partial leave (1-factor ANNOVA)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	7.350	4	1.838	1.064	.381
Intra-groups	119.150	69	1.727		
Total	126.500	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20

The difference between the five (05) groups is however not significant ( $F=1.064$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.381$ ). We can therefore conclude that the age of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of putting certain employees on technical or partial leave in the SMEs of our sample.

5.2.3.2. Practice of technical or partial leave and size of the company

The objective here is to measure the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of partial leave in the SMEs of our sample in relation to the size of the company. The table of frequencies indicates that companies whose size is between 451 and 500 employees have practiced technical and partial leave the most, with an average of 4.00%, followed by companies whose age is between 300 and 350 employees, with an average of 3.00%. Meanwhile, those whose size is between 251 and 300 employees practice technical or partial leave the least, with an average of 1.00%.

**Table 12: Practice of placing certain employees on technical or partial leave (1-factor ANNOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	14.391	9	1.659	.952	.488
Intra-groups	111.569	64	1.743		
Total	126.500	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20

From the table above, the difference between the ten (10) groups is however not significant ( $F=0.952$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.488$ ). Hence, we can conclude that the size or the workforce of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of sending certain employees on technical or partial leave in the SMEs in our sample.

#### 5.2.4. Practice of mobilization or awareness campaigns on the pandemic

The task here consists of measuring the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of awareness campaign in the SMEs of our sample in relation to the size and age of the company.

##### 5.2.4.1. Practice of awareness or mobilization campaigns and age

The goal is to test the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of awareness campaign in SMEs of our sample in relation to the age of the company. The frequencies table indicates that companies whose age is between 1 and 5 years have carried out mobilization and awareness campaigns on the pandemic the most with an average of 3.38%, followed by companies whose age range is between 06 and 10 years old, with an average of 3.20%. But, those whose age group is between 20 years and over practice the least mobilization and awareness campaigns on the pandemic, with an average of 2.75%.

**Table 13: Practice of mobilization and awareness campaigns on the pandemic (1-factor ANNOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	4.445	4	1.111	.720	.581
Intra-groups	106.433	69	1.543		
Total	110.878	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20

The difference between the ten (05) groups is however not significant ( $F=0.720$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.581$ ). So we can conclude that the age of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of mobilization and awareness campaigns on the pandemic in the SMEs OF our sample.

##### 5.2.4.2. Practice of mobilization or awareness campaigns and size of the company

The major concern here is to measure the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of awareness campaign in the SMEs of our sample in relation to the size of the company. The table of frequencies indicates that companies whose size is between 51 and 100 employees have practiced mobilization and awareness campaigns on the pandemic the most, with an average of 3.63%, followed by companies whose size is between 301 and 340 employees, with an average of 3.40%. Whereas, those whose size is between 401 to 450 employees practice mobilization and awareness campaigns on the pandemic the least, with an average of 1.50%.

**Table 14: Practice of mobilization and awareness campaigns on the pandemic (1-factor ANNOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	13.453	9	1.495	.982	.463
Intra-groups	97.425	64	1.522		
Total	110.878	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20

The difference between the ten (10) groups is however not significant ( $F=0.982$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.463$ ). So we can conclude that the size or the workforce of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of mobilization and awareness campaigns on the pandemic in the SMEs in our sample.

### 5.2.5. Practice of online or remote staff training

We aim at measuring the degree of implementation of online or distance staff training in the companies of our sample in relation to the age and size of the company.

#### 5.2.5.1. Online or distance learning practice and age

This area is concerned with testing the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of online training in the SMEs of our sample in relation to the age of the company. The table of frequencies indicates that companies whose age is between 16 and 20 years have practiced distance or online training the most with an average of 2.83%, followed by companies whose age range is between 06 and 10 years old, with an average of 2.80%. Contrarily, those whose age group is between 1 to 05 years practice distance or online training the least, with an average of 2.31%.

**Table 15: Practice of remote or online staff training (1-factor ANNOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	3.532	4	.883	.445	.776
Intra-groups	136.954	69	1.985		
Total	140.486	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20

From table above, the difference between the five (05) groups is however not significant ( $F=0.445$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.776$ ). As a result, we can conclude that the age of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of distance or online staff training in the SMEs of our sample.

#### 5.2.5.1.1. Practice of online or distance learning and company size

The objective here is to find out the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of online training in the SMEs of our sample in relation to the size of the company. The results of the frequency table indicate that companies whose size is between 151 and 200 employees practiced distance or online training the most with an average of 3.00% followed by companies whose size is between 101 to 150 employees, with an average of 2.80%. Meanwhile, those whose size is between 451 to 500 employees practice remote or online training the least, with an average of 1.00%.

**Table 16: Practice of remote or online staff training (1-factor ANNOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	8.543	9	.949	.460	.896
Intra-groups	131.944	64	2.062		
Total	140.496	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20

Referring to the table above, the difference between the ten (10) groups is however not significant ( $F=0.460$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.896$ ). As a result, we can conclude that the size or the workforce of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of distance or online staff training in the SMEs of our sample.

### 5.2.6. Practice of telework or working from home

The task comprises measuring the degree of implementation of telework or working from home in the companies of our sample in relation to the age and the size of the company.

### 5.2.6.1. Practice of telework and the age of the company

The main concern here is to test the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of telework in the SMEs of our sample in relation to the age of the company. The frequency table indicates through the frequency table that companies whose age is between 6 and 10 years have practiced telework the most, with an average of 4.30%, followed by companies whose age group is between 16 and 20 years old, with an average of 4%. While those whose age group is between 11 and 15 years old do the less work from home, with an average of 3.8.

**Table 17: Practice of telework or video conferencing in working time management (1-factor ANNOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	1.528	4	.382	.174	.951
Intra-groups	151.350	69	2.193		
Total	152.878	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20

Following the table above, the difference between the five (5) groups is however not significant ( $F=0.174$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.951$ ). Hence, we can conclude that the age of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of telework in the SMEs of our sample.

### 5.2.6.2. Practice of telework or working from home and the size of the company

At this level, it is a question for us of seeing the degree of significance of the implementation of the practice of telework in the SMEs of our sample in relation to the size of the company. Reading the frequency table indicates through the frequency table that companies whose workforce is between 251 and 300 employees with an average of 5% have practiced telework the most, followed by companies whose workforce is between 151 and 200 employees, with an average of 4.63%. While those whose workforce is between 101 and 150 work the least from home, with an average of 2, 40%.

**Table 18: Practice of telework or video conferencing in working time management (1-factor ANNOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inter-groups	23.260	4	2.584	1.267	.267
Intra-groups	129.619	69	2.025		
Total	152.878	73			

Source: Result of the enquiries with SPSS 20

With reference to the table above, the difference between the ten (10) groups is however not significant ( $F=1.276$ ;  $df=73$ ;  $p=0.267$ ). Thus, we can conclude that the size or the workforce of the company does not influence the implementation of the practice of telework in the SMEs of our sample.

In fact, with regard to the results of the data analysis of the 1-factor ANOVA test, the objective was to measure the degree of significance of the implementation of HR practices in the context of COVID-19 in relation to age and size of the company. These variables constitute the control variables. The analysis shows that certain practices of HR have been identified in the context of a pandemic, but their implementation are still in an embryonic state, because their degree of significance is greater than 0.05.

## CONCLUSION

From the analysis, two observations could be made. The first concerns the security measures (hand washing, social distancing, wearing a nose mask, etc.) observed by all the actors as an interpretation of certain barrier measures enacted by the WHO and relayed by the Government. It appears that the adaptation of companies in relation to these measures only concerns tactical actions. The pressure exerted by companies and employers' groups led to a relaxation of the measures, a month later. Summarily, it can be said that the formal institution

represented by the state here is not the only one to influence corporate behavior. Mimetic behaviors have also been observed, specifically, the practice of telework, the suspension of internships, the shift system, telephone interviews and/or video conferences following the process of mimetic isomorphism of DiMaggio and Powell (1983). The company E1 has opted for the shift system and has thus implemented the practice of working from home or telework. The structural modifications (Chandler, 1962) in terms of reduction of workstations, enrichment of workstations or structural reconfigurations are remarkable. It is also important to point out the emergence of the occupational health and safety committee, which is often neglected or even non-existent in some SMEs. It is not excluded that this committee could be integrated into the organizational charts of several companies to ensure strategic monitoring and plan health and safety management policies. In the absence of this committee; it appeared that several companies had no benchmarks for decision-making in an emergency and in an uncertain environment. Even if we can admit that the Covid-19 pandemic was not predictable, the adjustment within companies was more difficult in the absence of basic knowledge of these viral diseases due to the lack of health and safety monitoring.

The second observation concerns the behavior of most companies, which consists in waiting for decisions taken by the Government, donors and international partners in order to build a viable strategy. Two actors are therefore invited into the strategic process of companies as strong determinants of adaptation actions. Thus, in addition to the motivations of strategic adaptations of companies according to the logics of survival (Cyert and March, 1963; March and Simon, 1958), competition, strategic positioning (Porter, 1982), diversification or adaptation to technology (Chandler, 1962), or even according to the processes of isomorphism DiMaggio and Powell (1983), the regulation here implies the involvement of the State through the reduction of charges, subsidies or direct financial support legitimizing the strategic adaptation of businesses. Similarly, the decisions taken by donors (in relation to States) and international business partners determine the strategic adaptation of businesses, guided by the quest for survival. It then appears that the adaptation of companies in the event of a global pandemic inducing an economic recession depends more on the agreement between formal national institutions (State, employers' groups, and unions) and international institutions than on their own initiatives. This brings us closer to the vertical alignment of contingency theory (Shuler and Jackson, 1987).

The literature is thus enriched with knowledge relating to the strategic adaptation and in particular, the adaptation of HR practices of companies in the event of a pandemic leading to a recession. In this context, the adaptation of companies depends on the one hand, on external strategies, especially on institutional agreement resulting from national institutions (State, employers, and trade unions) and international institutions. On the other hand, adaptation depends on internal strategies: work organization, quality management, organizational culture (Baird and Meshonlam, 1988) with regard to the horizontal alignment of contingency theory.

This study reveals a reflection on the part of companies geared towards having a post in charge of the health and safety monitoring policy or a health and safety committee at work. Similarly, for activities for which telework is more effective, this modality could effectively be combined with face-to-face work. Then, it would be appropriate for telework to be legislated by parliament, as some countries have already done, so that the conditions for its implementation are known to all, given that so far, it has been regulated through management based objective. Finally, it is urgent that Cameroonian SMEs update their technological devices for a better implementation of telework, especially in a context of managerial innovations.

Given the small nature of the sample, one of the subsequent avenues of research would be to assess the degree of implementation of this new business adaptation practices after a year.

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