

Diversity Management in the Small and Medium Sized enterprises: A study applied in the Littoral Region of Cameroon

Gestion de la Diversité Dans les Petites et Moyennes Entreprises : Une étude appliquée dans la Région du littoral du Cameroun

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Disclosure Statement :	Authors are not aware of any findings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this study and they are responsible for any plagiarism in this paper.
Conflict of Interest :	The authors report no conflicts of interest.
Cite this article :	NTEMEN, E., ESSOH, C. A., & AMOUGOU OYONO, T. (2024). Diversity Management in the Small and Medium Sized enterprises: A study applied in the Littoral Region of Cameroon. International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics, 5(4), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10939322
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Received: March 01, 2024

Accepted: April 08, 2024

International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics - IJAFAME

ISSN: 2658-8455

Volume 5, Issue 4 (2024)

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Abstract

SME in Cameroon is known as the “corner-stone” of the economy. At the same time, just as the troubling environment conditions the execution of their activities smoothly, so do they become resistant. This piece of work aims to assess the effects of diversity management on the SMEs in Cameroon. To guide ourselves towards achieving this objective, we asked the question, in what way does diversity management affect the SME? In our attempt to answer this question, we opted for a qualitative research approach with inductive reasoning. To be logical, our population of study is made of any SME mindless of its domain of activities within the littoral region of Cameroon and our sampled population is made up of the proprietors and/or the main human resource persons in these enterprises, making a total of six participants retained in this study due to saturation, thanks to the use of an interview guide for data collection; administered through face-to-face contact with the aid of an audio recorder. The collected data were analyzed manually based on thematic analysis. The results from the analysis show that : gender (100%), generational diversity (100%), ethnic and cultural diversity (100%), family status (60%), and inclusion of persons with disabilities (35%), are the main mechanisms of diversity management that are mostly practiced, and at the same time, they have different effects in the SME in Cameroon. This piece of work is limited only to sole SMEs in their domain of activity, which could lead to a multiplication of each case in a further study. To this effect, the different top resource persons in the SME should respect the stipulations of the Cameroon labor code against the practice of discrimination against workers, especially persons with disabilities. At the same time, the workers should be able to distinguish between the workplace and the areas of influence of their traditional titles, except in family-owned SMEs.

Keywords: Diversity, Management, SME

JEL Classification: I31

Type of paper: Empirical research

Résumé

Les PME au Cameroun sont connues comme la « pierre angulaire » de l'économie. Au moment où l'environnement trouble les conditionne dans l'exécution de leurs activités, au point de les rendre résistantes. L'objectif de ce travail est d'évaluer les effets de la gestion de la diversité dans les PME au Cameroun. Pour nous orienter vers cet objectif, nous avons posé la question suivante : de quelle manière la gestion de la diversité affecte-t-elle la PME ? En essayant de répondre à cette question, nous avons opté pour une approche de recherche qualitative avec un raisonnement inductif. Dans un souci de logique, notre population d'étude est constituée des PME de la région littorale du Cameroun, sans tenir compte de leur domaine d'activités. Notre population échantillonnée est composée des propriétaires et/ou des principales personnes ressources humaines de ces entreprises pour un nombre de six participants retenus dans cette étude en raison de la saturation, grâce à l'utilisation d'un guide d'entretien pour la collecte de données administré par un contact en face à face à l'aide d'un enregistreur audio. Les données collectées ont été analysées manuellement sur la base d'une analyse thématique. Les résultats de l'analyse montrent que : le genre (100%), la diversité générationnelle (100%), la diversité ethnique et culturelle (100%), la situation de famille (60%) et l'inclusion des personnes handicapées (35%) sont les principaux mécanismes de gestion de la diversité qui sont le plus souvent pratiqués. En même temps, ils ont leurs effets différents dans la PME au Cameroun. Ce travail est limité uniquement aux PME dans leur domaine d'activité. Cette étude pourrait procéder à une multiplication de chaque cas dans une étude ultérieure. À cet effet, les différentes personnes les plus qualifiées dans la PME devraient respecter les dispositions du code du travail camerounais contre la pratique de la discrimination à l'égard des travailleurs, en particulier des personnes handicapées. Dans le même temps, les travailleurs devraient être en mesure de distinguer le lieu de travail et les domaines d'influence de leurs titres traditionnels, sauf dans les PME familiales.

Mots-clés : Diversité, Gestion, PME

JEL Classification : I31

Type du papier : Recherche Empirique

1. Introduction

For several years now, diversity and the management of diversity have become a worrying issue for practitioners as well as researchers. It is high time to question the reasons why these different parties have decided to consider this phenomenon this late, which is at the center of the organizations and the societies at large. This goes a long way toward showing how strongly the recognition and valorization of individual human resources in society have become complex in an environment characterized by the mobility of people, capital, and technology. At this point in time, diversity has become a factor in riches, innovations, and creativity (Kamdern E., 2018). More so, diversity is at the heart of the preparation and implementation of Cameroon's development strategy, as clearly stated in the Strategic Document for Growth and Employment for the next 20 years. So, diversity in the workplace means including or acknowledging people from a wide range of backgrounds, taking into account their race, ethnicity, gender, and national origins (Emmanuel K., 2017). This goes further to help the different workers to be able to share knowledge on their different cultural backgrounds and equally help the workers to learn more about their values, beliefs, interactions, norms, as well as their expectations. At the same time, it helps them to avoid misunderstandings, stereotypes, and assumptions and helps to create certain cultural competencies, especially in organizational communication and integration. Furthermore, cultural competence is the ability of a worker to effectively interact, work, and develop meaningful relationships with co-workers of various backgrounds, and these are possible thanks to the type of atmosphere that exists in the organization (Sonkeng G., 2022).

As leaders, in normal circumstances, as they deal with human resources daily, it is necessary to adopt diversity management strategies for the smooth and better integration and engagement of their workers. In the same light, diversity can be promoted through recognition, as diversity is traced through every aspect of management, self-awareness, and understanding of the different cultures of the workforce. With respect to the best practices, there is a need for commitment; on the one hand, the top management is responsible for policy formulation, which should influence workforce diversity; and on the other hand, the adoption of a shared vision among the top management, in which case the organizational diversity plan becomes limited (Malo, F. B., 2015; Boujima, M., 2022). More to that, organizations should go beyond the traditional form to hire new workers, such as veterans exiting competitive organizations, talents from other regions or countries, and individuals with diverse skills, knowledge, and know-how to be more productive to the organization in terms of better quality services (Kamdern E. et Fouda Ongodo, M., 2012). It should be noted here that the African continent, and Cameroon in particular, is generally presented as Africa in miniature as it reflects Africa's diversity in different fields such as economic, ethnic, religious, linguistic, climate, and ecology, and these show how there is a great need to put in place mechanisms to better manage these varied profiles of workers (Kamdern E., 2018; Lalekan B. O., 2023). On the contrary, it has been noted that the major factors affecting workplace diversity and the organizational climate are age, religion, language culture, race, education, and skills. There are lots of different perspectives as well as approaches observed in many organizations, such as putting in place poor diversity management programs, the absence of a diverse workforce, and failures in risk assessment. In general, these studies present a statement of the problem of the management of diversity of human resources in an organization, especially on the main research works on the management of diversity, and the performance was in a larger situation, developed from an economic perspective. At the same time, organizations have been encouraged to explore the benefits of diversity to ameliorate and go beyond their financial performance (Apitsa et al., 2014; Kamdem et al., 2007; Nizet et al., 2007; Tidjani et al., 2010; Bekono Ohana, 2017). Based on these impediments, we

forwarded our research questions as follows: in what way does diversity management affect the SME? The response to this question permitted us to achieve our objective, which is to assess the effects of diversity management in the SME. The originality of this work is to integrate the model of diversity management by being interested in the contribution of dimensions such as generational diversity, inclusion of persons with disabilities, and ethnic and cultural diversity in SME Cameroon.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

The African man has a system of living as a group or family, and such manifestations are traced through ethnic groupings, attachment to traditions, and solidarity; on the contrary, in foreign countries such as the United States, they practice a more individualistic system of leaving. It can be noted that the system of living in groups gives a sense of solidarity and creates a favorable environment for family members, and the different groupings are strongly attached to their culture and the rules of the culture. Besides the ethics and typical practices, societal structures are identical in the sense of living as a community, the spirit of brotherliness, cultural attachment, and heritage, loyalty to culture, female socialization, the sentiment of honors, family, and village groupings (Frimousse S. & Pretti J-M., 2006; Kamdem E. et al., 2011).

2.1. Background of the study

Seeing gender as one of the factors in diversity management made us understand that, in America, only 47% of women represent the American workforce; however, 40% of the women still report experiencing a gender type of discrimination at their workplace in different ways, such as unequal payment and promotion, being treated as less competent than the men, and feeling less supported by the organization (Parker K. et Funk C., 2017). More so, a study on the positive stereotypes about racial minorities that can lead to negative outcomes for Asian Americans made it clear that they are usually seen as the model of minority, and in this case, it is a positive stereotype as they have a strong work ethic and better outcomes in education and income (Woo 2000). To an extent, such stereotypes create a false perception that they are doing well, which is not the case. Furthermore, it was also noticed that, despite these perceptions, they are still likely not to be promoted to managerial positions as compared to their co-workers (Gee et al. 2018). In addition, the US and Ukraine studies aimed to determine the links between gender and compensation and benefits practices as features of assurance of equal rights and their impact on employees' motivation to move forward with the economic results of the enterprise. Using macro-level analysis and thanks to the use of graphs and mapping methods, the findings show that ensuring gender equality is a difficult task for even the most developed countries in the world, as it's not easy to obtain gender equity, even concerning labor rights. More so, gender discrimination is accompanied by age (57.1%) under 35 years; the higher the age, the smaller the wage gap (Yuriy B. et al., 2020).

Testing the level of discrimination in job access in France through a false job request based on individual origins and place of residence, a total of 17163 requests were deposited between October 2018 and January 2019 in 103 big French enterprises. A series of test methods were used, combining information requests and job requests. Indicators of discrimination have been produced to compare one enterprise to the other concerning recruitment. From the different enterprises tested, the results show significant evidence of discrimination according to the criteria at the beginning. The result shows a weak level of significance of discrimination as to the place of residence, and the results of discrimination as to origin (Afrique du Nord) are of greater significance in the big enterprises with a turnover greater than the median, and at the same time, at the level of industries in Paris, the place as a form of discrimination registers a

significant level (Laetitia C. et al., 20). It was further explained that inclusion, as compared to discrimination, is a stronger mediator in the relationship between positive leadership and well-being (Byron G. A. et al., 2020). More to this a study aimed to see the impact of discrimination on the minority through racial and ethnic minority names. The result shows that, on the aspect of discrimination by names of people, the minority have started modifying their names to be aligned to the names that show greater considerations as experienced in society. For the aspect of language, the minority equally switches by modifying their language to exclude slang in order to fit or improve perceptions of competence at work (Badger et al. 2018).

In trying to study the impact of social auditing of human resources, theories were mobilized, such as the theory of the universalist approach and the theory of social exchange. The results revealed that social auditing practices have a significant impact on the social climate of companies in Morocco (Yassine S. et Houria Z., 2022). More so, it has been confirmed that when women head for jobs or positions that are seen as strategic, engineering, or leadership, they can be seen as less opportune and are not hireable. But today, through the policies and laws put in place, the stereotypes of women are changing, and it can be seen through recent research that men and women are now perceived as similarly intelligent and competent (Hentschel T. et al., 2019). At the same time, the women, on their own part, are fighting to be in higher positions too, fighting for the balance of competence and, at the same time, maintaining a warm and likable presence (Corrington A. et al., 2019).

In several Cameroonian companies, the leaders have approved as they agreed to disclose their human resource management practices, particularly on recruitment and allocation of personnel in a workstation. It was discovered that they put at some strategic workstations personnel that are very close to the leaders as they use workers from different origins, such as Bassa, Douala, and Bamilike, designating the ethnic communities of their employees. The performance of human resources can be improved thanks to the management of diversity as described through factors such as equitable remuneration and motivation of employees, which strengthen social cohesion and a foundation of collective competence (Sonkeng G., 2022). Again, some of the leaders want to show the extent to which they care about the ethnic diversity of their employees, for we are in a country where ethnicity is one of the major dimensions in the operation of the employees in the organizations (Emmanuel K., 2017). It can be noted here that the Cameroon context favors greatly the practice of diversity management in every organization concerning the diverse ethnic groups that exist. The mixture of people from different backgrounds in the same organization, gives an added advantage to the said organization, especially when considerations are given to every worker. More so, this study has demonstrated that ethnic and religious identities do not produce violent conflicts. Instead, ethno-religious, disproportionate access to power, scarce resources, and opportunities are the producers of conflicts (Lalekan B. O., 2023). Human capital was and remains a great necessity to be taken into account in the orientations and strategies of a company. So, through the determinants of the social climate in private companies in Morocco, as proven by the empirical evidence of this study, it was declared that the impact of working conditions, internal communication, training, and career management on human resource behaviors and motivation depends on how these factors are received, perceived, and converted by employees. So, the linkage models do not have enough inside information to support the relationship between social factors and motivation (BOUJIMAL, M., 2022).

Going by the evolution of publications on diversity management, it has been noticed that it is not effective in Africa, as publications went from 45 in 2000 to 21 in 2010. The explanation for this regression lies in the slow and difficult emergence of the research field oriented to diversity management. The Anglophone publication represents just 13.5%, while the

Francophone publication represents just 05.23% of publications dedicated to diversity management (Kamdern 2012).

2.2. Hypotheses development of diversity management

- **Main features of diversity management in the Cameroonian context**

In the Cameroonian context, diversity management in organizations encompasses several main features such as:

- **Recognition and valuing of diversity:**

The importance of diverse backgrounds is being understood today by different organizations, as well as the experiences and perspectives of their employees. It is thanks to features like this that organizations can foster a culture that values and appreciates diversity. This shows that, following the geographical situation of Cameroon, diversity serves as a pillar, a source of motivation for the workers, and an innovation for the different organizations through which the organizations can become more competitive in their environment (Kamdern E. et Fouda Ongodo, M., 2012; Kamdem E., 2018).

- **Inclusive hiring practices:**

most organizations are doing their best to create diverse human resources in the workplace by implementing an inclusive hiring practices system. This inclusive hiring practice system is made up of actively seeking out candidates from different backgrounds and providing equal employment opportunities. This shows that the organizations at their different levels intend to benefit from the opportunities presented by diversity while at the same time contributing to eradicating discrimination (Malo F. B., 2015; Bourhis R., 2021; Sonkeng G., 2022).

- **Equal treatment and opportunities:**

currently, organizations are committed to treating all employees fairly and equally, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity, religion, or physical abilities. More so, this includes ensuring equal access to training, development, promotions, and other opportunities for professional development. At this level, there is a sense of promoting a culture of respect and understanding by encouraging employees to embrace different cultures, traditions, and languages. This helps to create a harmonious and inclusive work environment. Furthermore, organizations ensure that employees receive fair and equitable compensation and benefits, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds or benefits (Hentschel T. et al., 2019; Malo F. B., 2015; Soares, E. B., 2019).

- **Multilingual communication:**

In a linguistically diverse country like Cameroon, some of the organizations have recognized the importance of effective communication. In this situation, they may promote multilingualism and adopt strategies that facilitate communication between employees who have different language abilities. Some of the advantages of such a factor in the organization are that it helps to connect, share experiences, and support each other based on common identities or interests. It also contributes to fostering inclusivity and providing a sense of belonging (Lalekan B. O., 2023; Sonkeng G., 2022).

- **Training and sensitization:**

Training is an element that is often conducted in organizations, and sensitization programs are put in place to increase awareness and understanding of diversity. This equally helps employees develop cross-cultural competence and fosters a more inclusive work environment. At the same time, the organizations may have systems in place to monitor and evaluate their

diversity management efforts. At the same time, a regular assessment will help to identify areas for improvement and measure the impact of diversity initiatives (Parker K. et Funk C., 2017; Cameroon-Enterprise Survey, 2016). In general, diversity management in the Cameroonian context is aimed at creating an inclusive work environment that values and respects the differences among employees, fosters collaboration, and enhances organizational performance.

From the different literature reviews, lots of dimensions have been underlined that characterize diversity management as analysis is expressed through various forms of overt or covert social demands seen in the various areas of the SMEs and Cameroonian society at large, such as gender, generational affiliation, family status, physical appearance, health status, physical or mental disability, political opinion, union activity, and sexual orientation. Here below is a critical analysis of the main features of diversity management that are mostly practiced in the SMEs in Cameroon. Moreover, in Cameroon, like in many other countries, diversity management has evolved through several important dimensions. It should be underlined here that these dimensions will certainly contribute to the smooth functioning and integration of the workers in the organization, and at the same time, if the enterprise embraces and effectively manages diversity, it will go a long way toward enhancing creativity, innovation, and productivity in the enterprise.

2.3. Dimensions of diversity management in the SMEs

About the literature review and the results from our exploratory study, some of the key characteristics of diversity management underlined in SMEs in Cameroon are developed as follows:

- **The generational diversity:**

In enterprises today, they are now managing a workforce with multiple generations, and each generation has its own unique values, work styles, and communication preferences. In such a situation, companies are forced to put in place a system of adapting to these differences by fostering intergenerational relationships and creating age-friendly workplaces. Generational diversity is indeed an important factor in modern diversity management in enterprises in Cameroon. It refers to the differences and unique characteristics among employees from different generations. Some considerations related to generational diversity in enterprises in Cameroon are communication styles, technological preferences, work-life balance, career development, leadership styles, as well as diversity of ideas and monitoring programs (Parry E., 2016).

These different indicators show a great difference between the different generations, and at the same time, the organizations need them not only as a means of transition but also as a form of educating the enterprise culture to the new generation. Again, by acknowledging and embracing generational differences, enterprises will be able to create inclusive environments where all employees feel valued and can contribute their strengths, ultimately enhancing productivity, creativity, and overall organizational success (Peretz H, Fried Y, & Parry E, 2022).

- **The inclusion of persons with disabilities:**

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in an organization is not only a matter of ethical responsibility but also a strategic advantage. Including individuals with disabilities creates a diverse and inclusive work environment that fosters a strong atmosphere in the organization. Some enterprises are recognizing the importance of inclusivity and providing equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Soares, E. B., 2019). This can be done through the implementation of reasonable accommodations, putting in place anti-discrimination

policies, disability awareness, and training, promoting accessibility, mentorship, and career development, and raising awareness about the diverse abilities that individuals with disabilities bring to the workplace (Parry E., 2016).

- **Ethnic and cultural diversity:**

It is recognized that Cameroon is a diverse country with approximately 250 ethnic groups, and enterprises in Cameroon in particular have recognized the importance of understanding and valuing the various ethnic and cultural backgrounds of their employees (Kamdem E. et Fouda Ongodo, M., 2012). Its presence in an organization brings numerous benefits, both to the individuals involved and to the organization as a whole. Some of the reasons for this are that it will enhance innovation and creativity, expand market reach, improve decision-making, increase employee engagement and retention, and promote a positive reputation and employee branding. These can be achieved through inclusive hiring practices, the provision of diversity training, and the active promotion of a culture of respect and inclusion.

2.4. Influence of diversity management on small and medium-sized enterprises

In Cameroon, for instance, diversity management is an attractive and important research area because effective diversity management in SMEs can bring about significant benefits such as an increase in employee morale, enhanced creativity and innovation, better decision-making, and increased productivity. From the literature review, some key points have been underlined in the study of the contributions of diversity management to SMEs in our context of the study, which are: first, cultural diversity; in Cameroon, it is a culturally diverse country as it counts over 200 ethnic groups. In this situation, understanding and managing this diversity within SMEs is crucial for creating a harmonious and inclusive work environment. Second, gender diversity: the promotion of gender diversity in SMEs is very important for ensuring equal opportunities for both men and women in the workplace. This can lead to improved performance and a more balanced decision-making process. Third, social inclusion involves creating a workplace where employees from different backgrounds feel respected and valued. This can help reduce discrimination and promote a sense of belonging among employees. Fourth, training and development: it is important to provide diverse training programs for employees and managers, as it is good to create awareness and promote understanding of different cultures, beliefs, and perspectives within the organization. Fifth, leadership commitment meaning, a strong leadership commitment to diversity management is crucial for embedding inclusive practices in the organizational culture of SMEs, and sixth, understanding the legal framework on diversity and influence in this context is important for ensuring compliance with labor laws and regulations.

The data collected from the diverse SMEs in different domains of activities helped to understand the challenges and opportunities they face in managing diversity, especially and the cases that practice effective diversity management strategies in one way or another, as it justifies their current success in their business.

3. Adopted Research methodology

According to Gavard Perret et al. (2012, it is the study of methods of building knowledge. Again, it indicates and justifies the data collection and investigation methods chosen (Biloua F. C., 2021). Concerning our study, we have opted for a hypothetical-inductive research approach with inductive reasoning to understand the phenomena of our study and to achieve our research objective.

3.1. Methods of data collection and treatment

This phase of data collection is fundamental because it constitutes the pillar of empirical research work for the researchers and the basis on which they will have to rely to justify the orientation of their work. Our participants are made up of proprietors, representatives of workers, controllers, and managers in small and medium-sized enterprises in Cameroon, particularly in the Littoral Region. After using the abductive method of data collection, we were able to collect data from enterprises that deal in agricultural products, insurance companies, and enterprises in the tertiary sector. The table below gives summary information on our sampled population from where we collected our data:

Table 1: Recapitulative table of respondents interviewed

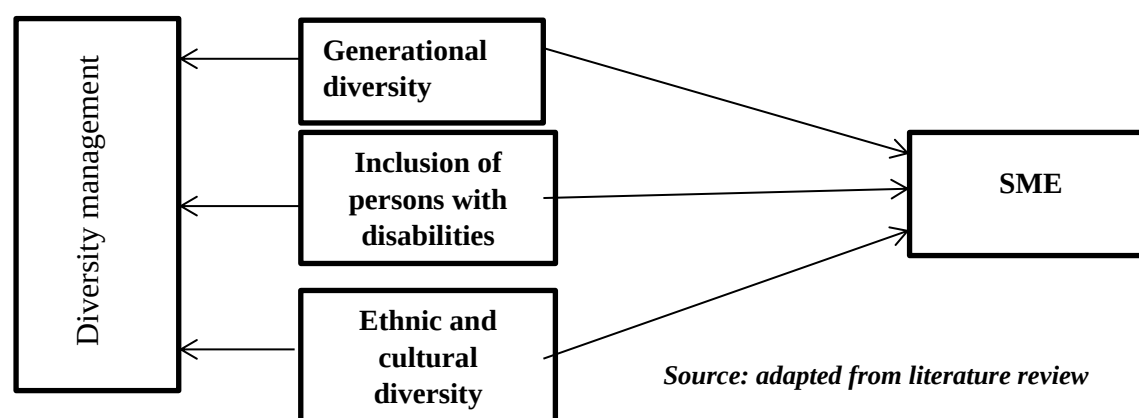
Enterprise (codes for respondents)	Type of enterprise	Post of Responsibility	Years of experience	Duration of interview
A1	Insurance company	Proprietor	18 years	19mins
A2	Inter-urban transport company	Head of marketing unit	13 years	25mins
A3	Agriculture (distribution)	Sales representative	09 years	14mins
A4	Hardware shop	Proprietor	15 years	17mins
A5	Poultry farm	Proprietor	11 years	19mins
A6	Restaurant	Manager	17 years	14min

Source: fieldwork

3.1.1. Presentation of research proposals

Emerging dimensions of analysis expressed through various forms of overt or covert social demands have been expressed in the various areas of Cameroonian society, as underlined in the literature (Emmanuel K., 2017). According to the results of our exploratory study, some of the major dimensions found in the different SMEs are gender, generational diversity, ethnic and cultural diversity, family status, physical appearance, inclusion of persons with disabilities, health status, physical or mental disability, political opinion, union activity, generational diversity, and sexual orientation. From the above justifications concerning the dimensions of diversity management in SMEs and Cameroon in particular, we have formulated our principal research proposal as the generational diversity, inclusion of persons with disabilities, and ethnic and cultural diversity are the mechanisms of diversity management that contribute to the management of SME in Cameroon.

Figure 1: Schematically representation of our research proposal



Source: adapted from literature review

3.2. Presentation and justification of population of study and sample

In respect to the population of our study, it is made up of workers who hold a post of responsibility in the enterprises (SME), as seen in Table 1. At the same time, due to the unstable situation of the region as a result of the ongoing armed conflicts, this sampled population under study is made up mostly of enterprises that have been resilient in the littoral crisis context and are still hooked on their organizational culture (NTEMEN, E., & BILOA FOU DA, C. N., 2023). Six enterprises (see Table 1) involved in different areas of activities were accessed for data collection, and it was limited to this number as we reached saturation after using the abductive method of data collection. The reason for sampling enterprises in multiple domains of activities is that we intended to sample a variety of opinions concerning our research objectives. In addition to that, an interview guide was used as a data collection tool, which was administered face-to-face with the aid of an audio recorder. It should be underlined here that the original responses of the respondents were registered in the French language and were later translated to develop the verbatim. For the analyses of our data meaning, as for the data analysis technique, the data was closely examined by researchers to identify common themes, ideas, and patterns of meaning that came up repeatedly (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Biloa Fou da, C. N., 2018), so we settled for the thematic analysis. The manual analysis of data was used as it is detailed in the treatment of the transcriptions made within the period of interviews (from November 6, 2023, to February 14, 2024), and the transcriptions were done simultaneously.

The researchers were satisfied with a representative subset of the population to which the generalizations called a sample were made. As specified by Kinyamba, 2008, cited in NTEMEN, E., and BILOA FOU DA, C. N., 2023, the sample was generated from the practical impossibility of individually questioning an entire population in which one is interested and from the statistical possibility of describing the whole by part. We interviewed six because, at this point, we had reached saturation. We have determined our study population and target population; we chose our sampling technique, which was multiple holistic cases. With this sampling technique, we were able to understand the reality of the context of our study (Biloa F., 2018). It consists of identifying common features and those that are idiosyncratic to arrive at a theory offering real potential for analytical generalization (Cusin, 2009).

The choice of our sampling is motivated by several reasons, one of which is our topic of research. Secondly, today, we are witnessing enterprises exercising their activities even in times of adversity at the same time; it's interesting for us to understand how these enterprises manage to remain competitive. However, a sampling technique is not chosen haphazardly. It is necessary to choose a favorable sampling technique that best answers qualitatively to solve the problem under study.

4. Presentation and discussion of research results

4.1. Results

The preoccupation of enterprises is not only oriented to quantifiable aspects such as turnover and market share but equally and particularly to non-quantifiable aspects such as competence management, well-being, know-how, and aptitudes. Concerning our different variables, we collected sufficient data through interviewers, which enabled us to understand, through our different analyses, the effects of diversity management in enterprises. Below is the result of our analysis concerning our different rubrics under study:

– **The generational diversity: (A1)** <<...their relationship is not in good shape because the old think they know much better and think they have better competence which is not the case... >>, **(A2)** <<... It is harmonious in the sense that their mentalities in certain contexts

such as debates, general comments. It is also complex for reasons that, the elders use their age as a means of justification of superiority which goes a long way to affect the respect of hierarchy in most times, when there are “quacks”, the issue of age is left out making the milieu to be ambiguous...>>, (A3) <<...we have a simple form of relationship on one hand when it comes to out of professional matters, on the other hand, the elders don't want to listen to the younger that they they have nothing constructive to tell them... >>, (A4) <<... the relationship that exists between colleagues is friendly and professional... >>, (A5) <<... The relationship between these two groups of workers in the organizations has several forms of behaviors that are not easy to explain. In their different ways, we can see that there can never be a consensus between them in their ideas or ways of thinking. Professionally, the older think that they have the wisdom of everything even though they are at times unable to apply what they have in mind, and the younger, have the ability to adapt to change but are not humbled enough either in the way to present their ideas or make criticisms....>>, (A6) <<... in our organization, they are together just as they are not. This is to explain that, they all have a different background of education and they are so attached to it that they become resistant to change. The younger think that the theory gotten from school equals the realities in the field even though this is not usually the case and the older equally think that what they studied in their days is still current in the field. On these bases, they always have disagreements. But, they usually end up having a point of agreement....>>,

– **The inclusion of persons with disabilities:** (A1) <<...poorly remunerated, they are not considered like one who can produce something important...>>, (A2) <<... they present the possibilities of not being able to execute their task and always sick for the assistance of others to do their job, but the “abinos” was considered as a normal person with her competences, was not looked differently....>>, (A3) <<...they want to be always at the first position other things but when it comes for engagement on duty, some of them bring forth their handicap situation to run away from work....>>, (A5) <<... they give additional work to us in the organization which goes a long way to make us register lots of losses such as in time, unnecessary expenditures purposely for them. So I don't longer have any in my organization....>>, (A6) <<...I have never recruited any person with a handicap in my organization, so I cannot talk about them....>>.

– **The ethnic and cultural diversity:** (A1) <<... my workers are more bilingual and working with people from different backgrounds allows ameliorating the quality of services and the practice of tribalism. Also, It gives them the possibility to develop their knowhow competitively...>>, (A2) <<...our head is coming from a foreign country and his returns, he has opted for regional representation of workers in his enterprise and at the same time, I take distance with everyone in the organisation, even though we are all here for our ends need and our relations ends only on the platform of professionalism. We have different ways to see and understand things also, our different levels of comprehension don't depend on our levels of education. So the difficult issue here is at the level of comprehension...>>, (A3) <<...workers who are of the same ethnic group as the proprietor are about 85% and at the same time, I think it is very interesting on one hand and very difficult on the other for reason that there are some people from certain part of the country that are considered less educated, this makes one to easily put everyone in the same bundle which should not be the case. Again, some of them have a very difficult character to manage but are forced to work together, especially in team work...>>, (A4) <<...we are about 60% who are of the same origin as our boss and won't find difficulty working together for it instead helps us to learn from each other's, obtain new knowledge, experience and also different cultures...>>, (A5) <<...I think is about 30% and working with people of different backgrounds at one moment is so disturbing because it is difficult to trace them or even accompany them like in their villages if needs to be to very long

distances and also, since we are not familiar in cultural practices, they give me the impression of being odd in my practices...>>, (A6) <<... it should be about 50%. It is also good because it helps one to know more about others' cultures and practices and at the same time, it reduces the level of trust and confidence among workers especially those workers coming from a region that is best known for malpractices...>>.

– **Sexual Orientation (gender) :** (A1) <<...they are in a good relationship because some of them really find happiness among them...>>, (A2) <<...friendly, cooperative, random miscomprehension...>>, (A3) <<...we have a normal relationship even though the women are usually under looked when it comes to certain opportunities and jobs to be executed...>>, (A4) <<... the relationship between the man and the female is friendly and professional...>>, (A5) <<...is normal like in any other environment where respect is mostly given especially to the married (women) even though they do have at the time their discrete types of relationships...>>, (A6) <<...there is nothing special between these two genders, even though it has been observed that the females always flatter the males to carry out some of their duties for them...>>.

– **Family Status:** (A1) <<...I have not registered any so far so I cannot talk about it...>>, (A2) <<...for the married, they are considered as parents and great considerations are given to them, they advise everyone even though at times the younger ones get in a clash with them abusing them as “sabi tout”. The rich, always want their things like “T-Shirts or Polo” given by the enterprise to them should be of different quality as compared to the less privileged. Workers of the lower categories are not considered for in a review of their working condition...>>, (A3) <<...well in our organizations, we do not have titled men, so we do not have any experience yet...>>, (A4) <<... those who are more closed to the boss thing they are also the boss and want to influence every one...>>, (A5) <<...in our organization, people coming from some part of the Littoral region and the littoral in general are attached to their traditional titles. To an extent, they think the titles should be the same wherever they which is not the case, and it creates a sort of problem between workers in the organization...>>, (A6) <<...as of now, no worker in this organization is having a family title, so I don't have any experience on that yet...>>.

Table 2: Recapitulative table of diversity management features in the SMEs

Category	Rubric	Relative values (%)
DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT	Gender	100
	Generational diversity	100
	Ethnic and cultural diversity	100
	Family Status	60
	Inclusion of persons with disabilities	35

Source: Extracted from our interview

In summary, going by our empirical results, it has been noticed that there exists a variety of mechanisms of diversity management in the SMEs in Cameroon. Is it for such a reason that these organizations can register a certain degree of organizational climate that permits them to find a minimum level of communication amongst the workers? Refereeing to our summary table above (table 2), we have retained five rubrics or categories of the mechanisms of diversity management in Cameroon, with their respective scores derived from the frequency of ideas coming from the different interviewees retained for this study. From the relative values, we can subgroup the rubrics into three based on the classification of their scores. At this moment, it came to our attention that the rubric gender registers a 100% score, meaning

all the respondents confirmed the practice of diversity management through gender. This can be justified by the stipulations of Cameroon's labor code that put a stop to discrimination based on gender during employment. Also, together with the fight for gender equality, these organizations have been able to recruit 73% of males as workers and 27% as females. This disequilibrium can be justified for the reason that most of the organizations under study are in hardware shops.

Still, in the first category, generational diversity scores a 100% presence in organizations. It was noticed that, in these organizations, the youngest worker has an average age of 26 years and the oldest is 52 years old. This shows a great gap that exists between the different generations and their respective ideologies. More so, ethnic and cultural diversity is one of the mechanisms of diversity management that is greatly present in organizations, as can be justified by their scores. This means that favors are given to the selection of candidates, especially those of the same origin as the head of the organization, for personal reasons. Family status (60%) and the inclusion of persons with disabilities (35%) are the dimensions that still register very weak recognition in the field. This shows that the major organizational cultures in the organizations do not emphasize these factors, especially the last. It can be deduced from the results that some dimensions are practiced in organizations, but they rather produce a negative effect. At the same time, others are given little or no attention, which goes a long way toward promoting disparity among workers.

5. Discussion

Since human capital is a main factor in the success of every business, there is a great need for human resources to be at the center of the organization and its management. Thus, gender or sexual orientation is one of the basic factors in the retention of workers in the organization based on their qualities and capacities. Our results show that, in addition to the principal research proposals that were forwarded, the organizations have equally put in place other mechanisms to facilitate the attainment of their objectives, such as gender, family status, and inclusion of persons with disabilities, as seen in Table 2. This shows how important these factors are to the organizations, as they equally reduce the level of certain risks. This can be seen through the perceptions of the different leaders about what diversity management is all about, such as <<...it is the variety of the profiles of the workers in the organization and our organizations do practice diversity...>>, again, <<...I can define it as the possibility of more than two people who is different in their backgrounds can work together...>>. From our results, there in the first rubric where all the respondents approved the practices of these dimensions which are gender, generational diversity, and ethnic and cultural diversity respectively registers a 100% score. It was noticed that the different respondents have different perceptions of what it is as they made it clear that <<...it is the technique put in place by the top management to take into consideration the differences of the workers based on their origins, characters for their integration in the organizations...>>. At the same time, others see it as <<...I think it is a way in which workers can find a means to be together and be able to communicate among themselves easily...>>. On the other hand, they are not really by the benefits of diversity management as announced in the literature (Frimousse S. & Pretti J-M., 2006) (Kamdern E., 2018). They declared that, <<...there is poor management of diversity in our organization because of lots of tribalism, discrimination, and inequity...>>, It is acceptable but can be ameliorated because is not limited only to the region of origin of the employer for instance, taking someone from the littoral who is generally known as a set of lazy people and taking someone from the western region known as economic strategic people is to give them privileges in respect to their areas of the force, so is necessary to put the good and the bad together in the enterprise...>>, <<... we think that it is almost not active because

how workers are managed favors mostly only those who are closer to the top management or those from the same region as the boss...>>, <<... It is a way of managing people with good and bad characters in the organization. It should be noted that these different sets of people in the organization do have a positive contribution or role to place for the well-being and animation of the culture of the enterprise...>>. On the other hand, one of the respondents affirms that<<...the management of diversity is taken into account in our organization as it permits the workers to be more engaged on their duty, there is a distinction in terms of age, gender, origins, and others, so the employees are more confident...>>.

Concerning the first principal factor of our research proposal which is generational diversity (100%), the respondents made it clear that<<...the relationship between these two groups of workers in the organizations has several forms of behaviors which are not easy to explain. In their different ways, we can see that there can never be a consensus between them in their ideas or ways of thinking. Professionally, the older think that they have the wisdom of everything even though they are at times unable to really apply what they have in mind and the younger, ones have the ability to adapt to change but are not humbled enough either in the way to present their ideas or make criticisms...>>, again, <<...it is harmonious in the sense that their mentalities in certain contexts such as debates, general comments. It is also complex for reasons that, the elders use their age as a means of justification of superiority which goes a long way to affect the respect of hierarchy in most times, when there are “quacks”, the issue of age is left out making the milieu to be ambiguous...>> and <<...their relationship is not in good shape because the old think they know much better and think they have better competence which is not the case. ...>>. The different results from all the respondents confirm that there is a constant disparity between the different generations in their ways of thinking and their work procedures. A lot is still to be done within the organizations so that these parties find a consensus and be able to create more value for the benefit of the organization.

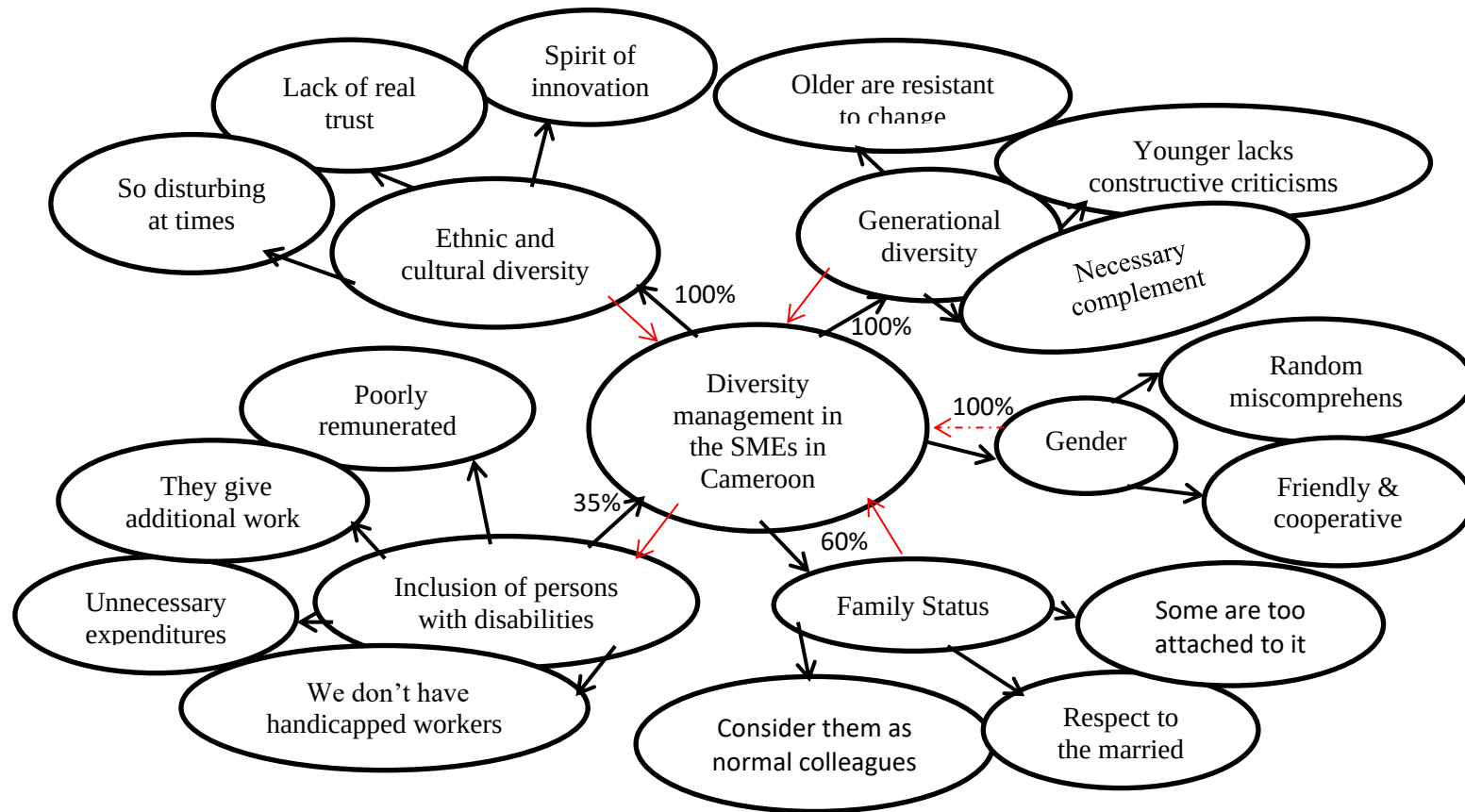
Concerning the second factor of our main research proposal which is ethnic and cultural diversity (100%). The different respondents confirm its presence in the organizations but are not satisfied with its ways of practice. They declared that, <<...most of the workers share the same ethnic and cultural group with the heads making it difficult for the application of equity. They represent 85%, 60%, 35%, and 50% respectively...>>, <<...my workers are more of bam like and working with people from different backgrounds allows ameliorating the quality of services and the practice of tribalism...>>, except in one case who declared that, <<...our head is coming from a foreign country and his returns, he has opted for regional representation of workers in his enterprise...>>. Therefore, with the dominant presence of workers of the same origin as their heads, there becomes a greater chance for discrimination. With the last factor on the inclusion of persons with disabilities (35%), this dimension registers the lowest score for reasons that, its application is almost absent in the organizations as the respondents declared that, <<...they give additional work to us in the organization which goes a long way to make us register lots of losses such as in time, unnecessary expenditures purposely for them. So I no longer have any in my organization...>>, <<...they want to be always in the first position for other things but when it comes to engagement on duty, some of them bring forth their handicap situation to run away from work...>>, <<... they present the possibilities of not been able to execute their task and always sick for the assistance of others to do their job, but the “abinos” was considered as a normal person with her competences, was not looked differently...>>, <<...poorly remunerated, they are not considered like one who can produce something important,...>>. From these different responses, it can be seen that, most of the different heads have a negative impression on

people with disabilities and it goes a long work for an application of auto-discrimination to anyone who shows (physical in particular) of disability.

In respect to other studies done on concepts and dimensions attached to this topic of research their results confirm that the aspect of discrimination by names of people, the minority have started modifying their names to be aligned to the names that show greater considerations as experienced. For the aspect of language, the minority equally switch by modifying their language to exclude slang in other to fit or improve perceptions of competence at work (Badger et al. 2018). Again, other studies have equally underlined that, through the policies and laws put in place, the stereotypes of women are changing, and can be seen through recent research that, men and women are now perceived as similarly intelligent and competent (Hentschel T. et al., 2019). Furthermore, another study shows that, ensuring gender equality is a difficult task for even the most developed countries of the world as it's not easy to obtain gender equity and even concerning labor rights. Moreover, gender discrimination is accompanied by age (57.1%) under 35 years, so the higher the age, the smaller the wage gap (Yuriy B. et al., 2020). The above analysis can be summarized through our model below (Figure 2).

Finally, our results have permitted us to come up with the above interpretations and models (Figure 2, below), and to turn back the negative curve on the present manner of contributions of the mechanisms of diversity management in the SME, there is a need to forward some key recommendations. At this point, we call on the different figures in the organization to put in place measures that will favor the application of equity in the organization by stamping out discrimination not only against workers or tube workers with disabilities but also among existing workers and equally putting in place procedures through which the different generations will easily find a common tongue for communication.

Figure 2: conceptual model for diversity management in the SMES in Cameroon



Source: results from data analyses

6. Conclusion

In a nutshell, this work took into account some limits, such as the multiplication of each case study. The sample size of the study could have an extension to all the enterprises or organizations purely owned by sole proprietors with different origins as well as multi-national firms to be able to have more specific particularities on the different mechanisms of diversity management practices identified in the different organizations. Only limited dimensions were retained for the study, as seen in Tables 1 and 2 above, which, at the same time, served as a great source of information for the different figures in the organizations as well as future researchers. To round up, if the results of this study are taken into account, the different organizations will not only register sustainable development. Still, they will equally promote the organizational climate of the organizations as well as performance. The achievement of the objectives of our work went through a variation of our work as follows: the first part focused on the conceptualization of diversity management, and the second part focused on data interpretation, analysis of results, and discussion. The significance of our study to the managers is that it will help them to know how to consider and interpret each mechanism of diversity management in the organizations and to the policymakers to give them information on the realities of the consequences of diversity management on the workers and the organizational climate in general.

Data was collected for this study through the use of the interview guide, which was administered to the different SMEs found in both industrial and commercial sectors and which were more of the French-speaking organizations within the littoral region in Cameroon, and the collection of data could be more mature if both the qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Besides, there is no use of mediating dimensions such as language, longevity, or age, which could be another opportunity for further research studies.

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