



**EFFECTS OF PANDEMICS ON THE SOCIAL CLIMATE IN SMALL AND
MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMEs) IN BENIN**

**EFFETS DES PANDEMIES SUR LE CLIMAT SOCIAL DANS LES PETITES ET
MOYENNES ENTREPRISES (PME) AU BENIN**

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Abstract: This research aims to determine the effects of pandemics on the social climate in targeted small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Benin. The quantitative data used were collected from 2004 employees and 16 managers of the targeted SMEs. These data are analyzed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, descriptive statistics and multiple correspondence analysis. Our findings revealed that that respecting the wearing of masks during a pandemic constitutes an obstacle to inclusive communication in SMEs. In addition, these results also illustrated that the application of social distancing measures during a pandemic explains the change in professional lifestyle habits which is at the origin of the disruption of the social climate within SMEs. Finally, the stress resulting from the various measures applied was a major handicap to the establishment of a friendly social climate in SMEs.

Keywords: Barrier gestures, habit, social distancing, communication, Benin.

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1. Introduction

During the evolution of humanity, the history of social relations has been disrupted by a number of social factors including pandemics. These pandemics have had a considerable impact on daily

life and the well-being of individuals (Doyle et al., 2005). The frequency of occurrence of these pandemics and the mortality rates recorded most often raise concerns not only for the future of humanity in general but also for small and medium-sized businesses in particular (Usman et al., 2020). In their spread, these easily communicable and very fatal diseases have for some time required the World Health Organization (WHO) to enact measures to slow down or contain them if necessary (Anton, 2020). Compliance with these behavioral recommendations plays an essential role in the control and prevention of these infections (Tchounwou, 2021). Research in health sciences showed that the adoption of these preventive attitudes contributes to the improvement of personal hygiene and, consequently, to the reduction of morbidity induced by these pandemics.

To limit the various effects of pandemics, almost the entire world population was invited to change their habits and make sacrifices for collective well-being. If there is a priori great uncertainty as to the way in which individuals will react to health instructions, it is easy to understand that the support of the population for the decisions of health authorities in these types of situations is essential to hope for the proper implementation of instructions. This support, in turn, depends on many factors (sociodemographic, institutional and economic). To that end, Pietromonaco et al (2020) believe that the context in which individuals are willing to accept personal costs for benefits that are mainly collective depends on many variables. Pandemics, for the most part, disrupt the social climate in SMEs.

Furthermore, perceptions and feelings often matter more than facts when faced with challenges (Simpson and Rholes, 2017). It is on the basis of these findings on the link between pandemics and the social climate that this study attempts to answer the following question: what are the effects of pandemics on the social climate in SMEs in Benin? More specifically, what is the influence of wearing masks as barrier measures on work efficiency? What is the effect of distancing on changing lifestyle habits in the professional environment? What is the effect of the stress caused by compliance with the various measures on the development of agents in the professional environment?

The responses to these questions will allow the various stakeholders to take into account not only the realistic nature of pandemics but also their influence on psychological working conditions in SMEs so that the social climate does not deteriorate even during a pandemic.

This article is structured around three sections. The first focuses on the literature review on pandemics and their socio-organizational implications. The second deals with the methodology

used. The last section is devoted to the results and discussion in order to open the debate on the Human Resources Management practices that these diseases could impose.

2. Literature review

Pandemics have been a hot topic in several fields (Chastel, 2006; Widmer et al., 2020; Faria and Chioussé, 2021; Drioua, 2021; Elkam and Faridi, 2022 and Mériade, 2022). Most of studies on the topic illustrate a change in behavior to adapt to a situation of turbulence, especially health related. Indeed, the individuals who constitute the cornerstone of all businesses must develop new habits to cope with tumultuous environment to ensure their.

In this part, the importance of wearing masks as barrier measures for work efficiency in SMEs is first presented, then the concepts of social distancing, modification of lifestyle habits and development of agents are presented. Finally, how the effects of pandemics affected the social climate in SMEs in Benin is discussed.

2.1. Mask wearing and inclusive communication inclusive in SMEs

Strategies against a pandemic aim first to limit its spread until a vaccine is available. There are therefore several levels of barriers against infectious diseases (Autret-Leca, et al., 2006 and Hocquet-Berg, 2020) such as pharmaceutical measures (vaccines and medications) and non-pharmaceutical measures (hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, disinfection of fomites, face masks, isolation or confinement of affected people, etc. Wearing a mask is a non-pharmaceutical measure that is likely to disrupt inclusive communication in SMEs (Meyer and Smith, 1993).

The staff of SMEs who constitute the heart of companies ensure the effectiveness of production and participate in the creation of wealth for the company (Didry and Giordano, 2023). To succeed in this mission, the staff must not only be in good health but also have the freedom to collaborate with its peers (Meyer and Smith, 1993). The barrier gestures or behaviors which are often implemented to protect these personnel from fatal death constitute all the individual and collective behaviors likely to slow the spread of an epidemic. Practices intended to limit the spread of a pathogen have been popularized during the media coverage of pandemics such as Covid-19 and avian flu (Lothar and Betsh, 2020). For certain vulnerable people, the viruses responsible for these pandemics are not trivial and are a source of complications (Amato, 2020). Empirical knowledge illustrates that barrier gestures lead to profound societal and hospital transformations caused by epidemics (Oriane, 2020 and Anton, 2020). They have regularly demonstrated that depending on the context, the link between diseases or other threats and the

adoption of behaviors in response to these threats radically transforms the relationships between partners. Complex barrier measures had already been practiced since antiquity and were very effective against the successive waves of the Black Death and the Spanish flu which spread throughout the world. Barrier gestures have become a daily matter during a pandemic. They designate all the actions and measures put in place to combat the spread of a health threat. They embody the idea of protecting yourself to protect your loved ones (Phélinas, Hernandez, Ciriez, 2021). Respect for barrier gestures, including the wearing of masks, is stricter in the workplace during pandemics. Although wearing a mask prevents the transport of viruses that escape from infected people from contaminating others. It is likely to disrupt inclusive communication between SME employees. In workplaces, mask wearing is an effective source control measure for most pandemics. Wearing a mask as a pandemic strategy has helped reduce the transmission of many pandemics. The mask therefore offers both individual and collective protection to the person wearing it.

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2.2. Social distancing and lifestyle changes

Each epidemic requires the population concerned and each individual to adopt personal protective measures. Knowing that these measures must be supplemented by collective and especially environmental measures aimed at strengthening, facilitating, and supervising them

if possible. Most pandemics have made it possible to highlight delicate dosages to construct in terms of information, communication, accompaniment, and support (Tourette-Turgis and Chollier, (2021). The researcher' interest is to draw on epidemiological, biomedical, anthropological, sociological and psychosocial approaches engaged in collecting behaviors and perceptions to help health authorities build an effective prevention and care policy.

Amid this health crises, the first trends often lead to a change in lifestyle habits. Social distancing better illustrated this change in lifestyle habits as highlighted by the WHO and taken up by various authors (Muxel, 2007 and Druet, 2021). Social distancing is not just a regulatory social spacing. It is present in barrier gestures. Social distancing, as a barrier gesture, consisted in avoiding physical contact with others. During a pandemic, social distancing is a proven and effective measure to limit the spread of a disease or virus (Muxel, 2007). Everyone can play an important role in protecting those at risk by simply staying at a considerable distance from loved ones. This socially responsible behavior requires the determination and will of SME employees and all citizens (Didry and Giordano, 2023). To comply with social distancing measures, it is therefore necessary, where possible, to stay and work at home. In addition, it is becoming imperative to respect this distance by using technology to keep in touch with colleagues and loved ones.

2.3. Stress and employee fulfillment in SMEs

The stress triggered by one of the barrier gestures occurs in the context of other pre-existing and ongoing contextual vulnerabilities (Meyer and Smith, 1993). SMEs already struggling to meet their basic needs may have limited cognitive, emotional and social resources to manage the added stress. Companies that suffer significant losses due to barrier gestures have lasting vulnerabilities. They are less flexible to fluctuations in their environment. The key point is that the extent to which relationships within SMEs are damaged or thrive because of barrier gestures is highly context-dependent (Nguyen, Karney, & Bradbury, 2020). SMEs whose employees experienced high stress during pandemic crises interacted using less adaptive relationships. The risks of barrier gestures on health and well-being were better mitigated when SMEs felt connected and supported by responsive partners concerned about their well-being (Pietromonaco and Collins, 2017; Reis et al., 2004). Responsive support in the face of adversity not only helps relieve distress and improve well-being but can also lead to relationship growth (Feeney & Collins, 2015). However, support that meets the needs of beneficiaries is not easy, even without the additional challenges of barrier gestures. Under the effect of stress,

interactions between SME employees are negative, which makes them less effective (Rehman, Gollan and Mortimer, 2008).

Indeed, according to SMEs, many barrier gestures are difficult to respect given the requirements of the activities to be carried out but also the lack of space or limited access to company rooms. Despite good knowledge of barrier gestures, few employees strictly respected them. However, it is necessary to eliminate obstacles preventing employees from carrying out their tasks with confidence and dignity. SMEs facing economic difficulties had to deal with all the stressors associated with their situation, opening more possibilities for conflict and limiting opportunities for activities that can promote growth and intimacy in relationships (Didry and Giordano, 2023). In the pandemic context, this stress can further deplete the human resources of SMEs and harm their ability to interact with partners. The situation is worse in developing economies, where a larger part of the population is employed in informal sectors where social protections are much weaker (Didry and Giordano, 2023). It is likely that the pandemic will lead to a prolonged decline in the income of men and women and their participation in the labor market. In most countries, it has a much greater impact on poor, vulnerable and low-income SMEs, business activities and workers.

3. Methods

3.1. Sampling

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were combined in this research. Regarding the quantitative approach, it took place from September to October 2023. The parent population considered in this research is all SMEs identified by the directory of the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises. The sample selected was purposive and made up of a workforce of 3,500 employees of the targeted SMEs. The information collected related to the respondents' apprehension of the issues and damage linked to pandemics and likely to influence the development of agents within SMEs. Of the 3,500 questionnaires distributed, only 2,004 were used.

3.2. Variables choice and research hypotheses

The variable explained in this research was “the social climate of Beninese SMEs”. The explanatory variables retained according to the conceptual model and observed in the literature included the compliance with mask wearing, social distancing and stress caused by the effects

of pandemics. They were key components of the models because of their empirical link with the social climate that reigned within Beninese SMEs.

Tardieu-Bertheau and Lasry (2018) reported that phenomena fluctuated according to the changes that societies experienced, and worsened or attenuated depending on the context, appeared or disappeared depending on the rigor in the application of appropriate measures. In such an environment, contingency factors such as pandemics have their influence on the future of SMEs. The first hypotheses then formulated in this research was that : **respecting the wearing of masks during a pandemic represented an obstacle to inclusive communication in SMEs.**

Social distancing, during a pandemic, better illustrated this change in lifestyle habits as highlighted by the WHO and taken up by various authors (Muxel, 2007 and Druet, 2021). It is not only a regulatory social spacing but is present as a core barrier gesture. The second hypothesis (H2) of this article was then that **the application of social distancing measures during a pandemic explained the change in lifestyle habits in the professional environment and induced a disruption of the social climate within SMEs.**

The stress triggered by the damage observed during a pandemic forced individuals to respect a certain social distancing (Reis et al., 2004). SMEs already struggling to meet their basic needs may have limited cognitive, emotional and social resources to manage the added stress. Thus, the third hypothesis (H3) formulated in this research was : **the stress caused by the damage of pandemics represented an obstacle to a friendly social climate in SMEs.** So, the conceptual model of the research was as follows:

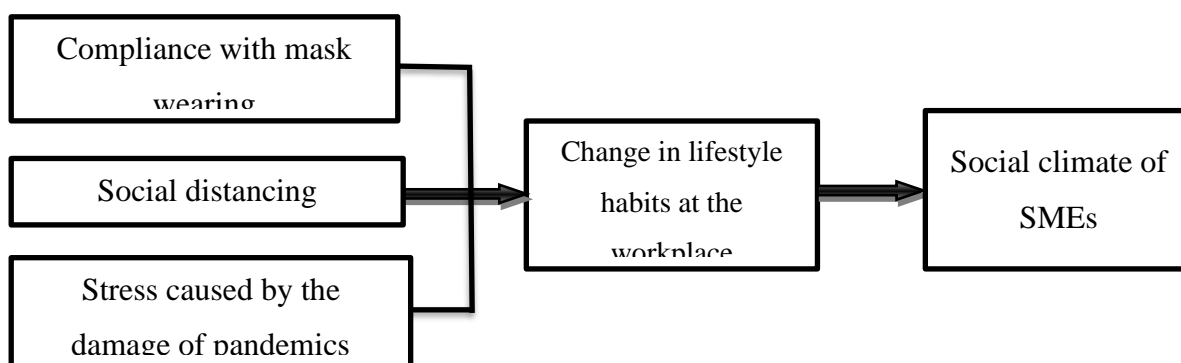


Figure 1: Conceptual model of the research: Author, August 2023.

3.3. Measurement of the model's variables

For the quantitative method, the relationship between pandemics and the social climate of SMEs in Benin was assessed through the scoring of the items constituting each construct (exogenous and endogenous variables). The variable explained in this model was designated by (Y) and

relates to the social climate of Beninese SMEs. The variables X1 (respect for wearing a mask), X2 (social distancing) and X3 (stress caused by the pandemics damages) were the explanatory variables hindering the development of employees within Beninese SMEs. Thus, it is then necessary to test the link between the respect of mask wearing, social distancing, the stress observed by employees and the social climate which reigned within Beninese SMEs.

3.4. Data analyses

To better understand the distribution of the study data into components of variables (items), the first procedure was the identification of the major components of variables. These were variables linked to compliance with mask wearing, communication difficulties within SMEs, social distancing, changes in professional lifestyle habits, and stress caused by the effects of pandemics. Then, these different variables were associated with the study components by carefully studying the questionnaire and finally, the internal consistency (Cronbrach reliability) of each variable component was evaluated using the Alpha Cronbach reliability test through the SPSS software version 21.0. A multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) was carried out using the R.3.6.0 software in to to describe the existing link between the components according to the postulate of hypotheses 1 and 2. To verify hypothesis 3, the relative frequencies of variables linked to the stress component caused by the various damages were calculated to highlight its potential effect on the social climate within SMEs. The results from the processing of the different data are presented in Table 1, 2, 3 and 4 and Figure 2.

4. Results

The different inter-item matrices related to each explanatory variable are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1. Inter-item correlation matrix for the explanatory variable “mask wearing”

	Face expression	Voice quality	Gestures decoding	Gestural communication
Face expression	1			
Voice quality	0.639	1		
Gestures decoding	0.902	0.577	1	
Gestural communication	0.542	0.347	0.601	1

Source : The author, 2023

Table 2. Inter-item correlation matrix for the explanatory variable “social distancing”

	Closeness relationship	Anxiety and lack of closeness	Distrust linked to contagion	Social contact	Teleworking development
Closeness relationship	1				
Anxiety and lack of closeness	0.859	1			
Distrust linked to contagion	0.932	0.918	1		
Social contact	0.103	-0.021	0.134	1	
Teleworking development	-0.027	-0.175	-0.003	0.902	1

Source. The author, 2023

Table 3. Inter-item correlation matrix for the explanatory variable “stress caused by pandemic damage”

	Habits change	Exchange quality	Lack of interaction	Lack of face expression	Identification of interlocutors
Habits change	1				
Exchange quality	0.105	1			
Lack of interaction	0.021	0.542	1		
Lack of face expression	0.503	0.048	0.088	1	
Identification of interlocutors	0.175	0.601	0.902	0.079	1

Source : The author, 2023

The different inter-item correlation matrices of the three variables in this research gave correlation coefficients varying between -0.027 and 0.932 and are positive for the most part. It is therefore necessary, through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, to evaluate the internal consistency of the items of these variables. Thus, the internal consistency of the different variables is presented in Table 4.

Tableau 4 : Reliability test

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on normalized elements sur des éléments normalisés	Number of elements	Average	Standar deviation
Mak wearing	0,734	0,746	4	2,03	0,669
Social distancing	0,843	0,837	5	5,77	1,904
Stress	0,815	0,818	5	6,07	1,832

Source : The author, 2023

As a result of the quantitative data processing, all variables had Cronbach's alpha coefficients greater than 0.7. These values confirmed a strong reliability among the items of the different variables. These results suggested the existence of a link between pandemics and the social climate of SMEs in Benin.

4.1. Hypothesis testing

Perceptions and feelings often count more than facts when faced with certain social and professional challenges (Simpson and Rholes, 2017). The link between pandemics and social climate was tested and the results illustrate that 57% of the coefficients resulting from the inter-item correlation was positive and overall high for the variable “wearing a mask”. 43% of the coefficients resulting from the inter-item correlation were positive and overall, very high. However, negative correlations were weak for the “social distancing” variable. On the other hand, 71% of the coefficients resulting from the inter-items correlation were positive and overall high. The negative correlations observed were weakly represented for the variable “stress caused by compliance with barrier measures”

However, according to the data processing, all the variables had Cronbach's Alpha coefficients greater than 0.7. These values confirmed a certain reliability between the items of the different variables. These results suggested the existence of a link between pandemics and the social climate of SMEs in Benin, and thus confirmed that respecting mask wearing during a pandemic positively influences inclusive communication in SMEs. In addition, they also illustrated that the application of social distancing measures during a pandemic negatively influenced the modification of professional lifestyle habits and at the same time disrupted the social climate in SMEs. Finally, the stress caused by the effects of pandemics had a positive influence on the friendly social climate in SMEs.

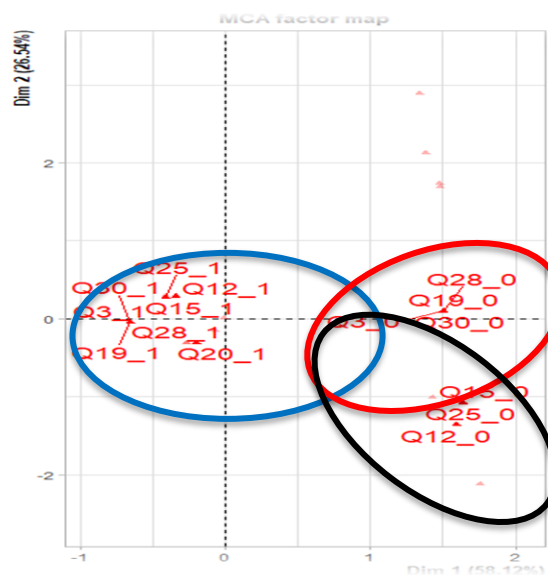


Figure 2 : Distribution of the categories of the variables observed in the factorial map.

Source : The author, 2023

Figure 2 presented the Multiple Correspondence Factor Analysis carried out with the aim of identifying the relationship between pandemics and the social climate which reigns within SMEs. The model used is highly significant at the 1% level according to the Chi-square test and proves that there is a significant link between the explained variable of this research and the explanatory ones.

4.2. Results interpretation

4.2.1. Compliance with mask wearing during a pandemic and inclusive communication in SME

Since the areas of observation remained relatively few for researchers on this approach, this research attempted to tackle the link between compliance with mask wearing and inclusive communication in SMEs. In this research, the variable “compliance with mask wearing and inclusive communication in SMEs” was studied using the measures imposed during pandemic periods. From the analysis of the results, it appeared that the quality of language translated by facial expression, volume of voice, poor reading or decoding of signs, and gestures were very important factors in communication and were likely to lead to social or professional inclusion. Given these results, the quality of communication was therefore decisive. Wearing a mask can lead to a change in social and professional interactions. The degree of adaptability to barrier gestures is a difficult factor to assess due to the fact that it is easier to measure it in practice and in the long term than during pandemics which are for the most part temporary and impose, when a pandemic occurs, new barrier measures.

The multiple correspondence factorial analysis carried out with the aim of identifying the relationship between respect for mask wearing and inclusive communication within SMEs showed through the Chi-square test that there was a significant link between the mask wearing and inclusive communication at the 5% threshold ($p\text{-value} < 0.005$). We deduced from these results that corroborated those of Codjo (2023) that wearing a mask significantly and negatively influenced inclusive communication in SMEs. Tardieu-Bertheau and Lasry (2018) believed that phenomena fluctuated according to the changes that shook organizations. In such an environment, pandemics had their influence on the future of businesses. These results confirmed the hypothesis H1: respecting the wearing of masks during a pandemic constituted an obstacle to inclusive communication in SMEs.

4.2.2. *Social distancing and modification of professional lifestyle*

The results of the present study illustrated that the application of social distancing measures is a variable which had good internal consistency. Indeed, this variable was characterized by items such as close relationships, the absence of proximity, distrust linked to contagion, the absence of social contact and the development of teleworking. Each of these items acted in a different way on changing lifestyle habits in the professional environment. Multiple correspondence factor analysis also confirmed the relationship between social distancing and changes in professional lifestyle habits within companies. It emerged from the content analysis “*I am afraid to approach customers as soon as they come to the company for information*”. The chi-square test showed that there was a significant link between social distancing and changes in professional lifestyle habits at the 1% significance level ($p\text{-value} < 2.2e-16$). Social distancing therefore corresponds to socially responsible behavior requiring the determination and will of individuals and all citizens. It therefore appeared necessary to comply with social distancing measures although this led to social distancing and changes in lifestyle habits, particularly professional ones. In addition, if it is possible to respect this distance by using technology to keep in touch with colleagues and loved ones.

Social distancing, during a pandemic, therefore significantly and negatively influences the modification of lifestyle habits as highlighted by Muxel (2007) and Druet (2021). It is not only the agreement of regulatory social spacing but is central in the barrier gestures. Thus, these results made it possible to confirm hypothesis H2 of this research: the application of social distancing measures during a pandemic explained the change in professional life habits and induced the disruption of the social climate of SMEs.

4.2.3. *Stress caused by barrier measures and organizational climate in SMEs.*

From the analysis of the results, it appeared that the organizational climate which reigned within companies was evaluated through the related items. In addition to the consistent value of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained from the quantitative results, the interview response extracts were also substantial in this regard. Most of respondents said they felt intense fear during a pandemic. 91.5% of the respondents affirmed that they felt intense fear when one of their colleagues was tested positive, 81.70% directed their stress towards contagion by customers and users and 40% described the quality of relationships during the pandemic as good within the company. These results demonstrated the existence of anxiety caused by barrier measures. The items relating to this variable therefore influenced the organizational climate in

SMEs. So, the stress caused by respecting barrier gestures can cause depression, an upheaval of the situation which had a direct impact on the organizational climate in SMEs. The managers interviewed said: “stress means that sometimes from morning to evening no customers are registered with the company. » In view of the above, it appeared that the stress triggered by one of the barrier gestures observed during a pandemic required individuals to respect a certain social distancing (Reis et al., 2004). SMEs struggling to meet customer needs may have limited cognitive, emotional, and social resources to manage employee stress. These results led to confirmation of hypothesis H3: The stress caused by barrier measures represented an obstacle to a friendly social climate in SMEs.

5. Discussion

The representation of variables in the factorial plan proposed in this research was crucial to analyze the effects of pandemics on the social climate in SMEs in Benin. The damages caused by pandemics constituted relatively radical handicaps to the possibilities of establishing a peaceful social climate within SMEs (Rholes, 2017; Widmer et al., 2020). The grouping of variables around the horizontal axis explained the total level of inertia. Three groupings can be distinguished: first, an association between the modalities “reason for changing lifestyle habits in the professional environment”, “respect for wearing a mask” and “social distancing”. These modalities, whose rigorous application led to changes in life in the professional environment, mean that SMEs whose managers attached particular importance to the establishment of a friendly climate did not put emphasis on respecting the various practices aimed at eradicating effects of pandemics. This led to high mortality rates in these structures. (Which does not invalidate the hypothesis 3); then a proximity between the variable respect for wearing a mask and social distancing. This meant that SMEs which complied with the various measures to combat pandemics shifted communication to a second rank and in such organizations, there was no priority for an internal communication policy. Finally, the connection between the stress caused by the effects of the pandemic and the change in lifestyle habits in the professional environment focused on the conviviality of the social climate. This is entirely logical because without applying these different measures, the criterion of modifying human behavior at work will not result in the absence of a friendly social climate. The Multiple correspondence analysis indicated the existence of a link between pandemics and the social climate of SMEs. The results illustrated that 57% of these inter-item correlations were positive and high for the variable “wearing a mask”. 43% of the coefficients were positive and very high for the social distancing

variable. 71% of the coefficients resulting from the inter-item correlation were overall positive and generally high for the variable stress caused by the effects of pandemics. In addition, all variables had Cronbach's alpha coefficients greater than 0.7. These values confirmed the reliability between the items of the different variables. These results suggested the existence of a link between pandemics and the social climate of SMEs in Benin. The results of this study corroborated those of Widmer et al. (2020). Complying with mask wearing during a pandemic therefore had a positive influence on inclusive communication in SMEs. They were also aligned with the work of Tardieu-Bertheau and Lasry (2018) for whom phenomena fluctuated according to mutations. This confirmed the fact that an employee felt obliged to respect the wearing of a mask during a pandemic even if this constituted an obstacle to inclusive communication in SMEs. Thus, a great interactivity is observed at the workplace in the absence of compliance with the various measures. Mougou and Biwolé (2021) are part of the same dynamic and believed that without the mask, exchanges were richer and more fluid. The mask creates a form of filter and not only slowed down exchanges but also disrupted inclusive communication in companies.

Social distancing, for its part, is seen by Muxel (2007) and Druet (2021) as a source of profound change in lifestyle habits. Regarding the influence of the latter on the modification of lifestyle habits, the change in habits varied depending on the items. This difference was explained by the fact that the employees' bodies did not have the same resistivity. To do this, the various stakeholders of SMEs must play an important role in protecting people at risk by staying at a considerable distance from them. This behavior required the determination and will of SME employees but also the effort of decoding gestures by all citizens. To comply with different practices, it seems necessary to opt for teleworking. Hence the use of new technologies to keep in touch with colleagues and loved ones. The results focused on the usefulness of ICT, especially smartphones. But Tchokponhoué (2023) drew attention to the harmful consequences of the abusive use of social networks through smartphones in professional environments.

The stress triggered by these practices due to pandemics forced individuals to now question their way of life (Reis et al., 2004). In view of all these provisions, SMEs struggled to meet essential needs and still felt constrained to have emotional resources to manage this additional stress. Interactions among employees feature more negative communication strategies like hostility, withdrawal, blame and less positive ones like effective problem solving (Rehman, Gollan, & Mortimer, 2008). The interpersonal behavior of depressed employees can also increase stress. The most depressed employees reserve discussions that could lead to the

resolution of certain problems. These behaviors are also likely to generate interpersonal stress capable of pushing SMEs into an adhocracy configuration where it will be an individualizing human resources management model.

Although the risks inherent in the state of stress are added to the psychological consequences and the obligation to change lifestyle during the pandemic in question, it is necessary to anchor certain behaviors or states in the habits of employees and users to manage future episodes more easily. The long-term effects of barrier measures constituted a dual global health challenge. This is a long-term issue linked to the prevention and management of the consequences of pandemics on the state of health of people. The second issue is in the medium term and aimed to prepare for the possibility of new barrier measures. Psychosocial support for employees must be thought of individually and collectively by engaging community and health stakeholders in a dynamic of continuous prevention. Mental health must be an integral part of the overall health approach and public health strategies.

6. CONCLUSION

The central objective was to determine the effects of pandemics on the social climate within SMEs in Benin. The observation was that pandemics are diseases for which understanding the effects, different eradication practices and possible obstacles are essential to promote the social climate in companies.

Among the factors preventing the establishment of a friendly social climate, three reasons were primarily identified. The first referred to complying with the wearing of masks, the second related to respecting barrier gestures through social distancing and the third was linked to the stress resulting from the various damages observed during these pandemics. These reasons were essentially at the origin of employees' dissatisfaction and in turn led to the absence of a peaceful working climate due to changes in habits in SMEs in Benin. All these results were obtained through the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected respectively from nearly 2004 employees and 16 managers of these targeted SMEs.

Managerial involvement suggested that the challenges and damage caused by pandemics accompanied the change in professional life habits and the disruption of the social climate that should exist in SMEs. It consists in ensuring the evolution from a mechanistic structure to an adhocracy structure by facilitating the transition from the functional manager to a human resources director who now opts for interpersonal negotiations. In practice, changing lifestyle

habits in the professional environment has an impact on the organizational involvement of employees. There were three explanatory factors according to Tchokponhoué (2010): an effect of surprise; an effect of dissatisfaction with the conditions of coherence, reciprocity and appropriation and an effect of responsibility of leaders during a pandemic. Given these results and all these considerations, SMEs can have an updated analysis framework allowing them an objective evaluation of their logic of action in order to avoid loss of human life, all of whose motives are unpredictable when the organizations are not in a state of alert. The main managerial recommendation is to integrate the organizational involvement of employees as a key explained variable in pandemic management practices. They were likely to create conditions favorable to a reduction in the rate of dissatisfaction and, in turn, to an improvement in the social climate in these SMEs.

Based on these results, it should be pointed out that this work added to the various works already carried out in the field of human resources and more precisely to those relating to the establishment of the link between the sociology of Human Resources and the effects of the different practices observed during pandemics. This research provided a better understanding of employees' perceptions of the effects of pandemics both in businesses and within households. Finally, this study showed the changes linked to lifestyle habits at the workplace as well as the impact on the development of employees and users.

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