The influence of organisational culture and effective communication on volunteer engagement in student NGOS

~ *Student* **Teodora Tomiță** *(Faculty of Administration and Business, University of Bucharest, 4-12 Regina Elisabeta Boulevard, Sector 3, 030018 Bucharest, Romania)*

E-mail: teodora.tomita@s.unibuc.ro

Abstract: *This study explores the influence of organizational culture, effective communication, and personal and professional development opportunities on the engagement and satisfaction of volunteers within student NGOs. The quantitative analysis of 223 volunteer responses highlighted that most are aware of the organizational culture and consider risk preparedness vital. The importance of an efficient leader in coordinating activities was also emphasized. The results confirm the hypotheses that a well-defined organizational culture and development opportunities significantly contribute to volunteer retention and active involvement, supported by the literature. In conclusion, the study underscores the necessity of a positive organizational culture for the long-term success of student NGOs.*

Key words: Volunteering, student NGOs, organizational culture, effective communication.
JEL: L31, M14, D23, C83.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the labour market has undergone major changes, influencing Generation "Z" both positively and negatively. This generation is often considered the generation of technology and speed, frequently losing appreciation for traditional activities, such as reading books or enjoying nature, and showing a tendency to want everything to be done instantly, with a simple press of a button (Grzesiak, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified these tendencies, affecting both the mental and physical health of many individuals, especially young people. In 2021, over 5.4 million people took a mental health screening, an increase of nearly 500% compared to 2019 (Mental Health, 2021). According to a study conducted by Mental Health America, approximately 73% of those who took the test were young people aged between 11 and 24, suggesting that the generation most affected by the pandemic was Generation "Z", deprived of an environment conducive to the development of social skills at a crucial age. Student associations offer an optimal context for the personal and social development of young people, providing volunteering opportunities that contribute to skill-building and social life. The deprivation of these experiences and the shift of activities to the online environment represented a significant barrier for young people who wished to assert themselves and discover their own aspirations. The labour market often demands professional experience even from young graduates, which generates anxiety among them. It is difficult to study a field and simultaneously acquire practical experience, requiring considerable effort in both directions. The student environment, particularly student NGOs, supports Generation "Z" through activities and projects that facilitate the acquisition of experience and the development of skills required in the labour market. The COVID-19 pandemic also disrupted the activities of student NGOs, resulting in a generation of young people facing difficulties in asserting themselves and clarifying their own aspirations. Nevertheless, student associations have continued to develop, offering projects and job opportunities in various fields for young people.

Volunteering involves responsibility and dedication, not only to avoid disappointing colleagues but also to create and help other people. Although the main purpose of volunteering is to help the community, the benefits are primarily felt by the volunteer, offering the opportunity to discover new perspectives, to appreciate what they have, and to motivate themselves to overcome their own limits.

The questionnaire used in this research was completed by student volunteers who are members of associations at the University of Bucharest, representing the exact target group required for this study. Thanks to ASUB, the questionnaire was easily distributed to a large number of students from all faculties of the University, ensuring adequate representation and the validity of the results. Thus, this paper aims to examine students' perceptions and attitudes towards volunteering and student NGOs, highlighting the benefits and challenges associated with these activities and providing insight into the impact they have on young people's personal and professional development.

2. Literature review

The specialised literature highlights the positive influence of volunteering on young people, emphasising that it contributes to shaping responsible adults with a developed civic spirit (Quezada, 2014). Daniel Hart and Michael J. Sulik (2014) state that volunteering provides a valuable perspective on prosocial life. Through volunteering, researchers can observe the various influences on prosocial behaviour, including emotions, personality traits, family, and social institutions (Wilson, 2000).

Student associations have existed almost as long as educational institutions themselves. They offer students opportunities for personal and professional development, helping them to improve their leadership skills and to find their own voice (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, & Mainella, 2006). In 2015, it was reported that more than one in four first-year students was a member of a student association (Rios-Aguilar & Eagan, 2015).

In Romania, student associations continue to shape young people into responsible adults and to prepare them for an active professional life. At the University of Bucharest, there are 19 student associations, each representing the students of its respective faculty and offering opportunities in the corresponding field of study. The University of Bucharest Student Association (ASUB) is the umbrella association representing all the others and is a member of the National Student Union of Romania (USR), a national student federation (University of Bucharest, 2024; National Student Union of Romania, 2024).

The Influence of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Volunteering and Student NGOs

The Covid-19 pandemic, caused by the SarsCov 2 virus, generated significant global changes starting in 2020. Human society was forced to adapt rapidly to the new conditions imposed by the pandemic, without prior preparation. These conditions deeply influenced each individual's life, modifying professional, social, and educational activities (Rump & Eilers, 2020). The lack of adequate preparation led many people to encounter difficulties in managing emotions and maintaining an active social life.

An international study conducted by UNICEF and Gallup revealed that 1 in 5 young people, aged between 15 and 24, show low interest in activities and feel depressed (UNICEF & Gallup, 2021). The changes imposed on the education system, such as moving courses online and restricting face-to-face activities, had negative consequences on students, forcing them to give up their social lives and adapt to a period characterised by the lack of physical interactions. This situation led to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, while irritability and difficulties in concentration rose significantly (Brooks et al., 2020).

The pandemic also created gaps in the labour market, severely affecting the economy. Moreover, whereas until recently organisations would update their strategies only when problems arose, this is no longer possible if companies wish to remain competitive (Minciu et al., 2022). Many people lost their jobs due to the necessity of digitising positions or shifting to remote work.

In this context, students and volunteers were also affected, with many being among those seeking employment. Students searched for various activities to occupy their time, but most did not contribute to their personal development, which amplified their sense of uselessness. Many

spent their time watching films and series on Netflix, and very few practised sports to clear their minds and keep their bodies active. Engaging in so few useful and recreational activities led to various worries about their own lives and future. The SARS-CoV-2 virus affected a range of industries, from mining to electronics, automobiles, transport, and logistics (Minciu et al., 2020). Student association activities were also affected, being moved online. Volunteers made additional efforts to remain calm and to continue their volunteer work, seeking ways to spend time together remotely, using online platforms to see each other and communicate in real time (Netflix Party, Zoom).

The Covid-19 pandemic had a profound influence on volunteering and student NGOs, affecting activities and volunteer morale. Adapting to the new conditions was difficult, but the efforts to maintain volunteering activities were remarkable, highlighting the resilience and dedication of the young people involved in these organisations. The pandemic accelerated digitalisation in many fields of activity (Matei & Veith, 2023). This forced digitalisation became essential for carrying out various activities and maintaining an active social life. It was necessary to identify new technologies for processing a large volume of data and to develop artificial intelligence to support activity in organisations and companies (Urbach & Ahlemann, 2019). Thus, the recent achievements in the field of information and communication technology (ICT) have been remarkable.

The pandemic forced the transfer of activities to the online environment, with education being among the first domains that had to adapt to these new conditions. Digitalisation became vital for the continuation of studies, with pupils and students being required to adapt to online courses (Stanciu, 2022). Moreover, digitalisation is a factor that contributes to the transition towards a circular economy. Student associations also had to adapt and find solutions to continue traditional projects in the online environment.

Human Resources in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Human resources became more difficult to coordinate, and maintaining volunteer interest and supporting activities relied heavily on effective management and the involvement of each association's board. In a time of crisis, managers had to set clear objectives to provide the team and volunteers with confidence, while simultaneously giving them a sense of stability and security (Mendy, Stewart, & VanAkin, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic did not influence only the economic environment but also the lives of all citizens (Veith & Dogaru, 2020). Carrying out any type of activity within student associations relies on the creativity and willingness of volunteers to implement projects and contribute to the association's growth. Appropriate leadership is necessary, adapted to the needs of those directly involved (volunteers) and indirectly involved (students for whom the projects are implemented).

Due to the diversity of ideas and solutions based on the personal experiences of each individual, it is vital to have human resource management that brings together these ideas and leverages them to identify the optimal solution. Usually, HR management is handled by an authorised, experienced person who can capitalise on volunteers' ideas without discouraging them. Proponents of the interactional approach to competitive advantage perceive human resources as mediators between strategy and performance outcomes or as creators of relationships within the

network of student associations and in the business environment. They also see human resource management as a developer of HR skills and capabilities and as a performance enhancer. The smooth running of an association relies on the process of recruiting, integrating, and motivating volunteers, who represent the main source of action. Student volunteers want to identify with the actions undertaken and to align with the objectives of the organisation they belong to. It is important for them to participate in the organisation's development process and in decision-making, thus achieving personal fulfilment (Hermeier, 2019).

Personal fulfilment suggests that the self is not fully satisfied until the activity is completed. This provides a strong desire to carry out various types of activities and focuses on the deepest ambition (Gewirth, 1998). Achieving personal fulfilment leads to skill development, learning new abilities, and building a character of which the individual can be proud. All these aspects influence the overall state of the organisation and its activity; therefore, the method chosen for recruiting new volunteers and for growing and developing human resources is relevant.

Leadership and Management in the Context of Student NGOs

The beginning of the 20th century brought novelty to the field of leadership, introducing the notion of "management". This concept came with various challenges, including the difficulty of identifying a clear definition. Specialists argue that management includes actions, functions, and processes through which organisational objectives are achieved (Zlate, 2004). There are two schools of thought regarding the definition of management: the first argues that leadership and management are one and the same, while the second considers that these notions are completely different. The latter argues that a good leader is not necessarily a good manager, and vice versa (Algathani, 2014). The editors of the Encyclopaedia of Leadership state that there is no universally accepted definition of leadership (Goethals, Sorenson, & Burns, 2004). Leadership behaviour involves specific actions through which a leader directs and coordinates the activity of their group members (Fiedler, 1967).

Table 1: Comparison Between Leader and Manager – Characteristics

Authors	Leader Characteristics	Manager Characteristics
(Zaleznik, 1977)	Focus on people	Focus on structure and systems
	Takes risks	Minimizes risks
	Vision and strategies	Plans and budgets
	Long-term perspective	Short-term perspective
(Bennis, 1994)	Develops	Maintains
	(Bennis, 1994)	Focuses on control
	Why? What?	When? How?
	Innovates	Manages
(Certo, 1997)	Soul	Mind
	Visionary	Rational
	(Certo, 1997)	Analytical
	Courageous	Structured

(Kotter, 2006)	Shows emotions	Does not show emotions
	Involves employees in decision-making	Employees' choices are limited
	Strategy	Operational
(Northouse, 2007)	Motivating, inspiring	Checks and solves the problem
	Meets needs	Takes corrective action
	Seeks commitment	Provides jobs
(Lunenburg, 2022)	Acts decisively	Acts responsibly
	(Northouse, 2007)	Manages change
	Uses influence	Uses authority

Source: Algathani, D. (2014). Are leadership and management different? A review. Journal of Management Policies and Practices, 71-82

Managers are accustomed to carrying out their activity in an environment with a clearly defined organisational structure, ensuring the achievement of objectives and the control of performance. Leaders, on the other hand, are those who adapt to change by establishing and developing a clear vision, guiding the team towards its fulfilment (Bertocci, 2009). Leaders create an appropriate environment for the team, paying attention to its members and making them feel like an integral part of the group.

Managers, in contrast, are focused on individual performance and the evaluation of deviations from the initial plan, giving less attention to the team's needs and desires (Bertocci, 2009). It can be stated that the differences between leadership styles represent an advantage for both men and women, as they develop the leadership skills required today to be a good manager (Veith & Costea, 2019). Leaders are characterised by strong personality traits and human and conceptual skills. These qualities allow leaders to focus on the working style of each team member, offering them support and confidence. Managers, on the other hand, are technical individuals, focused on achieving objectives and results, without becoming emotionally involved (Zlate, 2004).

Future orientation is a characteristic of leaders, as they wish to implement their ideas quickly, which can sometimes lead to impulsiveness. Managers, however, prefer behavioural uniformity to ensure success (Zlate, 2004). Both managers and leaders must work to earn the trust of the team, be able to acknowledge their mistakes and learn from them, and make efforts for the organisation's success (Kumaran, 2012). In conclusion, within an organisation, optimal effectiveness is achieved when leadership and management are widely exercised by well-prepared individuals (Kumaran, 2012).

3. Research methodology

For this study to achieve the desired results, it was considered that the most suitable research method is the questionnaire. In the specialised literature, the questionnaire is defined as an investigative tool based on a series of written questions, which can be completed in different formats. Symbols or suggestive images can be used to create an environment that is easy to interpret by respondents, thus ensuring highly accurate results. It is important that the answers are expressed using common words in specific contexts to avoid difficulties in understanding and to facilitate the choice of the most appropriate response (Chelcea, 2007).

To create the questionnaire, "Google Forms" was used, being an easy and efficient option for respondents. The questionnaire consists of three parts: an introduction, along with the definition of the concepts underlying the questions; closed-ended questions; and demographic data through which respondents can be classified to create a clear picture of the target group participating in the study.

The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, of which 11 were questions evaluating multiple factors and 3 questions required the evaluation of a single factor. To maintain respondents' interest, the questions were formulated to cover a wide range of topics relevant to the activity of student NGOs. Thus, the respondent had the opportunity to recall the activities in which they participated and to analyse the information they possessed about the NGO they are part of. The questions had a closed structure, facilitating the entire process and minimising response time. Open-ended questions were avoided because they would have increased the response time, forcing respondents to come up with their own answers, which could have led to abandoning the completion of the questionnaire. The study was conducted post-pandemic to realistically reflect the current context. The significance of this period is notable, as students had returned physically to campuses, in faculty hallways and in the offices of the associations. Recruitment was carried out face-to-face again, and the activities and projects of student associations returned to a physical format with a large number of participants. The questionnaire was distributed between November 2023 and January 2024, covering a period of recruitment for new members in NGOs. Thus, the questionnaire was completed by both students with experience in student volunteering and those without experience. This ensured a more varied, realistic, and solid range of responses. A total of 223 responses were collected, the questionnaire reaching a large number of student associations, most of which operate at the level of the faculties within the University of Bucharest. All 223 responses were valid and correctly analysed.

Of the 223 responses, 52.9% came from students aged between 18 and 21, indicating that they are in the first years of university and at the beginning of their student volunteering experience. Additionally, 21.1% of respondents were newly recruited, having only recently become members of an NGO. Approximately 78.9% of respondents had at least one year of experience in the associations and their projects. Regarding gender, 39% of respondents were male, while 60.1% were female. 0.9% did not identify with either gender or preferred not to answer the question. It can be concluded that women are predominant in student volunteering, suggesting a greater openness of women towards involvement in organisational and community activities. The collected data were analysed to obtain viable responses for the proposed hypotheses. The

method of analysis used was factor analysis. The analyses were performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), created by IBM to facilitate statistical analyses.

Factor analysis was chosen due to the type of variables analysed, which are ordinal. A Likert scale from 1 to 5 was used to obtain ordinal variables. Some studies mention potential issues regarding the Likert scale and internal validity (Toutenburg & Heumann, 2008).

The empirical research had as a starting point my own activity within a student organisation at the University of Bucharest. Spending most of my student life in this environment, I wanted to highlight the activity of student NGOs and emphasise how they influence the lives of young people aged between 18 and 26.

Each student organisation has its own organisational culture, which allows identification and recognition externally. From representative colours and crests to the projects carried out, the environment of student volunteering offers diverse opportunities for personal and professional development. This study focuses on young people aged 18 to 26, the most socially active and engaged group. Once leaving home and entering the university environment, the desire for involvement and belonging to a group increases. Student volunteering provides the ideal environment for discovering and developing creativity and personal skills. The aim of this research was to determine what information volunteers possess about NGO activities and how favourable they perceive the student volunteering environment to be for learning and development. Based on these responses, specialised literature was selected and an analysis of the student volunteering environment was carried out. The quantitative empirical research used in this study responded to the following hypotheses through the use of statistical tools:

Hypothesis 1: Student NGOs that place a strong emphasis on effective communication and mutual support have higher levels of member engagement and satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: A well-defined organisational structure and the personal and professional development opportunities offered by student NGOs significantly contribute to the retention and active involvement of volunteers.

4. Results and discussions

To verify the possibility of using factor analysis, the data processing began with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test. The KMO value obtained was 0.796. This indicates a good level of sampling adequacy for factor analysis. The KMO value ranges between 0 and 1, and a value above 0.6 is considered acceptable, with values closer to 1 being ideal. A value of 0.796 suggests that a sufficient percentage of variability among the variables was captured and that factor analysis is likely to be useful. Factor analysis shows that most variables have communalities above 0.5 after extraction, indicating good adequacy of the data for the factorial model. For example, for the variable "familiarity with organisational culture," approximately 69.1% of the variance is explained by the extracted factors. However, there are also some variables with lower values (e.g., "Reputation risks" with 0.485), which may be less representative for the extracted factors.

The Bartlett test checks the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix among variables is an identity matrix, meaning that the variables are unrelated and factor analysis is not suitable.

The Bartlett test has an approximate chi-square value of 3886.252, with a significance level (Sig.) of 0.000. This means that we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there are sufficient correlations among the variables to justify conducting factor analysis.

Based on these results, the data are adequate for factor analysis. Most variables have communalities above 0.5 after extraction, which indicates good data adequacy for the factorial model. For example, for the variable "familiarity with organisational culture," approximately 69.1% of the variance is explained by the extracted factors. Still, there are a few variables with lower values (e.g., "Reputation risks" with 0.485), which may be less representative for the extracted factors. This suggests that the majority of variables are suitable for factor analysis and are well represented by the extracted factors.

The "Communication and Support" component represents a significant proportion of the total variance (19.073%). This suggests the existence of a dominant factor or a dimension of organisational culture that is highly present in respondents' answers. This could be, for instance, the degree of involvement or the members' satisfaction with the NGO's mission. The "Structure and Organisation" and "Personal and Professional Development" components together explain almost 17% of the additional variance, representing other important dimensions such as internal communication and support for personal development, contributing significantly to the organisational culture of NGOs.

Applying Kaiser's criterion (retaining only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1), the first 19 components were considered, which explain 83.244% of the total variance. This suggests a complex organisational culture, with many sub-dimensions that could include leadership, organisational ethics, norms, and values shared among members. Applying a rotation (such as Varimax) helps clarify the factor structure. For example, Component 1 after rotation now explains 11.157% of the variance, suggesting that rotation has helped better differentiate the specific dimensions of organisational culture.

Subsequent factors, after Component 19, contribute very little to the total variance, indicating that the additional dimensions they might represent are far less relevant to the organisational culture model in student NGOs.

Component "Communication and Support": This appears related to communication and support within the organisation, with high factor loadings for the variables "easy communication," "supportive environment," "colleagues' opinion/work evaluation," "efficient leader," and "values feedback."

Component "Structure and Organisation": Shows high loadings for "organisation mode," "rules/norms," and "adopted behaviours."

Component "Personal and Professional Development": Includes elements related to personal and professional development, with high factor loadings for "opportunities for professional development," "opportunities for personal development," and "opportunities for development in the organisational environment."

Component "External Communication": Component 4 has a high factor loading for "communication with associations," suggesting a connection with external communication or inter-organisational relationships.

Component "Risk Evaluation and Management": Factor 5 appears associated with risk evaluation and management, indicated by the loadings for "prioritisation of occurrence probabilities," "prioritisation of project impact," and "combination of probability and impact."

Other Identified Dimensions:

• Internal Processes: Includes aspects related to internal processes, such as "implementation of internal process regulations," "increasing communication in internal processes," "increasing transparency in internal processes," and "simplification of internal process procedures."

• Demographics: Related to demographics, with the variables "Gender" and "Age" having high loadings.

• Experience in Student Associations: Suggests an aspect linked to individual experience in student NGOs.

The analysis highlights the different dimensions of organisational culture and risk management in student NGOs. Each factor represents a group of conceptually related variables, influencing how NGO members perceive and interact with organisational culture. For example, "Communication and Support" suggests that an open communication environment and mutual support are key components of organisational culture in these organisations. Similarly, "Risk Evaluation and Management" indicates the importance of risk evaluation processes in decision-making.

Communication and Support: This factor suggests that student NGOs place strong emphasis on effective communication and building a supportive environment. In such organisational cultures, members are likely encouraged to share ideas and feedback, and leaders are seen as efficient and value everyone's contributions. This environment can improve morale and member engagement, facilitating an open exchange of ideas, which can lead to innovations and continuous improvements.

Structure and Organisation: The high loadings of this factor for variables related to organisational structure and rules indicate the importance of a well-defined culture, with clear norms and rules. This can contribute to organisational efficiency, as members understand expectations and how they should behave, leading to better coordination of activities.

Personal and Professional Development: This factor underlines the value that student NGOs place on development opportunities for both individuals and the organisation as a whole. A culture that supports personal and professional growth can attract and retain talents, as members feel valued and see a clear path for their advancement.

External Communication: This factor seems to indicate the importance that student NGOs place on communication with other associations and external entities. An organisational culture that prioritises good external relations can be essential for partnerships, collaborations, and external support.

Risk Evaluation and Management: The loadings for risk prioritisation indicate a culture that focuses on prudent risk management. Such a culture can help NGOs navigate a complex and often uncertain environment, ensuring they are well-prepared for challenges and able to minimise the negative impact of risks on their projects.

Internal Processes: Aspects related to internal processes, such as implementing regulations and increasing transparency, suggest that NGOs value clarity and efficiency in their internal activities. An organisational culture that promotes the simplification of procedures can improve

agility and responsiveness to change.

Demographics: Factor loadings for "Gender" and "Age" may reflect demographic diversity within NGOs and how these characteristics can influence members' experiences and perspectives.

Experience in Student Associations: This factor shows the importance of prior experience in student associations and how it can affect organisational culture. Members with more experience can bring valuable knowledge and play an important role in mentoring and guiding new members.

Based on the component transformation matrix, we calculated the correlation between the resulting components. These correlations were as follows:

Communication and Support (Component 1) – Strongly associated with Structure and Organisation (Component 2) rotated (0.702), suggesting that in the organisational context, communication and support are closely linked to how structure and organisation are perceived or implemented.

Structure and Organisation (Component 2) – Shows a strong negative correlation with Component 2 rotated (-0.525). This indicates a possible change in perception or the importance of structure and organisation after rotation, meaning that these aspects may be reconsidered or redefined in the context of transformation.

Personal and Professional Development (Component 3) – Maintains a relatively good alignment with Component 3 rotated (0.501), suggesting that personal and professional development remains a stable and consistent component in organisational culture, even after the restructuring of the factors.

External Communication (Component 4) – Retains a very strong correlation with Component 4 rotated (0.864), indicating that external communication is a fundamental aspect that does not change substantially with rotation and remains a core element of student NGO activities.

Risk Evaluation and Management (Component 5) – Has a strong negative correlation with External Communication (Component 4) rotated (-0.584), which may suggest that risk evaluation and management are perceived in contrast to external communication or that these two domains require different approaches within the organisation.

Internal Processes (Component 6) – Shows a moderate negative correlation with Component 6 rotated (-0.332), possibly indicating that internal processes change or are re-evaluated within the factor reorganisation.

Components 7 to 11 – Show lower correlations with the rotated factors, indicating that these factors may have a smaller impact or are less well-defined after rotation.

Demographics (Component 9) and Experience in Student Associations (Component 10) – Are not present in the matrix provided, suggesting that these factors were not considered significant or were not rotated in this specific matrix. It may be necessary to examine another matrix or additional data to understand how these factors are affected by rotation.

This analysis highlights the various dimensions of organisational culture and risk management in student NGOs. Each factor represents a group of conceptually related variables that can influence how NGO members perceive and interact with the organisational culture. For example, "Communication and Support" may suggest that an open communication environment and mutual support are key components of organisational culture in these organisations. Similarly,

"Risk Evaluation and Management" may indicate the importance of risk evaluation processes in decision-making.

Hypothesis 1: Student NGOs that place a strong emphasis on effective communication and mutual support have higher levels of member engagement and satisfaction.

The literature highlights the essential role of communication and support in developing prosocial behaviour and engagement among young people. Daniel Hart and Michael J. Sulik state that volunteering provides a valuable perspective on prosocial life, allowing observation of various influences on behaviour, including emotions and social interactions (Hart & Sulik, 2014). In the context of student NGOs, effective communication and mutual support are fundamental for building a positive organisational culture.

The empirical results of this study confirm the hypothesis, showing that "Communication and Support" explains a significant proportion of the total variance (19.073%). This demonstrates that NGOs that prioritise open communication and mutual support have more engaged and satisfied members. The variables "easy communication," "supportive environment," "colleagues' opinion/work evaluation," "efficient leader," and "values feedback" had high factor loadings, indicating that these factors are essential for member engagement and satisfaction. The factor analysis results support this hypothesis. The "Communication and Support" component explained a significant proportion of the total variance (19.073%), indicating that this factor plays a crucial role in the organisational culture of student NGOs. The KMO value of 0.796 and the Bartlett test results (approximate chi-square 3886.252, Sig. 0.000) suggest that the data are adequate for factor analysis and that the variables related to communication and support are well represented in the factorial model.

Specifically, variables such as "easy communication," "supportive environment," "colleagues' opinion/work evaluation," "efficient leader," and "values feedback" had high factor loadings within this component. This suggests that members of NGOs who perceive an environment of open communication and mutual support have a more positive organisational experience. This environment facilitates the exchange of ideas, innovations, and continuous improvements, which can contribute to a high level of engagement and satisfaction.

Moreover, the rotated analysis showed that "Communication and Support" is strongly associated with "Structure and Organisation" (0.702), suggesting that effective communication is closely linked to how structure and organisation are perceived or implemented. This confirms the hypothesis that NGOs with strong internal communication and mutual support have more engaged and satisfied members.

Hypothesis 2: A well-defined organisational structure and the personal and professional development opportunities offered by student NGOs significantly contribute to volunteer retention and active involvement.

Previous studies highlight the importance of well-defined organisational structures and development opportunities for volunteer retention and engagement. Burke (2005) argues that modern organisations must respond to challenges such as increasing productivity, expanding into the global market, and developing a skilled and flexible workforce, all facilitated by a clear organisational structure and development opportunities.

The results of this study confirm the hypothesis, showing that "Structure and Organisation" and "Personal and Professional Development" together explain almost 17% of the additional variance. Variables such as "organisation mode," "rules/norms," and "adopted behaviours" indicate

that a well-defined organisational structure contributes to efficiency and activity coordination, thereby facilitating volunteer retention.

Personal and professional development opportunities, highlighted by the variables "opportunities for professional development," "opportunities for personal development," and "opportunities for development in the organisational environment," are essential for attracting and retaining talent. Additionally, Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, and Mainella (2006) emphasise that student associations provide personal and professional development opportunities, helping students enhance their leadership skills. This is confirmed by the results of this study, which show that personal and professional development remains a stable and consistent component of organisational culture, contributing significantly to active volunteer involvement. The results obtained from the empirical research also support this hypothesis. The "Structure and Organisation" and "Personal and Professional Development" factors together explain almost 17% of the additional variance. Variables such as "organisation mode," "rules/norms," and "adopted behaviours" had high loadings for the "Structure and Organisation" component, indicating the importance of a well-defined structure for organisational efficiency. Regarding "Personal and Professional Development," the variables "opportunities for professional development," "opportunities for personal development," and "opportunities for development in the organisational environment" showed high factor loadings. This suggests that NGOs offering clear development opportunities attract and retain talent more easily, as members see a clear path for advancement and feel valued. Moreover, the rotated analysis revealed that "Personal and Professional Development" maintains a relatively good alignment with the corresponding rotated factor (0.501), indicating that this aspect remains stable and consistent in organisational culture, even after the restructuring of factors. This confirms that NGOs investing in their members' personal and professional development achieve better retention and active volunteer involvement.

The discussion of the two hypotheses formulated in this study confirms the importance of effective communication, mutual support, a well-defined organisational structure, and personal and professional development opportunities in student NGOs. These results emphasise the importance of fostering a positive organisational culture that promotes open communication, mutual support, and continuous development to ensure the long-term success of student NGOs.

5. Conclusions

Starting from the main objective of the study, the quantitative analysis allowed for the creation of an overview of the environment of student NGOs by examining the responses of 223 volunteer members of at least one student association. The questions were structured as percentages and analysed according to the answers provided and the context in which they were collected.

The specialised literature formed the basis of this description, helping to create a clear picture of what volunteering means, the risks associated with this field, and its influence on those who choose to be part of these groups. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on students and volunteers, and this paper demonstrated how it affected the young generation and their lifestyle.

Being a member of a student association provided the opportunity to carry out the analysis from a realistic perspective, with concrete knowledge of how the activities are conducted. The questions were formulated to cover as many aspects of a student association as possible, to distinguish the organisational culture from the projects and activities specific to other NGOs.

The questionnaire highlighted the importance of an organisational culture, identified the risks faced by student associations, and underlined the need for a well-prepared leader with values compatible with those of the NGO. According to the information presented earlier, most volunteers are aware of the risks and consider preparation for them vital. In addition, volunteers are familiar with the organisational culture of the association they belong to, even if they have been involved in volunteering for only a short time, and they acknowledge the importance of a competent leader for the efficient implementation of projects.

This study highlighted the importance of effective communication, mutual support, a well-defined organisational structure, and opportunities for personal and professional development within student NGOs. These elements are essential for the engagement, satisfaction, retention, and active involvement of volunteers. The results of this study underline the importance of cultivating a positive organisational culture in student NGOs, one that promotes open communication, mutual support, and continuous development, to ensure the long-term success of these organisations. Implementing these practices can significantly contribute to increasing young people's involvement in volunteering activities and to their personal and professional development.

REFERENCES:

1. Algathani, D. (2014). Are leadership and management different? A review. Journal of Management Policies and Practices, 71-82.

2. Bennis, W. (1994). On becoming a leader. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

3. Bertocci, D. I. (2009). Leadership in Organizations: There is a Difference Between Leaders and Managers. University Press of America.

4. Brooks, S. K., Webster, R. K., Smith, L. E., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenberg, N., & Rubin, G. J. (2020). The Psychological Impact of Quarantine and How to Reduce It: Rapid Review of Evidence. The Lancet.

5. Burke, R. J. (2005). Reinventing Human Resource Management: Challenges and New Directions. London: R. J. Burke, C. L. Cooper.

6. Certo, S. C. (1997). Modern management : diversity, quality, ethics, and the global environment. New Jersey: Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

7. Chelcea, S. (2007). Metodologia cercetării sociologice. Metode cantitative şi calitative. București: Polirom.

8. Gewirth, A. (1998). Self-Fulfillment. United Kingdom: Princeton University.

9. Goethals, G. R., Sorenson, G. J., & Burns, M. J. (2004). Encyclopedia of leadership. SAGE Publications.

10. Grzesiak, M. (2018). Personal Brand Creation in the Digital Age Theory, Research and Practice. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

11. Hermeier, B. H.-R. (2019). Arbeitswelten der Zukunft Wie die Digitalisierung unsere Arbeitsplätze und Arbeitsweisen verändert. Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler.

12. Komives, S. R., Longerbeam, S., Owen, J., & Mainella, F. C. (2006). A leadership identity development model: Applications from a grounded theory. Journal of College Student, 47, 401-418.

13. Kotter, J. (2006). Our Iceberg Is Melting: Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions. Penguin Publishing Group.

14. Kumaran, M. (2012). Leadership in Libraries. A Focus on Ethnic-Minority Librarians. Chandos Publishing.

15. Lunenburg, F. C. (2022). Educational Administration: Concepts and Practices. United States of America: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data.

16. Matei, R. & Veith, C. (2023). Empowerment and Engagement: The Role of Autonomy and Feedback in Fostering Employee Motivation. Manager, 37, 7-22.

17. Mendy, A., Stewart, M. L., & VanAkin, K. (2020). McKinsey & Company. Preluat de pe https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/a-leaders-guide-communicating-with-teams-stakeholders-and-communities-during-covid-19#

18. Mental Health (2021). Mental Health and COVID-19. Preluat de pe Mental Health America: https://www.mhanational.org/mental-health-and-covid-19-april-2022-data

19. Minciu, M., Dobrea, R. C. & Loghin, M., 2022. The connection/link between the VUCA world and the need for organizational change. Proceedings of the International Management Conference, Faculty of Management, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, November, 16(1), 913-920.

20. Minciu, M., Dobrea, R. C., Staiculescu, C., & Stoica, B. S. (2020). The Impact of the Epidemic Generated by the SARS-COV-2 Virus in the Context of the VUCA World. Management and Economics Review, 5(2), 246-254. https://doi.org/10.24818/mer/2020.12-05.

21. Netflix. (2020). Netflix. Preluat de pe Netflix party: https://www.netflixparty.live/ro

22. Northouse, P. G. (2007). Leadership theory and practice. Sage Publications.

23. Quezada, R. G. (2014). University volunteering as a fiels of service learning and social entrepreneurship. A case study. Chile: Scientific Electronic Library Online.

24. Rios-Aguilar, C., & K. Eagan, E. B. (2015). Findings from the 2015 administration of the your first college year (YFCY) survey. LosAngeles: Higher Education Research Institute.

25. Rump, J., & Eilers, S. (2020). Die vierte Dimension der Digitalisierung.

26. Stanciu, D. E. (2022, 09 13). Educația digitală, între necesitate și oportunitate. (C. ". polono-moldove-nesc", Operator interviu)

27. Toutenburg, H., & Heumann, C. (2008). Deskriptive Statistik: Eine Einführung in Methoden und Anwendungen mit R und SPSS. Springer.

28. Uniunea Studenților din România. (2024, 04 28). Preluat de pe https://uniunea-studentilor.ro/

29. Universitatea din București. (2024, 04 28). Preluat de pe Asociații Studențești UNIBUC: https://unibuc.ro/student-ub/asociatii-studentesti/#1668679046300-19716dde-662b

30. Urbach, N., & Ahlemann, F. (2019). IT Management in the Digital Age - A Roadmap for the IT Department of the Future -. Cham: Springer Nature.

31. Veith, C., & Costea, D. (2019). Industry 4.0 – A challenge or a risk for the involvement of women in management and business. Manager Journal, 29, 91 - 98. Preluat de pe https://manager.faa.ro/archive/manager_29/1000_29_m_91_98.pdf

32. Veith, C., & Dogaru, I. (2020). Digital work in the context of COVID 19. Manager Journal, 31, 61 - 69. Preluat de pe https://manager.faa.ro/archive/manager_31/31_m_61_69.pdf

33. Wilson, E. (2000). Sociobiology: The New Synthesis. Harvard University Press.

34. Zaleznik, A. (1977). Managers and Leaders: Are They Different. Harvard Business Review Case Services.

35. Zlate, M. (2004). Leadership și Management. București: Polirom.