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## ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS CONTEXTS: SUSTAINING VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT IN UKRAINE DURING MARTIAL LAW АДАПТИВНЕ УПРАВЛІННЯ ТА ЛІДЕРСТВО В УМОВАХ КРИЗ: ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ ЗАЛУЧЕНОСТІ ВОЛОНТЕРІВ В УКРАЇНІ ПІД ЧАС ВОЄННОГО СТАНУ

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*The prolonged crisis conditions triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine have profoundly transformed the landscape of volunteer activity and the management of civil society organizations. Under martial law, volunteer organizations have become pivotal actors in addressing humanitarian, logistical, social, and military support challenges. However, sustaining volunteer engagement and preventing burnout amid persistent uncertainty has emerged as a critical challenge for managers and leaders. This paper offers a conceptual exploration of adaptive management and leadership practices that support the long-term involvement of volunteers within crisis-driven organizations in Ukraine. Drawing on contemporary management and leadership theories, including adaptive leadership, transformational and servant leadership, and crisis management frameworks, the paper develops a multidimensional conceptual model linking organizational adaptability, motivational mechanisms, and sustained volunteer participation. It argues that effective volunteer management during wartime requires flexible decision-making, decentralized coordination, transparent communication, and a strong sense of shared purpose. Adaptive management enables organizations to adjust internal processes, redistribute resources, and realign priorities in response to rapidly evolving conditions. In contrast, adaptive leadership fosters psychological safety, collective efficacy, and moral resilience among volunteers. The proposed conceptual framework emphasizes three interrelated dimensions essential for sustaining engagement: managerial adaptability – the capacity to institutionalize learning and modify operational routines; leadership responsiveness – the ability to provide meaning, trust, and empowerment; and volunteer motivation and retention – grounded in intrinsic values of solidarity and civic responsibility rather than external incentives. By synthesizing insights from crisis management, nonprofit leadership, and volunteerism studies, this work contributes to the theoretical understanding of how civil society organizations can maintain operational continuity and human commitment during extreme disruptions. While focusing on the Ukrainian context, the conceptual implications extend to other crisis-affected regions, offering guidance for strengthening the resilience and sustainability of volunteer engagement in volatile environments.*

**Keywords:** adaptive management, crisis leadership, volunteer engagement, volunteer management, organizational resilience, civil society organizations, wartime volunteering.

Тривалі кризові умови, спричинені російським вторгненням в Україну, суттєво трансформували сферу волонтерської діяльності та управління організаціями громадянського суспільства. В умовах воєнного стану волонтерські структури стали ключовими суб'єктами у вирішенні гуманітарних, логістичних, соціальних та завдань із підтримки військових. Водночас підтримання сталої залученості волонтерів і запобігання вигоранню в умовах постійної невизначеності постало як критичне управлінське та лідерське завдання. У статті здійснено концептуальне дослідження адаптивних управлінських та лідерських практик, що забезпечують довгострокову участь волонтерів у діяльності організацій, які функціонують в умовах кризи в Україні. Спираючись на сучасні теорії менеджменту та лідерства – зокрема лідерство, орієнтоване на служіння (*servant leadership*), трансформаційне та адаптивне лідерство, а також на концепції антикризового управління, стаття пропонує багатовимірну концептуальну модель, що поєднує організаційну гнучкість, мотиваційні механізми та сталість волонтерської участі. У роботі обґрунтовано, що ефективний менеджмент волонтерів в умовах війни вимагає динамічного прийняття рішень, децентралізованої координації, прозорості комунікації та сильної спільної мети. Гнучке (адаптивне) управління дозволяє організаціям коригувати внутрішні процеси, перерозподіляти ресурси та змінювати пріоритети відповідно до швидкоплинних умов, тоді як відповідне лідерство сприяє психологічній безпеці, колективній ефективності та моральній стійкості волонтерів. Запропонована концептуальна модель підкреслює три взаємопов'язані виміри, необхідні для підтримання залученості: управлінська гнучкість – здатність інституціоналізувати навчання та модифікувати операційні процедури; лідерська чутливість – уміння надавати сенс, довіру та повноваження; і мотивація та утримання волонтерів, що ґрунтуються на внутрішніх цінностях солідарності та громадянської відповідальності, а не на зовнішніх стимулах. Синтезуючи підходи з теорій кризового менеджменту, некомерційного лідерства та волонтерознавства, дослідження робить теоретичний внесок у розуміння того, як організації громадянського суспільства можуть зберігати операційну безперервність і людську відданість у періоди глибоких потрясінь. Хоча основна увага приділяється українському контексту, концептуальні висновки мають ширше застосування для інших регіонів, що переживають кризу, пропонуючи орієнтири для посилення стійкості та сталості волонтерської залученості у нестабільних середовищах.

**Ключові слова:** адаптивне управління, лідерство в умовах кризи, залученість волонтерів, управління волонтерами, організаційна стійкість, організації громадянського суспільства, волонтерство в умовах війни.

### Statement of the problem

Volunteer organizations in Ukraine and similar crisis contexts face unique challenges in retaining and engaging volunteers over extended periods of social, humanitarian, and military crises. During the initial phase of the full-scale russian

invasion in 2022, Ukrainian society witnessed an extraordinary surge of civic solidarity and volunteer mobilization. Citizens from diverse backgrounds united to provide humanitarian assistance, logistical support, and aid to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Yet, as the war has persisted, volunteer activity has gradually evolved, and long-term engagement has shown signs of decline. Many organizations now report challenges in sustaining volunteers' motivation and preventing burnout, as emotional exhaustion, economic strain, and prolonged uncertainty undermine continuous participation. This shift underscores the urgent need for management and leadership approaches that ensure the sustainability and resilience of volunteer involvement.

Scholarly research demonstrates that effective management and motivating leadership are decisive factors for sustaining volunteer engagement under crisis conditions [5]. Professional management, transparent communication, recognition, and inclusive leadership strengthen volunteers' satisfaction and commitment, while poor organization or lack of recognition increases turnover [7; 8; 10; 12]. Effective management provides structure and coordination, whereas leadership fosters belonging, trust, and meaning – qualities vital for long-term engagement.

Recent studies highlight the growing importance of adaptive management and context-sensitive leadership in crisis-driven volunteer organizations. Works by S. Almas et al. [1], A. C. Y. Tsai et al. [9], and D. L. Parris et al. [11] show that adaptive and servant leadership enhance resilience and collective purpose. Ukrainian scholars – B. Hromovyyk et al. [13], O. Boichak et al. [3], T. Blyznyuk et al. [2], and A. Diulherova et al. [4] – further reveal the hybrid nature of Ukrainian volunteerism, which integrates civic, humanitarian, and military support dimensions.

### The purpose of the research

Building upon these studies, this paper aims to conceptually explore the role of adaptive management and leadership in sustaining volunteer engagement in Ukraine during martial law. The purpose of the study is to develop a conceptual framework linking managerial adaptability, leadership responsiveness, and volunteer motivation, thereby deepening theoretical understanding of sustainable volunteer management within crisis-driven civil society organizations.

### Presentation of the primary research material

Effective management practices – such as clear communication, structured internal processes, regular feedback, recognition, training, and inclusion (Table 1) – are strongly linked to higher volunteer retention and engagement [5; 12].

**Table 1. Key management practices for volunteer retention**

| Management practice               | Mechanism of impact  | Relevant contextual factors   | Supporting studies                              |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Clear communication               | Enhances identification; provides stability/clarity; supports both upward/downward channels.           | Reduces confusion; critical for information flow in a crisis.                   | T. De Clerck et al. [5]                         |
| Recognition and support           | Boosts organizational commitment; reinforces sense of value and belonging; prevents burnout.           | Essential for psychological well-being in high-stress, crisis settings.         | I. Nowakowska et al. [10]                       |
| Training and orientation          | Increases satisfaction; supports professionalization; forms leadership qualities in youth.             | Overcomes stereotypes about volunteer management; necessary for skill-building. | J. S. Piatak et al. [12], N. Koliada et al. [7] |
| Inclusion and empowerment         | Fosters engagement, loyalty, and capacity; allows for initiative (autonomy-supportive).                | Supports engaged citizenship; volunteers are included in decision-making.       | J. S. Piatak et al. [12]                        |
| Structured processes and planning | Provides stability; increases efficiency, transparency, and trust; aids in adaptive change management. | Prevents excessive bureaucracy/chaos; critical for resilience during war.       | T. De Clerck et al. [5], B. Kopylchak [8]       |

*Source: Systematized by the authors based on [5; 7; 8; 10; 12]*

Practices that make volunteers feel valued and supported, such as empowerment and flexible scheduling, significantly increase their intention to stay and their organizational commitment. Specifically, training and orientation increase satisfaction and retention [12], while recognition and support boost organizational commitment. Furthermore, clear communication enhances volunteer identification and retention [5], and inclusion and empowerment foster engagement and loyalty [12].

Conversely, poor management, a lack of recognition, or excessive bureaucracy can lead to dissatisfaction and higher turnover [5; 12]. The balance between structure and flexibility is delicate – too much rigidity can be demotivating, while too little structure can lead to confusion and disengagement [5]. The need for institutionalization and professionalization of volunteer organizations increases efficiency, transparency, and trust, making long-term involvement more attractive.

Motivating leadership styles – especially transformational, servant, ethical, and autonomy-supportive approaches – significantly enhance volunteer satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intention to remain [1; 5]. These styles are effective because they foster a sense of purpose, belonging, and empowerment among volunteers. Conversely, controlling or chaotic leadership can demotivate and increase attrition [1; 5]. Job satisfaction often mediates the relationship between leadership style and retention, highlighting the importance of supportive, visionary, and ethical leaders [1]. Table 2 contrasts the specific mechanisms of action for the leadership styles discussed, clarifying how each contributes to long-term engagement.

**Table 2. Comparison of motivating leadership styles and effects**

| Leadership style    | Core characteristics  | Primary impact on volunteers  | Key mechanisms in crisis contexts   |
|---------------------|---|---|---|
| Transformational    | Inspiring vision, individualized support, and fostering a sense of purpose.           | Increased intention to remain, stronger role identity, and high satisfaction. | Provides psychological support; fosters motivation and vision.            |
| Servant             | Prioritizing others, empathy, ethical behavior, and emotional support.                | Higher affective/normative commitment; increased motivation; reduced burnout. | Builds trust, shared values, and psychological safety.                    |
| Autonomy-supportive | Providing clear expectations, allowing initiative, and being structured yet flexible. | Higher capacity and engagement; increased job satisfaction (mediator).        | Balances structure with flexibility; prevents demotivation from rigidity. |
| Task-oriented       | Managing external relationships; providing clear direction.                           | Increased satisfaction and organizational commitment.                         | Provides clarity and stability necessary for effective action.            |

*Source: Compiled by the authors according to [1; 5; 9; 11]*

Transformational leadership, characterized by inspiring vision, individualized support, and a sense of purpose, has a direct, positive effect on volunteers' intention to remain with organizations. This effect is partially mediated by increased satisfaction, organizational commitment, and the development of a strong volunteer role identity. Training volunteer

coordinators in transformational leadership skills is identified as a helpful strategy to boost long-term retention, especially in crisis contexts where sustained engagement is critical [1]. Furthermore, task-oriented and external leader behaviors (such as managing external relationships and providing clear direction) also contribute to volunteer satisfaction and organizational commitment, which are key predictors of retention. Volunteer satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between task-oriented leadership and organizational commitment, highlighting the importance of meeting volunteers' needs and expectations [9].

Servant leadership, which prioritizes serving others, empathy, and ethical behavior, significantly enhances volunteer motivation and organizational commitment during crises [9; 11]. This approach directly increases volunteers' motivation by aligning organizational values with personal values and creating a sense of meaningfulness in their work. Volunteers under servant leaders feel valued, listened to, and empowered, boosting intrinsic motivation and encouraging sustained engagement, even in high-stress crisis settings [9; 11]. Servant leaders also help volunteers see the impact of their contributions, further strengthening motivation. This style is strongly linked to higher affective and normative commitment among volunteers, building trust, psychological safety, and a sense of belonging, which are critical for commitment during crises. Studies show that servant leadership's positive effect on commitment is often mediated by increased motivation and reduced burnout, as well as by fostering hope, creating a shared vision, and building a caring, inclusive community [6; 11].

Autonomy-supportive and structuring leadership styles (providing clear expectations and support while allowing initiative) are associated with higher volunteer capacity and engagement [5]. Conversely, chaotic or overly controlling leadership can undermine retention. In crisis settings, leadership that provides psychological support, protects against burnout, and fosters a supportive community is crucial for sustaining engagement over time [10]. Effective communication and recognition from leaders further reinforce volunteers' commitment and willingness to continue [10].

The adaptive leadership matrix (Table 3) delineates four distinct organizational environments resulting from the interplay between management structure (professionalization and processes) and leadership support (empathy and motivational leadership), offering a framework for sustaining volunteer engagement during prolonged crises.

**Table 3. Adaptive leadership matrix**

|                    |  | Management structure                              |  |
|--------------------|--|---|--|
|                    |  | Low structural clarity (chaotic, unorganized)     | High structural clarity (professionalized, structured) |
| Leadership support | High relational support (empathy, recognition, empowerment)  | Quadrant 1:<br>Empowered engagement               | Quadrant 2:<br>Adaptive resilience (Optimal zone)      |
|                    | Low relational support (controlling, neglecting, impersonal) | Quadrant 3:<br>Chaotic disengagement (Avoid zone) | Quadrant 4:<br>Bureaucratic rigidity                   |

*Source: Developed by the authors based on [1; 2; 5; 6; 9]*

Quadrant 2 (Adaptive resilience) represents the optimal environment for maintaining sustained volunteer engagement and organizational capacity during high-stress periods. It is characterized by the joint presence of high management structure (e.g., professional management processes, clear communication) and high leadership support (e.g., servant, transformational, or autonomy-supportive leadership). In this zone, volunteers receive the psychological safety and intrinsic motivation needed to combat burnout, while structured processes ensure their efforts are efficient and directly contribute to organizational goals [5; 6]. This synergistic balance fosters affective and normative commitment and is key to achieving long-term volunteer retention in humanitarian settings.

Quadrant 1 (Empowered engagement) is defined by high leadership support but a deficit in management structure. While leaders successfully cultivate a strong sense of purpose, belonging, and emotional validation, the organization suffers from insufficient institutionalization, undefined internal processes, or role ambiguity. Volunteers are highly motivated and committed to the cause but are prone to frustration due to systemic inefficiency. Though emotional satisfaction is high, the lack of structured direction hinders organizational effectiveness and can ultimately undermine sustained engagement when idealism is tested by operational friction [5; 9].

Quadrant 4 (Bureaucratic rigidity) is characterized by high management structure (e.g., excessive rules, task orientation, and established procedures) but a lack of leadership support (e.g., impersonal leadership, insufficient recognition, or absence of psychological care). The organization prioritizes rigid adherence to management processes over the emotional and motivational needs of its personnel. Volunteers may understand their role but feel unvalued, leading to emotional distance and a perception of themselves as mere commodities [5]. This environment often results in demotivation, decreased intention to stay, and high turnover, as the structure, divorced from empathy, fails to meet the humanistic drivers of volunteerism.

Quadrant 3 (Chaotic disengagement) represents the organizational state most detrimental to volunteer retention, combining low management structure with low leadership support. This environment lacks both professional guidance and empathetic leadership, resulting in confusion, lack of direction, and a feeling of being unsupported in a high-stress context. Volunteers experience low job satisfaction and perceive their organizations as ineffective and chaotic [5]. Consequently, this environment maximizes dissatisfaction and leads to rapid, pervasive volunteer attrition, making sustained operations infeasible during prolonged crises.

In crisis-affected and humanitarian contexts, such as Ukraine, the need for flexible, responsive management and leadership is heightened. Volunteers are driven by altruism, solidarity, and civic responsibility, often at personal risk [13]. They are more likely to remain engaged when they perceive their work as meaningful, are included in decision-making, and receive emotional support from leaders [5]. The unique stressors of prolonged crises make supportive leadership and adaptive management even more essential.

The war has caused a significant shift in Ukrainian volunteerism from traditional, duty-based norms toward a model of engaged citizenship, emphasizing voluntary, self-motivated participation [3]. This dynamic has strengthened civil society and encouraged the collective shaping of new social norms. The existential threat has also solidified national identity and social cohesion, motivating widespread engagement, with volunteers viewed as key agents of social change and nation-building [3]. Public trust in volunteers is high, and wartime solidarity and national identity foster a strong culture of volunteering, sustaining engagement even as the conflict endures. Socio-political dynamics also include the evolving relationship between volunteers and the state; while the state has increasingly regulated activities, much volunteerism remains independent [3]. However, risks

such as “fake volunteering” and burnout have emerged due to high trust, economic pressures, and insufficient legal oversight [2].

Digital tools and online platforms facilitate recruitment, coordination, and resource mobilization, making volunteering more accessible and sustainable [13]. Social media and peer networks are significant sources of information and motivation, helping volunteers stay connected and engaged [13]. Organizational and structural factors such as clear communication, attention to volunteers’ needs, and inclusivity are crucial for retention.

The unique, crisis-specific factors that influence the application and effectiveness of the management and leadership concepts are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4. Contextual and socio-political factors affecting Ukrainian volunteerism**

| Factor category        | Typical expressions  | Impact on engagement and retention   |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Socio-political        | Wartime solidarity; engaged citizenship model; strong national identity; high public trust.  | Sustains collective action; makes participation a source of pride/self-identification.     |
| Digital/structural     | Digital tools (coordination/recruitment); social media/peer networks; institutionalization.  | Increases accessibility and sustainability of volunteer efforts; strengthens transparency. |
| Personal/psychological | Altruism, civic responsibility, solidarity, religious faith, and psychological resilience.   | Primary drivers for sustained involvement; necessary for managing stress/trauma.           |
| Organizational risks   | Excessive bureaucracy; lack of recognition; chaotic leadership; risk of “fake volunteering”. | Causes dissatisfaction; undermines volunteer satisfaction; increases turnover/burnout.     |

Source: Summarized by the authors according to [2; 3; 13]

Empirical studies provide specific evidence supporting the use of professional management and motivating leadership practices within the Ukrainian context. A 2020 study by T. De Clerck et al. found that reliance on professional management processes (e.g., mission development, internal communication, and structured planning) and motivating leadership styles (autonomy-supportive and structuring) is positively associated with volunteer capacity in all-volunteer organizations. This research, using the competing values framework and self-determination theory, demonstrated that both management processes and leadership styles jointly enhance volunteer engagement and organizational effectiveness [5].

Furthermore, research on Ukrainian youth NGOs during the war highlights the importance of adaptive and cognitive approaches to change management. Delegation of authority, strategic planning, and responsiveness to external challenges (such as full-scale aggression) are identified as effective management strategies for maintaining volunteer engagement and organizational resilience [8]. Studies also emphasize that volunteer activity is a key component in forming leadership qualities among Ukrainian youth, fostering social competence, value orientation, and personal development [7]. Finally, qualitative research with organizations assisting the military identifies internal communication, burnout prevention, and strategic planning as critical management areas, suggesting that both established and new organizations benefit from training to strengthen organizational capacity [4].

### Conclusions and prospects for further research

This study confirms that effective management and motivating leadership are crucial for sustaining volunteer engagement in Ukrainian organizations operating under prolonged crisis conditions. Professional management – marked by clear communication, structured coordination, recognition, and inclusion – creates a supportive environment where volunteers feel valued and empowered. Complementary leadership styles, such as transformational, servant, ethical, and autonomy-supportive, further strengthen satisfaction, commitment, and identification with organizational goals.

The Ukrainian case demonstrates the need for adaptive and empathetic leadership that aligns organizational efficiency with civic solidarity and moral purpose. This hybrid model of volunteerism, shaped by war and humanitarian challenges, highlights Ukraine’s unique form of resilient civic engagement.

Future research should deepen these insights through empirical studies to examine how specific management practices and leadership styles influence volunteer retention across different organizational types and regions. Longitudinal and comparative studies could also reveal how these relationships evolve as crises and social conditions change.

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