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**MANAGING BRAND RELATIONSHIP PLURALITY: INSIGHTS  
FROM THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR**

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## MANAGING BRAND RELATIONSHIP PLURALITY:

### INSIGHTS FROM THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR

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**MANAGING BRAND RELATIONSHIP PLURALITY:  
INSIGHTS FROM THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR**

**Abstract:**

The non-profit sector is home to some of the most recognized and trustworthy brands, all competing for financial resources and volunteers. Akin to consumers, volunteers entertain relationships with non-profit brands. These relationships have recently become more diverse as individuals increasingly look for more ephemeral and distant forms of involvement. Drawing on an extensive qualitative dataset of the Vienna Red Cross comprising participant observation, archival data, and in-depth interviews, the authors conceptualize this non-escalating, episodic engagement as a *neither-growing-nor-fading* (NGNF) relationship. This theorization adds to the literature on consumer–brand relationships, which has predominantly focused on the cultivation of strong relationships. Informed by practice theory, the authors elaborate distinct brand relationship practices key to successfully maintaining NGNF relationships (acquiring and activating) while catering to volunteers following the traditional path of relationship intensification (building and cultivating). The analysis identifies constellations of practice elements conducive to managing both types of brand relationships in a symbiotic manner. The authors argue for the importance of moving beyond an exclusive focus on relationship growth and embracing non-escalating relationships. This study thus contributes to nascent theorizing on brand relationships that do not follow an axiology valuing growth and intensification.

**Keywords:** Brand relationship management; Brand relationship trajectories; Brand relationship types; Growth axiology; Non-escalating brand relationships; Non-profit brands; Practice theory; Volunteering.



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Volunteering is a crucial societal pillar. Across the globe, over 850 million volunteers give their time to support to a variety of causes (United Nations Volunteers 2021), placing non-profit organizations (NPOs) in competition to attract them as precious resources. In this context, brand building is of major importance and has allowed NPOs to ascend the echelons of the most recognized and trusted brands. Like their for-profit counterparts, NPOs need to carefully manage the relationships that they entertain with individuals. In particular, non-profit brands must understand volunteers' motivations and needs and actively communicate with them to attract and enroll them. They also need to ensure volunteers' satisfaction, so they retain their level of service (Sargeant 2005).

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Traditionally, volunteers were thought to be motivated by the altruistic act of giving (Rochester, Paine, and Howlett 2012) and to choose non-profit brands based on a strong socio-cultural fit and personal convictions. They showed loyalty and sought long-term relationships with organizations (Hustinx 2001). However, the non-profit sector has recently experienced an important change in the way volunteers interact with brands. This new way of volunteering focuses more on short-term executions, with individuals devoting fewer hours to their cause (Hustinx 2005) and pursuing flexible schedules (McKee and McKee 2012). They are also more extrinsically motivated in their choice of volunteering tasks; they seek opportunities for personal growth and activities with potential work-related benefits (Evans and Saxton 2005; Hustinx 2001). In general, these new volunteers often show a weaker sense of affiliation with organizations (Hustinx 2005). This new logic of volunteering is embedded in sociodemographic and economic factors such as increased levels of higher education, heavier school debt, competitive workplaces, and more individualistic and technologically mediated social dynamics (Evans and Saxton 2005; McKee and McKee 2012).

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3 This change in the nature of the relationship between individuals and non-profit brands  
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5 has become a significant preoccupation for managers. Indeed, a review by the International  
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7 Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies issues an “urgent call for greater debate,  
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9 research and analysis on the way volunteering is changing and being challenged” (IFRC 2015,  
10  
11 p.10). Non-profit managers seek insights and guidance, yet there is scant empirical evidence  
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13 addressing this challenge.  
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17 Brand relationship literature is useful for understanding traditional volunteering, which  
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19 represents a strong, lasting, and intense relation mirroring the literature’s portrayal of an ideal  
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21 brand relationship style (e.g., Albert and Thomson 2018; Connors et al. 2021). The new type of  
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23 volunteer, however, displays low-intensity, ad hoc, task-driven, and episodic encounters with the  
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25 brand. While this relationship evolution echoes suggestions in the literature that brand  
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27 constituents may come to favor flexibility, adaptability, detachment, peripheral affiliation, and  
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29 swiftness in their brand relationships (Arvidsson and Caliandro 2016; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017;  
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31 Coupland 2005), such non-intensifying relationships have yet to be theorized.  
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35 We surmise that the new manner in which volunteers interact with the brand can be more  
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37 generally thought of as a *non-escalating brand relationship*. A non-escalating brand relationship  
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39 manifests as a looser and more distant relationship between individuals and brands. Non-  
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41 escalation does not imply a decreasing trajectory in engagement, but indicates a lower level of  
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43 intensity for some brand members. Importantly, a non-escalating relationship *maintains* a  
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45 connection, but the relationship manifests as more distant, more modest, and less intense.  
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50 Our paper conceptualizes such a relationship, which we hereafter refer to as *neither-*  
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52 *growing-nor-fading* (NGNF), and illustrates how brands can successfully manage it. To do so,  
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54 we draw on practice theory, which assumes that intelligibility and understanding lie not in the  
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mind but in the practices, or patterns of actions, that are shared across people (Dolbec, Arsel, and Aboelenien 2022; Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). Leveraging the context of the non-profit sector, we identify the practice elements that help a brand embrace and foster these weaker, but lasting, relationships without neglecting the base of volunteers pursuing a classic growth-oriented relationship.

More specifically, we conducted multi-year in-depth fieldwork with the Red Cross in Austria, a strong and well-known non-profit brand. We actively engaged at the Vienna Red Cross (VRC) and conducted in-depth interviews with employees and volunteers at different levels and of varying tenure. We sought a deeper understanding of how NGNF relationships manifest in an NPO, how they can coexist next to classic growth-oriented relationships, and how both relationship types can be successfully managed by organizations. Our findings answer the following questions: (1) How do NGNF volunteer relationships manifest and compare to growth-oriented relationships within a non-profit organization? (2) How does a non-profit brand orchestrate practices that foster traditional growth-oriented relationships while also embracing NGNF relationships?

This study thus adds to and extends work on brand relationships. Our focus on NGNF relationships represents a departure from the axiology of growth typically encountered and encouraged in marketing literature (Park, McInnis, and Priester 2014). In a world in which the dominant marketing ideology is associated with progress, efficiency, and profit (Marion 2006), and where stronger relationships are shown to lead to higher brand loyalty, positively influencing market share, cash flow, and profits (Khamitov, Wang, and Thompson 2019; Park, MacInnis, and Priester 2014), non-escalating relationships might be frowned upon by brand managers. Against this background, our research contributes to the ongoing study of brand relationship

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trajectories and reinforces the importance of addressing the “full spectrum of consumer–brand relationships” (Connors et al. 2021, p. 103).<sup>1</sup> We expand research on brand relationships beyond the for-profit sector by focusing on non-profit brand relations, thus offering a new perspective on marketing contexts in which brand relationships manifest.<sup>2</sup>

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, we revisit extant work on brand relationships to illustrate the importance of not only focusing on growth-oriented but also on more distant relationships (Connors et al. 2021). Second, we introduce practice theory as our enabling lens to investigate the strategies non-profit brands deploy to manage these distinct brand relationships. Third, we outline the study context and describe our methodological approach. Last, we develop our findings and specify their theoretical and practical implications.

## Brand Relationships Beyond Growth

Brand relationship theory constitutes one of the most important areas in marketing, with hundreds of articles addressing the role brands play in the lives of individuals (Albert and Thomson 2018; Fournier 1998). This body of work overwhelmingly focuses on positive emotions and relationships and is permeated by a strong emphasis on growth, reflecting the field’s preoccupation with relationship intensification and its tendency to equate relationship strength with value for organizations. As Park, McInnis, and Priester (2014, p. 379) put it, “[S]trong brand relationships offer the greatest economic profit potential to companies; hence they matter to customers, meaning makers, and the companies that produce them.” Indeed, for Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004, p. 1), “[R]elationship strength predominates in marketing,” a

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteering manifests as a particular way of consuming a brand’s—in this case, a non-profit brand’s—value proposition, or in Wilson and Musick’s (1997, p. 696) words, “the consumption of a symbolic good.”

<sup>2</sup> Research in the non-profit sector has not historically focused on brand relationships. Rather, it has generally concentrated on donations, brand management, brand orientation, non-profit and for-profit partnerships, communication strategies, and stakeholder management (Sepulcri, Mainardes, and Belchior 2020).

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tendency “reflected in prevailing brand-management approaches that aim to move people from ‘weak or indifferent’ relationships (Fournier and Alvarez 2013, p. 253) to stronger ones in which they are more attached to, connected to, or in love with a brand” (Connors et al. 2021, p. 92).

The preoccupation with strength and growth is equally evident in Albert and Thomson’s (2018) review of the brand relationship literature. They identify core concepts that have both a high presence and significance in the literature, including attachment, loyalty, commitment, love, and connection. Much attention has been given to “brands with legendary or cult status and the strong visceral element that characterizes consumers’ experience of these brands” (Diamond et al. 2009, p. 119). Anecdotes of brand love abound, with examples ranging from people affectionally stroking their cars to tattooing a brand logo next to their heart. Cui, Mrad, and Hogg (2018, p. 118) go so far as to assert that brand addiction is “one of the most important ways that consumers engage with brands.” It seems that marketers’ default perspective with regards to brand relationships is often “the stronger the better.”

However, not all relationships follow this ideal, as Fournier (1998) addresses in her stress and entropy models. As she suggests, brand relationships can deteriorate and even dissolve because of various factors associated with the environment, the brand partner, or a lack of desire or motivation to keep the relationship alive. In a sense, Fournier’s models represent the flipside of the growth trajectory logic (i.e., while strong positive relations should grow, weaker, less positive relationships should dissolve). However, not all negative relationships come to an end. Individuals may find themselves entangled in enduring dysfunctional relationships (e.g. Alvarez et al. 2021; Fournier 1998). Moreover, not all positive relations survive; they can be experienced as flings (Alvarez and Fournier 2012) or flirts (Consiglio et al. 2018).

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3 Most notably, the extensive body of literature on brand relationships offers little  
4 reflection on relationships that last but that do not follow a growth trajectory. Connors and  
5 colleagues (2021, p. 102) are among the rare authors to draw attention to this phenomenon,  
6 acknowledging that some customers are content to maintain a rather distant relationship with  
7 brands. In their view, “It is unlikely that consumers will ever care about as many brands as  
8 marketers would want, so it is imperative that marketers learn to thrive within the constraints of  
9 existing brand relationships, many of which are rather distant.”

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19 Coupland (2005) offers another noteworthy exception by exploring how brands can  
20 become forgotten, minimized, and overlooked in the domestic sphere. She shows that after a  
21 period of novelty, many brands are stored, then progressively pooled and blended until they are  
22 no longer noticed. Coupland (2005) rightfully maintains that not all brand relationships are  
23 formed around heroic stories or identity-constructing narratives, showing that the power of a  
24 brand can instead reside in its capacity to incorporate an everyday household system silently and  
25 inconspicuously. This perspective confirms the importance of non-escalating relationships.  
26 However, not all brands in such a case end up as anonymous additions to the kitchen pantry;  
27 unremarkable relationships can also be experienced beyond the comfort of home. Indeed, such  
28 brand relationships exist in many areas of people’s lives and can manifest in various market  
29 contexts (Keller, 2021).

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45 We refer to these non-intensifying, non-growth-oriented brand relationships as *neither-*  
46 *growing-nor-fading* (NGNF). In NGNF relationships, brand commitment is characterized by  
47 non-escalation, implying brand connections that endure but that are more distant and modest.  
48 Individuals in NGNF relationships relate more passively to brands and yet can be perfectly  
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3 satisfied with these looser ties; they engage in this way out of personal choice, rather than  
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5 because of a lack of abilities or opportunities (Keller 2021).  
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8 While the marketing literature provides ample advice on how to manage brand  
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10 relationships that follow a growth trajectory, it remains mostly silent when it comes to NGNF  
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12 relationships. We argue that this gap is largely due to a focus on consumers and for-profit  
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14 contexts, in which intensifying relations and positive emotions are equated with profitability.  
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16 Studying brand relationships in a non-profit sector thus provides a unique opportunity to enrich  
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18 extant literature. Against this background, we adopt a practice theory lens to analyze how the  
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20 VRC successfully caters to volunteers engaged in an NGNF relationship, while simultaneously  
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22 catering to volunteers pursuing a growth-oriented relationship.  
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## 28 **Practices, their Elements, and Ecosystems**

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30 Theories of practice are particularly potent for understanding change and for tapping into  
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32 dynamics of transformation and stability (Dolbec, Arsel, and Aboelenien 2022; Shove, Pantzar,  
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34 and Watson 2012). They thus constitute a valuable enabling lens for our investigation of the  
35  
36 changing nature of volunteer relationships at the VRC. In marketing, “practice” has often been  
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38 used as a loose “cover term” for different actions and behaviors (Arsel and Bean 2013). When  
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40 conceptualized more thoroughly, though, the inherent complexity of the concept becomes clear.  
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42 Indeed, “practice” emerges not as a singular notion but rather as a profoundly “rich polysemic  
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44 word” (Hui, Schatzki, and Shove 2017, p. 2).  
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49 A practice is generally defined as a “routinized type of behavior [consisting] of several  
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51 elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities,  
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53 ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states  
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55 of emotion and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz 2002, p. 249). Scholars have employed  
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3 different terms to denote the constitutive elements of a practice or, as Schau and colleagues  
4 (2009, p. 35) refer to it, their “anatomical parts.” Typically, a practice is thought of as  
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6 comprising the tripartite interaction between materials (objects, equipment, technologies, and  
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8 tangible physical entities), doings (skills, techniques, competences, and know-how), and  
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10 meanings (symbols, ideas, and understandings); meanings are sometimes also referred to as  
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12 understandings, procedures, and engagements (Dolbec, Arsel, and Aboelenien 2022; Schau,  
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14 Muñiz, and Arnould 2009; Schatzki 2001; Warde 2005). These different practice elements relate  
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16 to and depend upon each other, and they exist through successive moments of performance.  
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21 While there is a general consensus that practices are “molar units” composed of smaller  
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23 elements, there is no agreement about “how big or small these units are” (Nicolini 2012, p. 10).  
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25 In fact, practices can subsume smaller practices. Coffee-making, for instance, comprises other  
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27 practices, such as cappuccino-making or pourover-making (Dolbec, Arsel, and Aboelenien  
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29 2022). One way to approach the level of abstraction between practices is to consider the  
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31 distinction between dispersed and integrative practices (Schatzki 1996). *Dispersed practices* are  
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33 “relatively simple, discrete practices that carry their own meanings, materialities, and  
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35 competences” (Bonetti et al. 2023, p. 871) and that can occur in various contexts. For instance,  
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37 “evangelizing” is a practice performed in a religious context that is also found within brand  
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39 communities (Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009). Dispersed practices are often woven into  
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41 *integrative practices* (Schatzki 1996), which are “complex practices found in and constitutive of  
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43 particular domains of social life” (p. 98). In marketing, retailing is an instance of an integrative  
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45 practice subsuming dispersed practices such as merchandizing and selling (Bonetti et al. 2023).  
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51 Integrative practices require not just an understanding of how to do something but also “a  
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53 knowledge of the context in which the practice is embedded” (Arsel and Bean 2013, p. 901).  
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3 According to Schatzki (2002), this context is comprised of practical understanding, rules,  
4 teleoaffective structure, and general understanding, all of which interconnect the various actions  
5 of the practice (Nicolini 2012; Schatzki 2002). Marketing literature has focused particularly on  
6 the teleoaffective structure to understand how practices unfold. A teleoaffective structure  
7 prescribes a set of acceptable ends or uses (Schatzki 1996) and assures that practices unfold  
8 “according to a specific direction and ‘oughtness,’ or ‘how they should be carried out’.”  
9 (Nicolini 2012, p. 166). Arsel and Bean (2013) explore how taste regimes operate as a  
10 teleoaffective structure in which practices are orchestrated, while Spotswood and colleagues  
11 (2023) study the changes to consumers’ strength training practices because of pandemic  
12 disruptions and illustrate how practice adaptation is facilitated or inhibited by more or less rigid  
13 teleoaffective structures. Following this line of work, we thus also focus on the teleoaffective  
14 structure of integrative practices.  
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## Practices of Brand Relationship Management

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35 Marketing scholars have recently given more attention to organizational practices,  
36 including practices of integrating AI in retail environments (Bonetti et al. 2023) or disseminating  
37 market intelligence within organizations (Gebhardt, Farrelly, and Conduit 2019). Organizational  
38 practices are defined as “particular ways of conducting organizational functions that have  
39 evolved over time under the influence of an organization's history, people, interests, and actions  
40 and that have become institutionalized in the organization” (Kostova 1999, p. 309). In contrast to  
41 consumption practices, which can be looked at solely from the perspective of the consumer who  
42 performs the practice—such as listening to digital music (Magaudda 2011) or repairing one’s  
43 climbing shoes (Godfrey, Price, and Lusch 2022)—organizational practices necessarily involve  
44 different actors. For instance, Bonetti et al. (2023, p. 869) distinguish between “practice  
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3 champions,” meaning “those who intentionally disseminate a practice,” and “practice  
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5 participants,” who “perform a practice,” and consider how both types of actors contribute to the  
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7 performance of retailing.  
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10           Against this background, brand relationship management practices can be thought of as  
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12 “meaning-making, identity forming, and order-producing activities” (Nicolini 2012, p. 7) that  
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14 enable an organization to sustain different types of brand relationships. They are inherently  
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16 boundary-spanning in that they connect individuals from various backgrounds with brands,  
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18 including managers, employees, and consumers.  
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21           Extant literature on brand relationship management has provided guidance on nurturing  
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23 strong, thriving connections with consumers (see Web Appendix A, Table W1). However, to  
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25 date, researchers have neither directly conceptualized nor empirically investigated brand  
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27 relationship management from a practice-theoretical lens. Those that have done so, such as  
28  
29 Schau and colleagues (2009) and Kelleher and colleagues (2019), focus on consumers, not the  
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31 organizational practices of a brand. We argue that practice theory is essential to addressing this  
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33 gap, as brand managers must carefully manage practice elements to enable individuals to sustain  
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35 relationships with the brand. Furthermore, the literature offers little practical guidance when it  
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37 comes to NGNF relationships. More research is needed to provide actionable recommendations  
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39 for such relationships. Indeed, navigating relationships that are not intended to grow may require  
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41 brands to employ alternative methods to ensure a sustained path of detached brand connection.  
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46           We contend that the changing landscape of volunteering and the VRC’s response to these  
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48 changes in terms of their brand relationship practices provides a rich context with which to  
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50 leverage the potential of practice theory and add to brand relationship literature. From a practice  
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52 theory perspective, managing brand relationships with volunteers requires a wide range of  
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practice elements assembled by and shared within an organization in order to develop and structure forms of volunteer engagement that will be beneficial to the volunteers as well as to the organization's mission. Our research aims to illustrate how the purposeful assemblage of meanings, doings, and materiality allows non-profit brands to sustain NGNF relationships while also catering to existing growth-oriented relationships with volunteers.

## Research Context and Methods

The Vienna Red Cross (VRC) is a regional association of the Austrian Red Cross that fulfills important functions in Austrian society across its four core areas: (1) emergency medical services; (2) ambulance services; (3) disaster relief services; and (4) social services and healthcare. In Austria, the VRC has the legal status of a charitable non-profit organization. It was founded in 1961 with 25 employees and 197 volunteers, a number that reflects the importance of volunteers for the VRC as a volunteer-based organization.<sup>3</sup>

The VRC is particularly well suited as our case study brand because of its unique sample of members, some of whom have been with the organization since its foundation. Our access to these members allowed us to explore how they relate to the brand and how the VRC has developed and incorporated brand relationship practices to handle the changing demands of the volunteer market. Moreover, the first author's prolonged involvement with the VRC as a volunteer gave us access to all formal and personal archival material collected by the VRC since its inception, as well as to resources such as training materials and member databases.

The VRC has two types of volunteers. The first kind of volunteers are "Executive Members" [*Ausführende Mitglieder*], henceforth referred to as "EMs," who have committed

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<sup>3</sup> This means that volunteers always have the ultimate authority with regards to strategic decisions (e.g., by assuring that there are more volunteers with voting rights than employees). See Web Appendix B for more details.

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3 themselves to a minimum of two shifts per month, which give them access to services offered by  
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5 the community and free trainings. As core members in the management of the VRC, these  
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7 volunteers are carefully integrated into the organization, whose objective is to retain them as life-  
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9 long contributors. EMs serve as brand ambassadors and play a crucial role in shaping and  
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11 embodying the values of the Red Cross. They know its history and guiding principles<sup>4</sup>, which are  
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13 reinforced at official events such as the inauguration of new members. They join the organization  
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15 at one of five district offices in Vienna, which are managed by EMs and have their own physical  
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17 infrastructure (such as offices, clubrooms, or vehicle fleets) to accommodate volunteers and to  
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19 hold social gatherings and formal trainings.  
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24 The second volunteer type, Team Austria [*Team Österreich*] members (henceforth  
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26 referred to as “TAs”), engage with the Red Cross on a sporadic basis. They are not eligible to  
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28 participate in trainings and have no access to Red Cross uniforms or the physical infrastructure  
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30 of the district offices. They contribute to different areas of the organization’s activity,  
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32 particularly when a specific need arises (e.g., translating documents). Before TAs were added,  
33  
34 the VRC had unsuccessfully created a volunteer category called “Active Now”<sup>5</sup>, henceforth  
35  
36 referred to as “ANs,” to facilitate the integration of the new volunteer type. We will discuss ANs  
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38 in more detail in the findings section.  
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## 43 ***Data Sources and Analysis***

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45 Following other marketing practice scholars (e.g., Maciel and Fischer 2020; Schau,  
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47 Muñiz, and Arnould 2009), we gathered data from multiple qualitative perspectives (see Table  
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49 1). First, we conducted participant observations within the VRC and during various operations in  
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55 <sup>4</sup> Humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality.

56 <sup>5</sup> No German name was used by the VRC. Only the English term “Active Now” was employed.  
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3 the field. The first author, an EM for several years, took extensive notes on activities (mostly in  
4 social service and health care). Observations began in November 2014 and continued until 2018,  
5  
6 with additional member checks, informal interviews, and sporadic field incursions continuing to  
7  
8 April 2021. We were involved in activities ranging from routine tasks to more exceptional work  
9  
10 at refugee houses during the 2015 crisis, which saw a huge influx of Syrian refugees to Austria.  
11  
12 Our in-depth involvement with the VRC allowed us to observe how the brand developed its  
13  
14 practices and deployed them to manage the different types of volunteers.  
15  
16  
17  
18

19           Second, we gathered various artifacts concerning the organization. The VRC provided us  
20  
21 with rich and diverse historical materials related to current and former employees and volunteers.  
22  
23 This material includes official bylaws, training handbooks, brochures, leaflets, and operation  
24  
25 plans but also more informal collections of work and meeting protocols, photos, internal notes  
26  
27 taken by VRC executives, and executives' correspondence. We also systematically assessed the  
28  
29 main periodic VRC publication (i.e., the "*Vorrang*" magazine sent to EMs), as well as any  
30  
31 available reports, white papers, newspapers, magazine articles, and websites. We were able to  
32  
33 trace the rising complexity in the organization that arose in response to changes in people's mode  
34  
35 of volunteering, and that ultimately led to the creation of Team Austria.  
36  
37  
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39

40           Third, to examine VRC members' perceptions of volunteering and of other volunteers,  
41  
42 and to further explore the brand's practices, we conducted in-depth interviews with 22  
43  
44 informants—employees, EMs, and TAs.  
45  
46

47           To analyze the data, we gathered all notes taken in the field and during the observation  
48  
49 sessions, all archival documents, and the interview transcriptions. As Bernard and Ryan (2010)  
50  
51 recommend, we paid particular attention when open-coding notes, archival data, and interviews  
52  
53 to uncovering within- and between-actor category patterns (e.g., employees vs EMs vs TAs).  
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**Table 1. Overview of Data Sources**

<b>Archival Data</b>			
<b>Types of Sources</b>	<b>Description / Exemplary Sources</b>	<b>Number of Issues, Reports or Pages</b>	
VRC member magazine “Vorrang”	Magazine published four times a year with information about activities and new developments sent out to EMs;	50 Issues	
VRC annual report	Annual reports outlining major achievements and statistics regarding members and their contribution.	19 reports	
Internal documents	Letters, documents, correspondence, training handbooks, activity statistics, announcements, brochures, protocols, photos, notes, advertisements.	272 pages (period from 1950 to 2007)	
Volunteer magazines	Civil protection Magazine.	Scattered issues (period from 1990 to 2012)	
<b>Interview Data</b>			
<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>VRC Entry</b>	<b>Type of VRC member</b>
Alan	Male	2012	Executive Member
Arnold	Male	2004	Executive Member
Ben	Male	2008	Executive Member
Clara	Female	1971	Executive Member
Geraldine	Female	1965	Executive Member
Herbert	Male	1996	Executive Member
John	Male	1958	Executive Member
Renee	Female	1981	Executive Member
Ronald	Male	1962	Executive Member
Sandra	Female	1992	Executive Member
Walter	Male	2001	Executive Member
Anna	Female	2014	Team Austria
Carol	Female	2002	Team Austria
Eva	Female	2015	Team Austria
Hans	Male	2011	Team Austria
Lisa	Female	2011	Team Austria
Martin	Male	1964*	Team Austria
Michael	Male	2007	Team Austria
Roy	Male	2014	Team Austria
Serge	Male	2015	Team Austria
Jasmin	Female	2002	Employee
Konrad	Male	1995	Employee
<b>Observational Data</b>			
<b>Type of Event</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Engagement</b>	
Information Sessions	3-hour sessions presenting the principles of the Red Cross, the functioning of the VRC, and the different membership types.	Participant observation in 2015, 2018 and 2021	
Training	First aid course.	2016	
Volunteer work	Involvement in the documentation team at a district office and humanitarian operations (e.g., refugee house).	2015-2016; 2019	

\*Note: Martin was a very active EM but decided to change to TA once he retired a few years ago.

This approach helped us understand how informants in each category perceived what volunteering meant and how they relate to the brand and to each other. It also gave us insights

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1  
2  
3 into the teleoaffective structure that holds together the VRC's integrative practices of managing  
4  
5 EM-type and TA-type brand relationships respectively.  
6

7  
8 The "meanings" were gleaned from a detailed analysis of archival data depicting the  
9  
10 VRC's internal and external official discourse, as well as of interviews offering a lived  
11  
12 perspective on how VRC members understood and experienced practices. The "doings" and  
13  
14 "materials" were unpacked through analysis of the interviews and our observation and field  
15  
16 notes. The abstraction and comparison of codes allowed us to reveal patterns related to the  
17  
18 development and evolution of brand relationship management practices and to the levels at  
19  
20 which practice elements are mobilized (Spiggle 1994).  
21  
22

23  
24 As mentioned, practices can be scrutinized at various levels of abstraction. Our analysis  
25  
26 unveils an intricate network of practices, encompassing both higher and lower orders. At the  
27  
28 apex lies the practice of brand relationship management, encapsulating all efforts to foster  
29  
30 relationships with the brand. This overarching practice is delineated into two integrative  
31  
32 practices: the management of growth-oriented relationships and the management of NGNF  
33  
34 relationships. Each of these practices has its own teleoaffective structure that provides its  
35  
36 normativity and affective coloring, and each subsumes different high-order and low-order  
37  
38 dispersed practices. On the higher order, we identified practices of *building* and *cultivating*  
39  
40 members in growth-oriented relationships and practices of *acquiring* and *activating* on the  
41  
42 NGNF side.  
43  
44

45  
46 Each of these practices further subsumes a large number of lower-order practices, such as  
47  
48 "welcoming," "evangelizing," "training," and so on. While it is possible to "zoom in" to such a  
49  
50 granular level, articulating an in-depth exploration of the anatomy of each dispersed practice is  
51  
52 difficult. At this level, it becomes challenging to maintain the conceptual integrity of practices by  
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clearly delineating practice elements. As an exhaustive list and analysis of these lower-level practices is offered by Schau and colleagues (2009), we thus chose to focus on higher-order dispersed practices. We provide a complementary perspective by precisely demonstrating for each practice how the VRC articulates multiple configurations of practice elements. This level of analysis also allows us to elucidate even higher connections arising at the level of integrative practices. We explore how growth-oriented and NGNF relationship practices connect within the organization. We shared preliminary findings with select subgroups of volunteers and members of the VRC management team to complement our understanding and to ensure that our depiction of the brand's historical development was accurate.

## **Managing Different Relationship Types at the VRC**

We structure our findings around the three different types of volunteer relationships and accompanying practices at the VRC: (1) practices to manage relationships with Executive Members (EMs), which epitomize the trajectory of intensification widely described in brand relationship literature; (2) the misalignment of practices and teleoaffective structure in the unsuccessful program Active Now (AN), which was developed in response to the changing logic of volunteering; and (3) practices assembled to manage Team Austria volunteers (TAs), a NGNF brand relationship that highlights the value of embracing individuals who are “just not that into you” (Connors et al. 2022).

## ***Managing Growing Brand Relationships as Building Blocks of the VRC***

Since its inception, the VRC has laid the groundwork for strong brand relationships with EMs, as these volunteers have been, and continue to be, the bedrock of the organization. The relationship onset is characterized by a strong pull mechanism, with EMs often recounting being



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1  
2  
3 drawn to joining the VRC. This path sometimes seems set from the beginning for the individual.

4  
5 This is the case for Sandra, who joined the VRC in 1992 because her parents were both very  
6  
7 active and her mother Geraldine has been heading a district office for over 15 years. Alan, a  
8  
9 more recent EM who joined 20 years after Sandra, was also “*born into a Red Cross family*”:

10  
11  
12 *I am a Red Cross child. I think my parents met 30 years ago at the Red Cross (...) It is*  
13  
14 *like a huge dating agency [laughs]. I grew up with my father driving rescue vehicles*  
15  
16 *every day, he still does today... and I joined the VRC when I was 17 years old.*

17  
18  
19 In cases where familial ties do not begin the relationship, EMs often feel a strong calling to join.

20  
21 For instance, Ronald (EM) reminisces: “*As a little boy, I saw injured people being transported*  
22  
23 *away [by the Red Cross]. And that is when I said, ‘that’s what I want to do when I grow up’.*”

24  
25 Several EMs shared similar stories when we asked them about their beginnings at the VRC.

26  
27 Arnold explained that he “*just knew*” that this is what he wanted to do, and John also “*needed no*  
28  
29 *one to recruit me. It was me who knocked on their doors and said ‘please, I want to join’*  
30  
31 *[laughs].*”

32  
33  
34  
35 EMs demonstrate a strong sense of duty and devotion. Geraldine explains that in her  
36  
37 early years at the Red Cross (in the late 1960s), volunteers had a saying: “*Joining the Red Cross*  
38  
39 *and leaving the Red Cross, that is voluntary. Everything else is duty.*” For her, volunteering with  
40  
41 the Red Cross and thus giving back to the community is something everyone ought to do. This  
42  
43 calling and strong sense of duty, the “*oughtness*” (Nicolini 2012) of volunteering at the VRC,  
44  
45 operates as a teleoaffective structure for the integrative practice of managing growth-oriented  
46  
47 relationships. Our analysis reveals two dispersed practices, *building* and *cultivating*, that are  
48  
49 crucial to successfully managing these relationships.  
50  
51  
52

53  
54 *Building relationships*

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1  
2  
3 The practice of *building* guides the early stages of EM's relationship with the VRC and  
4 assures that EMs embark on a path of growth. Overall, building aims to transmit the values of the  
5 Red Cross, inculcate a sense of what volunteering as an EM means, provide newcomers with  
6 foundational knowledge, and officialize their incorporation as EMs. To this end, the VRC draws  
7 on multiple configurations of material elements, meanings, and doings conducive to this stage.

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9  
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12  
13  
14  
15 Future EMs are often exposed to the physical environment of the VRC at the beginning:  
16 interested individuals can either attend formal information events at the regional headquarters in  
17 Vienna or come to one of the frequent open-door days at a district office located close to them.  
18 District offices have a day per week when EMs are present for a period of a few hours to answer  
19 questions and provide information about different core areas and minimum service requirements,  
20 for example, but also about social gatherings and tacit norms. From this first encounter, future  
21 EMs are exposed to the idea (and ideal) of "what it means to be a volunteer at the Red Cross,"  
22 highlighting the understanding the VRC wants to convey regarding their potential relationship.  
23 When asked, "[W]hat does it mean to be an EM according to you?" Sandra (EM) replied:

24  
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27  
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30  
31  
32  
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34  
35 *Responsibility. I have a responsibility to my association. I think that's the best way to put*  
36 *it. Yes, the responsibility to give time, the responsibility to represent the Red Cross*  
37 *correctly in ALL (strongly emphasized) areas. I am a Red Cross member. And I always*  
38 *have to behave like one, regardless of whether I'm wearing the uniform or not.*

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Once they officially join by filling out and signing a membership form, new volunteers are warmly welcomed and socialized into the community by fellow EMs. At these early stages of their relationship with the VRC, volunteers are guided by senior EMs who assume different roles: some act as supervisors and take on new volunteers while others act as mentors to advise EMs about trainings they can follow (Field notes). Internal documents provide complementary

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1  
2  
3 guidance for newcomers on how to perform their service and accurately represent the  
4  
5 organization, including details on how to wear the uniform (Web Appendix C, Figure W1).  
6

7  
8 All new EMs must complete a compulsory 16-hour first-aid course at their respective  
9  
10 district office. After six months, when volunteers have completed this course and fulfilled their  
11  
12 minimum service requirement, they receive a formal letter signed by the Red Cross president  
13  
14 welcoming them as “*part of the Red Cross.*” To further emphasize and celebrate their integration,  
15  
16 EMs are invited to attend an inauguration event in the presence of other new and older members.  
17  
18 In our field notes, we recorded the “*presence of several hundred people, sometimes in uniforms,*  
19  
20 *sometimes in formal attire*” at such an event. Jasmin (employee), who has already moderated an  
21  
22 inauguration, shares her experience of the event:  
23  
24

25  
26 *All the important people are present: the management, the entire Executive Committee.*  
27  
28 *(...) It is an important event with an official invitation. And we do it because we really*  
29  
30 *want to recognize the service, because their [the volunteers'] effort is so valuable. We*  
31  
32 *don't just take it for granted that they spend a lot of their free time here, we don't assume*  
33  
34 *this and instead want to recognize in this very official and festive setting.*  
35  
36

37  
38 This inauguration serves as a powerful context for conveying meanings. It was striking “*to see*  
39  
40 *how brand values are stressed and reiterated in the encounters and the official ceremony*” (Field  
41  
42 Notes). Our archival data includes excerpts of the presidential address: “*During your training,*  
43  
44 *you learned the craft of how to help other people. Now it is up to you to also take responsibility*  
45  
46 *for your Red Cross activities yourself.*” The inauguration officializes the integration and  
47  
48 concludes the VRC’s brand relationship practice of building a strong relationship with new  
49  
50  
51  
52 volunteers.

53  
54 *Cultivating relationships*  
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Cultivating mobilizes different practice elements that assure EMs continue on their path of growth. A core element is setting up a training system for each of the four core areas that allows individuals to reinforce their competences. For example, disaster relief trainings include “logistics,” “search and rescue,” “psycho-social services,” and “documentation.” Held at the district office, trainings allow volunteers to always “*keep their skills and abilities up to date with the latest best practices*” (Information Brochure on Trainings, Web Appendix C, Figure W2).

EMs gain in status with the more trainings they complete, the more competences they grow, and the more time they spend volunteering. The tenure and strength of their relationship with the VRC are officialized in a ranking system featured on badges displayed on their uniform (Web Appendix C, Figures W3 and W4). This ranking system, akin to military ranks, aims to facilitate organization in the field. Each rank is signaled by a badge, depicting a number of stars that EMs internally refer to as “*cookies*.” These stars signal a certain level of skills and know-how, which in turn allow EMs to orchestrate activities in the field following a chain of command, as Ronald (EM) illustrates:

*The basic principle behind it [the badges and stars] is clearly intended for large-scale activities, when many people are there to fulfill a certain task. So, it gives the person in charge the possibility to decide more quickly, because they know who has what rank.*

Finally, in order to support this path of intensification, the VRC set mechanisms in place to remind volunteers of their engagement and prevent possible defections. This occurs through various forms of communication (e.g., updates via text message or newsletters sent from district offices), and through peer encouragement to join the weekly get-together at the district office or other social gatherings: “*We were encouraged to let others know that we had been missing them during the event, that we would be happy to see them at the next occasion. We were told that this*

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was important because it showed that we cared” (Field Notes). EMs internalize this view, as expressed by Ben (EM) who emphasizes the importance of EMs’ presence at events (see Web Appendix C Figures W5 to W7 for examples of such events):

*There is always a member day where everyone is there (...) you kind of have to be there, because it’s kind of like a school class or a soccer team, if you’re not there then it’s kind of weird. You can’t just go there [to the VRC] anonymously, say, “I’m doing my service, I’m doing it well,” and then go home. That’s not really wanted..., instead it’s... [thinks a moment] it’s a little bit required, I’d say, by the group.*

Ben’s experience also highlights the interlinkage and interdependence of practice elements, since actions of communicating to other members about what it means to be an EM are necessarily related to a material sphere—in particular, the district offices. District offices are “*the home of EMs. This is where they live, where they go when everything else becomes too much. This is where people know each other and where they exchange ideas*” (Geraldine, EM).

In summary, the VRC has implemented two finely tuned practices, *building* and *cultivating*, to nurture growth-oriented relationships (see Table 2 for a summary). To execute each practice, a variety of elements comes into play. Acquiring a sense of duty, assimilating principles and norms, gaining status and responsibilities, and increasing specialization and engagement essentially constitute the core *meanings* of both practices. District offices, uniforms and badges, letters, text messages, newsletters and “the field” are important *material aspects*. Finally, ongoing interactions between members, trainings, mentoring, and duty reminders are important aspects of the *doing element*.

**Table 2. Practice Anatomy for Growth-Related Relationship Management at the VRC**

MEANINGS	MATERIALS	DOINGS
----------	-----------	--------

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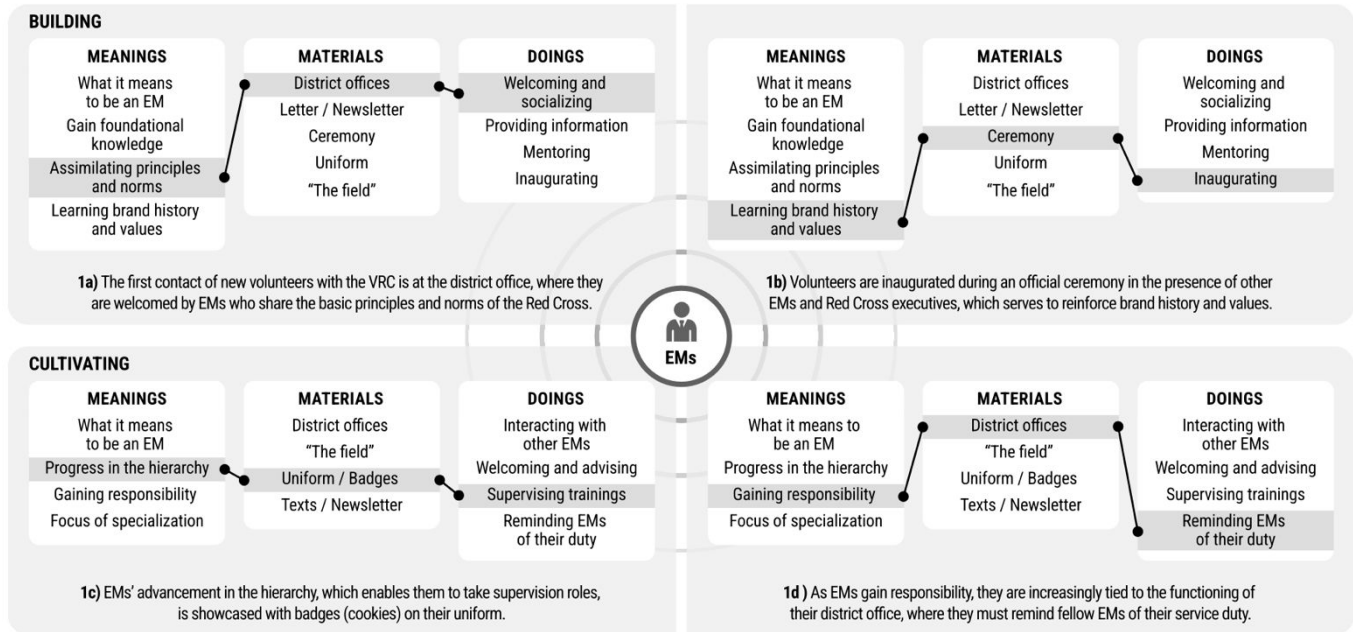
BUILDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Builds the foundation to set volunteers on the path of growth.</li> <li>- Inculcates organizational values and a meaning of volunteering, to provide foundational knowledge, and officialize the incorporation of members into the organization.</li> <li>- Sets the stage for the practice of cultivating.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A main physical site for volunteers. Other sites mobilized depending on the organization's activities.</li> <li>- Visual cues, such as a uniform.</li> <li>- Emails, newsletters, magazines, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organizes open-door events where interested people can show up at the organization and ask questions to volunteers about volunteer work.</li> <li>- Pairs up senior volunteers and newcomers so that seniors could provide mentorship.</li> <li>- Offers official trainings to newcomers to make sure they master certain basic aspects of volunteering work in line with the organization.</li> <li>- Organizes events to officialize the incorporation of new EMs (e.g., a ceremony, an awards luncheon, etc.). Offers visual cues to members.</li> <li>- Informs about the organization, celebrates its values, and reinforces the meaning of volunteering. Uses newsletters, magazines, etc.</li> </ul>
CULTIVATING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creates continuity after integration.</li> <li>- Makes sure the meaning of volunteering persists.</li> <li>- Makes sure EMs' engagement keeps growing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The main physical site continues being used by EMs. Other physical sites are mobilized, depending on specific activities.</li> <li>- Visual cues, such as badges, mark the milestones achieved by EMs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continues to inform EMs about organizational affairs, celebrates the organization's values, and reinforces the meaning of volunteering.</li> <li>- Codifies progress and identifies key milestones, the criteria needed to reach them, and the visual cues showcasing their achievement.</li> <li>- Teaches EMs how to properly wear and care for the uniform.</li> <li>- Provides mentoring by senior EMs.</li> <li>- Offers advanced trainings.</li> <li>- Instructs and encourages EMs to remind other EMs of the importance of attending designated spaces and/or events.</li> </ul>

The VRC aptly navigates each practice by mobilizing multiple configurations of practice elements. Figure 1 illustrates examples of how different practice elements are mobilized. EMs play a pivotal dual role in both practices. They actively participate in the practices by integrating into a district office undergoing proper training and advancing through the hierarchy as outlined by the VRC. As they gain seniority, experience, and autonomy, they transition into “practice champions” (Bonetti et al. 2023) responsible for guiding the younger, emerging generation of volunteers and therefore enforce *building* and *cultivating* relationships with them.

**Figure 1. Mobilizing Practice Elements for Building and Cultivating Growth-Oriented Brand Relationship**



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### ***Active Now! Trying to Integrate New Volunteers into Existing Practices***

A few decades after its inception in 1961, the VRC started observing a shift in the way volunteers related to non-profit brands. Archival data from 1992 shows the then-regional president expressing concern in an open letter, lamenting: *"There has been a shift in the attitude of helpers toward the task at hand and basic social values per se. Helping is increasingly no longer a value in itself"* (Vorrang Magazine, February 1992, p. 25). As changes in how people wanted to volunteer became increasingly palpable, VRC managers felt rising pressure about how to welcome new volunteers, as Arnold (EM) describes:

*Nowadays, and I believe this has something to do with the changing lifestyle, you want to help, for one project, and once the project is over, it might be weeks, months, or years... until you get involved with the next one. I do believe this is the present zeitgeist and therefore, this is a major challenge that the Red Cross is confronted with and where it must make sure it manages well.*

This remark by Arnold, a senior EM with leadership functions, aligns well with the context we outlined in the introduction. EM registrations began to decrease at the same time as the

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1  
2  
3 organization noticed increasing interest from volunteers seeking to provide occasional help  
4  
5 without the obligation of training and minimum monthly services. The VRC saw itself  
6  
7 confronted with individuals who moved away from long-term relationships and favored shorter,  
8  
9 less dedicated, more flexible, engagements (Hustinx 2005).  
10

11  
12 It became increasingly obvious that the VRC had to find a way to accommodate this  
13  
14 “new breed” (McKee and McKee 2012) of volunteers. It thus created a new volunteering  
15  
16 program called *Active Now*. The objective was clear: attracting those individuals who were  
17  
18 looking for volunteering with less commitment. The VRC’s initiative to accommodate this new  
19  
20 volunteering logic, and the idea of Active Now (AN), were met with great interest by other  
21  
22 regional associations of the Austrian Red Cross. Jasmin (employee), felt that AN was “*a turning*  
23  
24 *point when it comes to volunteering at the VRC.*” She added: “*The original motivation was*  
25  
26 *actually the increasing amount of offers from people who said they want to do something*  
27  
28 *voluntarily, but not with a long training (...)* So we said let’s offer Active Now, for a limited  
29  
30 *amount of time without any formation, trainings, and so on.*”  
31  
32  
33  
34

35  
36 AN was successful in the sense that it brought new volunteers to the VRC. Yet it failed in  
37  
38 offering them the type of stable yet distant relationship they were searching for. Instead, the  
39  
40 program was designed to set them on a path of relationship growth and was embedded in the  
41  
42 same teleoaffective structure as EM volunteering. AN membership was restricted to a period of  
43  
44 six months, after which members were expected to become EMs or leave the VRC. Thus, the  
45  
46 VRC integrated AN volunteers in the same upward trajectory as it used with EMs; it mobilized  
47  
48 the same growth-oriented practices of building and cultivating the relationship, but did so only  
49  
50 after a 6-month delay. This strategy was in line with the organizations’ predominant emphasis on  
51  
52 growth and illustrates the value and priority put on strong relationships over other kinds.  
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3 However, ANs showed little interest in the growth-oriented practice elements set up by  
4 the VRC, such as incorporating in a district office or participating in social events. Unlike their  
5 EM counterparts, they were indifferent to the knowledge support provided by the VRC and  
6 displayed no interest in climbing the hierarchy established for EMs, a central element in  
7 cultivating relationships at the VRC. Their focus was on fulfilling their volunteer tasks when  
8 their schedules permitted, then returning to their homes instead of socializing with other  
9 volunteers at the district office. The VRC failed to instill the teleoaffective structure and to  
10 mobilize the practice elements of growth-oriented relationship practices among these new  
11 volunteers. Reflecting on AN, Geraldine (EM) shares: “[T]he attachment to the Red Cross was  
12 not the same. For them it was an organization like any other.” Herbert (EM) adds that for AN  
13 volunteers it was just “mostly fun.”  
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28 Notwithstanding this mismatch, interest from individuals seeking flexible, task-specific,  
29 and less rigid forms of volunteering remained present. For the VRC and other regional Red Cross  
30 associations in Austria, it was imperative to find a way to successfully integrate these volunteers.  
31  
32

## 33 ***Creating New Practices around Team Austria***

34  
35  
36  
37  
38 Responding to the great interest in more flexible, more task-specific, and less rigid forms  
39 of volunteering, Team Austria [*Team Österreich*] or TA was created in 2007 in a joint national  
40 effort by all regional Red Cross organizations as well as Ö3, the country’s largest radio station.  
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TA effectively superseded AN within the VRC. From the outset, the program was designed  
separately from the EM structure, with its own identity and Team Austria logo (Web Appendix  
C, Figures W8 to W10).

The first important step to successfully embracing new TA volunteers and integrating  
NGNF relationships into the organization was to depart from predefined ideas about what brand

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members should look like in terms of their values and volunteer aspirations. Instead, the VRC described itself as ready “*for whomever wants to help, irrespective of their age, or their background, or how much time they can spend*” (Jasmin, employee). Arnold’s (EM) expectations about new volunteers also reflect this more relaxed view of volunteering: “[D]o they [new volunteers] really need to know that the Red Cross was founded in 1863? Be able to list the guiding principles by heart? Maybe we should just be thankful that they gave their time...”

Indeed, to TAs, volunteering does not imply a long-lasting and intense relationship with the Red Cross but is rooted in a pragmatic mentality of simplicity and flexibility (Evans and Saxton 2005; Hustinx 2001). For example, Hans (TA) explains why he had no desire to join EMs:

*Honestly, I am a bit too lazy [to become an EM]. At a district office, you must do two services a month. But I have a 40-hour job with night shifts, a child at home and a second one on its way... I don't always manage to volunteer two times a month. I often don't do it for three, four months and then again, I volunteer two, three times in a row.*

Accepting the distinct teleoaffective structure in which NGNF relationships are embedded was crucial for the VRC to create practices that allow TAs to entertain the kind of brand relationship they were looking for: distant, yet stable. To prevent mismatches, the VRC clearly communicates the teleoaffective structure of Team Austria volunteering: it invites individuals interested in “*uncomplicated helping without obligation*” (Red Cross 2024) to become involved as “*project-based volunteers.*” Our analysis revealed two practices the VRC set up to manage NGNF brand relationships with TAs: acquiring and activating.

## *Acquiring volunteers*

This practice entails putting in place tactics to attract substantial numbers of potential volunteers. Establishing a sizable pool of participants is crucial, especially when interactions are

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1  
2  
3 looser and volunteer activities are intermittent and unpredictable. Moreover, certain tasks  
4  
5 necessitate swift and extensive deployment of volunteers in the field, making it imperative to  
6  
7 reach out to a broad audience. Arnold explains the importance of this ‘numbers game’ during the  
8  
9 refugee crisis:

10  
11  
12 *If we hadn't had this huge pool, I don't know how we would have managed it, so they*  
13  
14 *really pulled us out of it and they played a huge part in making it work. We had up to 200*  
15  
16 *volunteers in one day who looked after the refugee houses.*

17  
18  
19 In contrast to the pull mechanism among EMs, who are drawn into the brand relationship  
20  
21 through personal connections or their admiration for the brand, recruiting in the context of TAs is  
22  
23 based on pushing the brand on the market. To achieve high enrollments, the Red Cross partnered  
24  
25 with Ö3, a radio station with market share of 35% in Austria that reaches over 2.7 million  
26  
27 listeners daily. Its endorsement and active promotion of Team Austria facilitated the acquisition  
28  
29 of new volunteers. People across Austria swiftly answered the call. Today, more than 95,000  
30  
31 individuals who can “*help voluntarily, spontaneously, and flexibly*” (Ö3 2024) are registered  
32  
33 with Team Austria. In its promotion of Team Austria, Ö3 explicitly emphasizes the significance  
34  
35 of numbers: “*The more people take part, the stronger Team Austria becomes*” (Ö3 2024).  
36  
37

38  
39  
40 To facilitate the practice of acquiring, a database was created and, at later point, a mobile  
41  
42 phone application. Using this dematerialized infrastructure, individuals can easily sign up  
43  
44 wherever they are instead of having to visit a district office (Web Appendix C, Figure W11). On  
45  
46 its website, the Red Cross promotes the app with the slogan “*You and your smartphone. A team*  
47  
48 *that saves lives*” (Red Cross 2024).  
49

50  
51  
52 As part of their registration, prospective TAs provide information about their  
53  
54 backgrounds and competences. Jasmin was “*part of the Austria-wide project group at the time,*  
55  
56  
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1  
2  
3 helping to come up with the name, set up the whole thing and implement it for Vienna...” She  
4  
5 explains the principle behind it and the process:

6  
7  
8 *You are asked what interests you have, where you are willing to help, how far you are*  
9  
10 *willing to travel, also what qualifications and experience you have, existing driver’s*  
11 *licenses for example, C driver’s license or something like that, these are always very*  
12 *interesting qualifications.*  
13  
14  
15

16  
17 Requesting detailed information is an important prerequisite for the detached brand relationships  
18  
19 trajectory, as this facilitates mobilizing existing competences rather than building new ones:  
20  
21 “Team Austria’s particular strength lies in the wealth of different skills of all the volunteers.  
22  
23 Thanks to the detailed information requested when registering for Team Austria, very specific  
24  
25 tasks can also be taken on by Team Austria” (Ö3 2024). Upon joining the program, new  
26  
27 volunteers are integrated into a database and are prepared to participate whenever their assistance  
28  
29 is required. This brings forth the second practice, which we refer to as *activating*.

## 30 31 32 33 *Activating volunteers*

34  
35 Activating entails soliciting potential volunteers to participate in a given task and  
36  
37 overseeing their activities in the field. Solicitation often first requires identifying individuals  
38  
39 suited to the task based on their competences. The range of competences sought among  
40  
41 volunteers is diverse. For example, job ads in the archival data we analyzed show that in March  
42  
43 2021 the VRC was specifically looking for hairdressers who could help in a homeless shelter; in  
44  
45 August 2019, members with skills in film editing were needed to help the brand’s documentation  
46  
47 team; and in September 2018, the VRC was seeking people with a background and interest in  
48  
49 marketing to support brand events and communications. TAs like Roy understand they are useful  
50  
51 to the organization for the specific skills they bring:  
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3 *I studied, I have two university degrees, these things are relatively easy. For example,*  
4 *when I helped with the school start-up package and there was an issue with the*  
5 *computers—tak tak, all done, it didn't take me long...*  
6  
7  
8  
9

10 Since the activation often hinges on the need arising for specific tasks and competences,  
11 volunteers may not be called upon regularly. When their help is required, they are notified via  
12 text message, as Ö3's (2024) website outlines: "*If necessary, Team Austria members in the*  
13 *immediate vicinity are then alerted by text message. That could be tomorrow—or in a few years'*  
14 *time. What counts is your willingness to help. So, if the need arises, you receive a text message*  
15 *and if you have time, answer 'Yes' and off you go!*"  
16  
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23

24 In addition to activating TAs for their skillsets, the VRC can also alert TAs with basic  
25 first-aid competencies as "Team Austria lifesavers." The 2020 Red Cross annual report nicely  
26 illustrates this by telling the story of Max, who was walking his dogs with his wife when he  
27 received a notification that someone in his vicinity had suffered a heart attack. He indicated his  
28 availability, ran to the address, and reached the person in need in three minutes. He conducted  
29 first-aid measures until the paramedics arrived. The story concludes on a poetic note: "*That*  
30 *Sunday ended quietly. It was already well into the evening when Max finally managed to take his*  
31 *walk. In the meantime, he had saved a man's life*" (Annual Report 2020, p. 11).  
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42 When TAs are activated for a service, they are typically given a form of briefing upon  
43 arrival in the field. This briefing is provided by an EM or employee, depending on the setting.  
44 For instance, the TA might be providing a service (such as helping with accounting or translating  
45 documents) at the regional headquarters, in which case, an employee could brief them and  
46 oversee the task. Briefings vary according to the complexity of the task to accomplish.  
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48  
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54 Sometimes, a briefing is as quick as pointing to a computer and indicating the specific files  
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needed for the job. In other cases, the task requires a longer explanation, such as when TAs recuperate food donations and redistribute them to food banks.

Once the volunteers have been properly briefed, they can perform their tasks independently. In some cases, however, TAs perform tasks that require continuous interaction with at least one EM who is deployed to serve as a coordinator of the respective activity. Whenever EMs and TAs are deployed at the same time, having EMs brief their TA counterparts is crucial to assure a smooth collaboration between members of both groups in the field. As Walter (EM) explains: *“Because these are very different people, who all have very different attitudes or ideas about volunteering, you simply need a really good leadership that has this ‘mob’ under control.”* Walter points to an important dynamic between the practices of managing growth-oriented and managing NGNF relationships. Because EMs have been well integrated, trained, and imparted with the values of the Red Cross, they are subsequently able to organize the ephemeral and fluid TAs in the field (see Web Appendix C, Figures W12 and W13 for examples of collaborations between EMs and TAs).

An important element of many interactions is the volunteers’ clothing. In fact, whenever they are in “the field” (e.g., helping out in warehouses, stacking sandbags in cases of flood risk, etc.), TAs are equipped with jackets provided by the VRC (Web Appendix C, Figures W8 to W10). Eva (TA) evokes this fact when recalling her experience of the refugee crisis in 2015:

*We showed up at the refugee house at whatever time was possible for us, some people did nightshifts, others worked in the mornings. There were always Red Cross members in their uniforms and that’s who we would contact. We got a Team Austria jacket, were briefed about the situation, and were told where and how to assist: provide food, distribute clothes, look after the children...*

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Simplifying roles and interactions in the field, EM uniforms act as strong visual cues to help TAs situate themselves, while TA jackets allow EMs and TAs to identify other TAs.

Finally, the activation process comes to an end. TAs are thanked and dismissed. Before leaving, they return their jackets—a routine differing markedly from EMs who retain their uniforms and are expected to take care of them. TAs leave the field without further noticeable engagement with other volunteers. Serge (TA) described his experience in the distribution to local food banks, an activity often done by TAs on Saturdays, as follows:

*Once all the food is distributed, we're basically ready to go. Some leave right at the last drop-off, some still drive back to the starting point. The coordinator just thanks us and says, 'that's it'. No one ever tried to make us go for a breakfast together (laughs)... or a coffee, and I don't think anyone feels like doing that either.*

TAs then resume the course of their life until their next activation.

A crucial difference in NGNF relationships like that of TAs compared to growth relationships is that the relationship is not forced in any way, which means the VRC lets go of volunteers without hesitation or effort. Hence, whereas relationships with EMs must be monitored and reinvigorated when signs of potential decline start manifesting, TAs are not only let go but also left alone. Their non-engagement with the brand is not considered a sign of defection, but simply of dormancy. The VRC leaves TAs dormant while keeping their information on file for when they will be next required. In doing so, the VRC leverages the interdependency of meanings and materials: essentially, the capacity to find the right people in the right numbers for the right job at the right time is closely intertwined with use of a database and mobile app that support this type of relationship.

***Table 3: Practice Anatomy for NGNF Relationship Management at the VRC***



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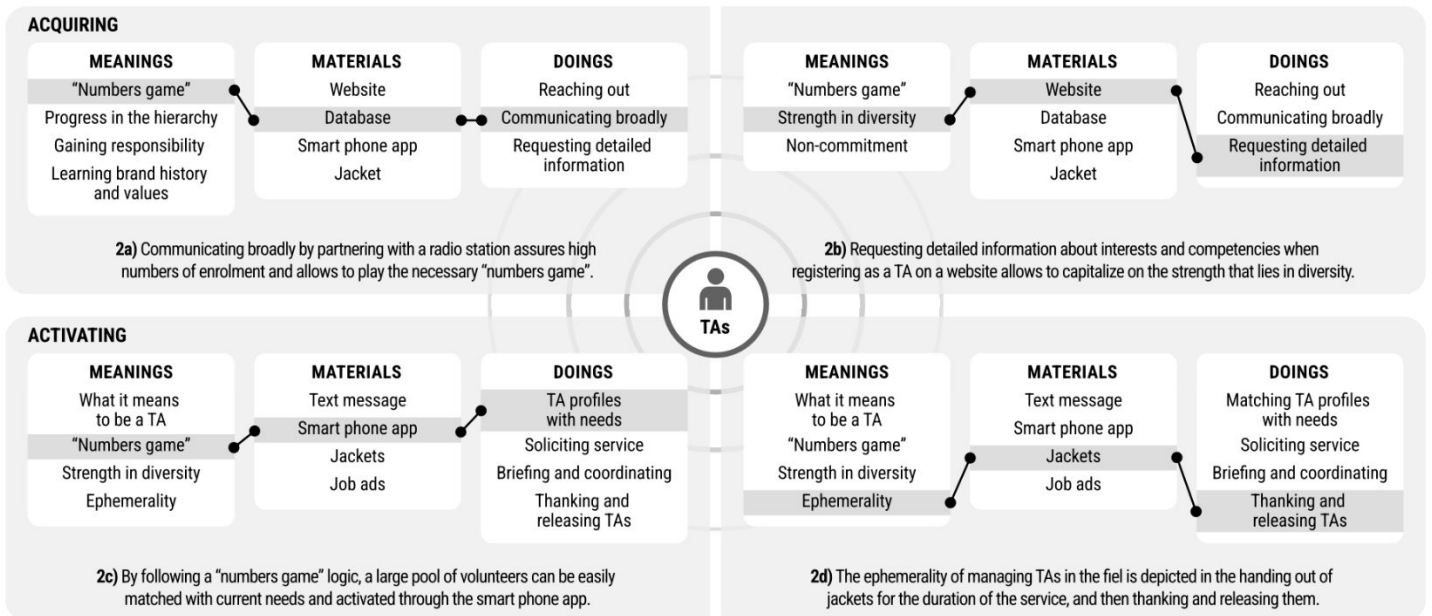
	MEANINGS	MATERIALS	DOINGS
ACQUIRING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attract a substantial number of volunteers using mass communication.</li> <li>- Quickly deploy volunteers based on the ad hoc needs of the organization.</li> <li>- Importance of the “numbers game.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Website and a mobile application.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develops website and mobile application to provide information about volunteering program and to allow for registration.</li> <li>- Works with partner (Ö3) to promote the volunteer program and drive traffic toward the registration platforms.</li> <li>- Deploys mass media tactics to promote volunteer program in the population and emphasized ease of volunteering, flexibility, low commitment.</li> </ul>
ACTIVATING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Solicit registered TAs to participate in a given task and oversee their activities in the field.</li> <li>-Find the right people in the right numbers at the right time, and ensure they perform the task correctly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Mobile phone with application ready for call to action.</li> <li>-Visual cues like jackets or baseball caps to identify TAs on the field.</li> <li>-Various physical sites are mobilized, depending on the activities on the field.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uses website and mobile phone application to target registered TAs based on VRC’s ad hoc needs and to share the call to action.</li> <li>- Dedicates senior EMs to coordinate TAs volunteers showing up in the field.</li> <li>- Uses visual cues, such as jackets, baseball caps, etc., to facilitate identification of TAs in the field.</li> <li>- Once activation is complete, thanks and dismisses TAs. Retrieves materials (such as visual cues). Allows TAs to enter dormant phase.</li> </ul>

In summary (see Table 3), this highly pragmatic, task-driven approach is central to the VRC’s creation of a completely different relationship with volunteers. While a Red Cross ‘way of life’ is carefully designed and almost imposed onto EMs, TAs are engaged based on the convenience of flexibility, requisite competences, and a certain degree of brand detachment.

Overall, the connection forged with TA volunteers relies on more dematerialized and less customized practice elements compared to the efforts deployed with EMs. Indeed, for TAs, there is no personal welcoming and guidance during early stage of the brand relationship; no mobilization of prominent physical displays like district offices or formal uniforms; no complex ranking system; no mandatory service; no mentorship; and no elaborate ceremonies such as an inauguration. Figure 2 shows different elements mobilized for acquiring and activating TAs.



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**Figure 2. Mobilizing Practice Elements for Acquiring and Activating NGNF Relationships**

The case of the VRC illustrates how the careful constellation of practice elements and their mobilization in a temporal sequence calibrated with the brand relationship trajectory ensures that growth-oriented relationships continue. Simultaneously, the VRC shows the value of embracing more distant relationships, such as those that TAs entertain with the Red Cross. Our informant Arnold highlights the importance of both types of volunteers:

*Finding a way to include these new volunteers is a defining challenge for non-profit organizations. For example, the [mentions other NPO] has sprung up spontaneously and witnessed a huge interest, but they don't have a backbone, they don't have a foundation and a vision on how to go on. At the Red Cross, we're good because we have a backbone.*

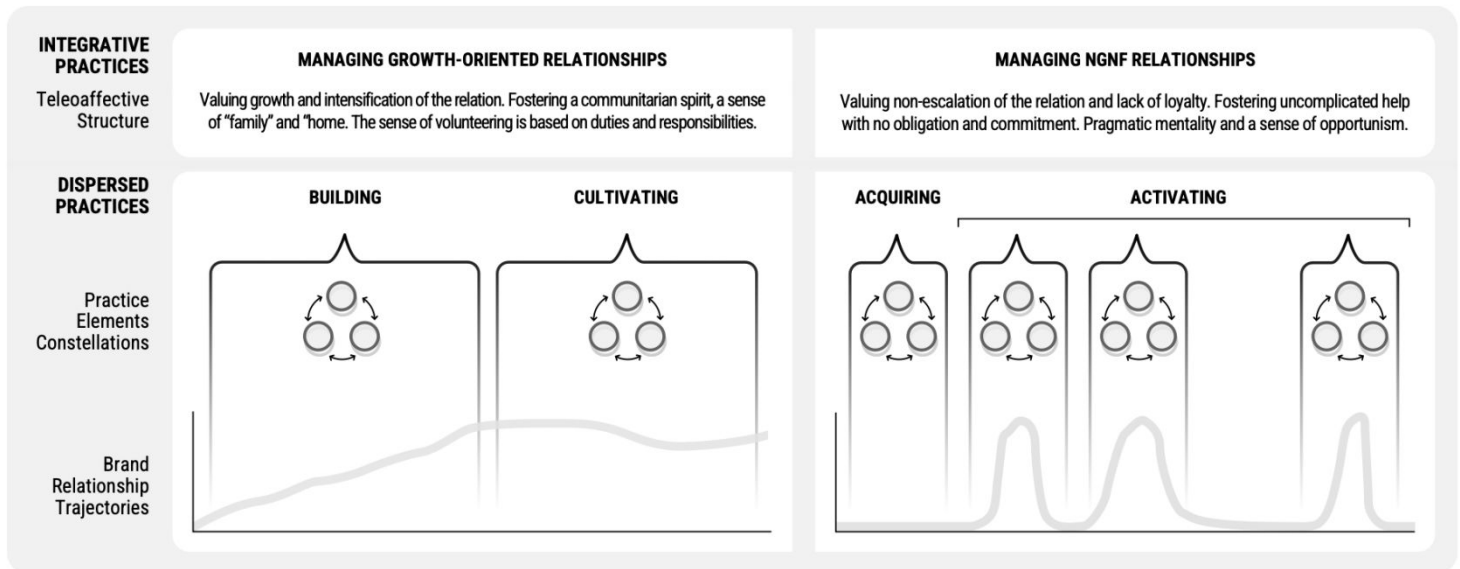
Arnold observes that to be successful, a non-profit organization needs large numbers of volunteers (referring to NGNF relationships) but must also have "the backbone" (in reference to growth-oriented volunteers) that can support them.

Figure 3 depicts an overview of the two types of brand relationships found at the VRC. It illustrates the integrative practices embedded in a teleoaffective structure and shows how

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dispersed practices address different stages in the brand relationship trajectories. As discussed earlier, different elements can be activated for each one of these dispersed practices.

**Figure 3. Practices to Manage Growth-Oriented and NGNF Brand Relationship Trajectories**



## Discussion

In this paper, we conceptualize a type of non-escalating relationship that individuals cultivate with a brand in which they keep a distant yet continuous liaison with the brand. We call this a *neither-growing-nor-fading* (NGNF) relationship and contrast it with the more traditional relationship type widely portrayed in marketing literature, which follows a path of growth and intensification. We argue that the non-profit context is particularly conducive to studying, articulating, and theorizing this type of brand relationship, which marketing literature has overlooked to date. In fact, our dataset from the VRC allows us to carve out in detail the brand relationship management practices relevant to both growth-oriented relationships, exemplified by EMs, and NGNF relationships, which we conceptualize using the example of TA members.

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The case of the VRC is not anecdotal. NGNF relationships are found across the non-profit sector, as organizations constantly face the challenge of managing volunteers seeking different types of relationships with their brand. An example of a non-profit context close to home for most marketing scholars is academic associations, which often constitute strong brands, like the American Marketing Association (AMA). The AMA actively searches for volunteers to get involved in various areas of its operations, from chapters and special interest groups (SIGs) to journal and conference reviewing. The AMA currently counts more than 6,000 volunteers, of whom some arguably pursue a growth-oriented relationship, while others are satisfied with a more distant NGNF relationship. The former likely started out by agreeing to do some ad hoc reviewing and outreach activities (such as sharing social media posts), then progressively took on more responsibilities, possibly even running for management roles like the AMA Board of Directors, a “group of volunteer leaders who are impactful visionaries in marketing” (AMA, 2023). The vision and initiative of these volunteers further shapes the AMA, by actions like creating new SIGs, like the recently introduced Sustainable Marketing and Innovation Special Interest Group (SUSTSIG). Other members, meanwhile, are content with having only a minimal relationship with the association. These NGNF-type volunteers may sporadically perform activities such as reviewing conference papers—often because they have submitted to the conference themselves, illustrating the pragmatic mindset of exchange. Thus, as this example shows, both brand relationship types are important. Non-profit organizations like the AMA need to know how to nurture both types in a way that respects their natural course.

We further contend that volunteers entertain relationships with non-profit brands in ways similar to how consumers relate with consumer brands. EMs exemplify the traditional growth-oriented volunteer relationship. In their interactions with the VRC, they display communitarian

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1  
2  
3 attitudes and behaviors similar to those of Jeep owners, as discussed by McAlexander and  
4  
5 colleagues (2002). Their actions reveal a strong sense of morality in their preservation of the  
6  
7 brand and in their understanding of what volunteering means. EMs also build their sense of  
8  
9 brand connection by interacting with other members during brand-initiated events. The  
10  
11 foundational characteristics identified by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001)—consciousness of kind,  
12  
13 sharing of rituals, and moral responsibility—are strongly present in EMs' relationship with the  
14  
15 VRC, to the point that volunteers self-perpetuate the relationship. They even innovate, improve,  
16  
17 and thus shape the brand. In fact, with appropriate integration and consolidation, EMs, like  
18  
19 highly involved AMA members, can focus on their own value-creating brand practices (Schau,  
20  
21 Muñiz, and Arnould 2009).  
22  
23  
24  
25

26  
27 These characteristics show a stark contrast with TA volunteers who exemplify NGNF-  
28  
29 relationships and who are distant with the brand, interested in short-term executions, and desire  
30  
31 flexible schedules (Hustinx 2005; McKee and McKee 2012). TAs seek more flexibility,  
32  
33 detachment, peripheral affiliation, and swiftness in their brand relationship (Arvidsson and  
34  
35 Caliandro 2016; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). In this NGNF relationship, individuals do not  
36  
37 pursue strong interactions with the brand, which can be temporarily forgotten or even replaced  
38  
39 (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Coupland 2005). When it comes to TAs, the brand is clearly 'in  
40  
41 charge' of keeping the relationship alive (Keller 2021); just as a heart maintains life through  
42  
43 cardiac function, it is the brand that must stimulate the necessary impulses to keep the  
44  
45 relationship alive. Here, the emphasis is primarily placed on optimal communication and  
46  
47 transaction optimization (Wichmann, Wiegand, and Reinartz 2022). By utilizing platform  
48  
49 technology and effective mass media communication, potential volunteers are reached (Kelleher  
50  
51 et al. 2019) and activated when their competences align with the organization's needs.  
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### ***Theoretical Implications***

This paper's focus on the non-profit sector allowed us to acknowledge and question the axiology of growth that pervades the vast majority of brand relationship work and that has led to conceptualizations ranging from brand love to brand addiction (Albert and Thompson 2018). We problematize the field's preoccupation with growth and intensification, which aligns with the dominant market ideology of progress and profitability (Marion 2006). Theorizing NGNF relationships leads us to challenge this growth-driven orientation, as NGNF relationships provide evidence of a distinct, more distant form of connecting to brands.

By allowing us to think outside of the growth axiology box, our study of the non-profit sector enables us to critically reconsider the high status ascribed to brands. Time and again, research has emphasized the spectacular power brands hold over consumers and shared grandiose tales of deep consumer-brand relationships. NGNF relationships impose a touch of modesty on this narrative and tone down the role of brands in consumer lives. Our research therefore extends the portfolio of brand relationships discussed to date (e.g., Albert and Thomson 2018; Alvarez and Fournier 2012; Consiglio et al. 2018; Cui, Mrad, and Hogg 2018) and adds to emergent insights about consumer-brand relationship distance (Connors et al. 2021). While the VRC builds and cultivates growth-oriented relationships through actions like governing, organizing, evangelizing, documenting, justifying, mentoring, welcoming, milestoneing, badging, and grooming, thereby echoing previous findings (Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009; Kelleher 2019), we demonstrate quite a different situation with NGNF relationships. In the latter case, the brand deviates from previous studies by acquiring and activating volunteers through more distant and ad hoc communication tactics (see Tables W2 and W3 in Web Appendix A for more details).

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Finally, we argue that while NGNF relationships are particularly relevant in the non-profit sector, they are also pertinent to for-profit companies that deal with consumers who prefer more distant relationships (Connors et al. 2021). Indeed, NGNF relationships are arguably ubiquitous—we cultivate them with our toothpaste brands, with the medical clinic tasked with our yearly check-ups, with the auto mechanic in charge of handling our car maintenance, or the company servicing our air conditioners—in essence, with any brand we appreciate and engage with yet do not desire to develop a deep relationship with.

## ***Managerial Implications: How to Manage Growth and NGNF Relationships Symbiotically***

The case of the VRC illustrates the potential of brand relationship plurality and the significant benefits of catering to individuals aspiring to different types of brand relationships. To leverage this potential, managers need to actively embrace individuals seeking NGNF relationships alongside those pursuing growth-oriented relationships.

First, the VRC shows how constellating practice elements and mobilizing them in a temporal sequence calibrated with the brand relationship trajectory—from building to cultivating the relationship—allows growth-oriented relationships to continue. These constitute the backbone of the organization. Table 4 summarizes key elements for fostering relationships with volunteers seeking to grow within the organization).

***Table 4. Strategies for Brand Relationship Practices that Build and Cultivate Growth***

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>What to do</b>
Invest strongly in materiality	Offer a space for volunteers to socialize and receive their training. Create physical elements to identify volunteers with the organization (uniforms, jackets, etc.) and to highlight their growth within the organization (e.g., stripes, colors). Officialize their relationship (e.g., through ceremonies).
Develop <i>your</i> story	Communicate your brand identity and values through various mediums (via website, newsletter, magazine, email, social media, etc., and during gatherings and social events); make sure your story is well understood by volunteers. Be welcoming to new volunteers and introduce them early to your story.

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Develop <i>their</i> story	<p>Create boundaries defining what the relationship entails (what are the duties and responsibilities of volunteers); provide an answer to: <i>What does it mean to be a “real volunteer” for my organization?</i> Communicate the importance of being “part of the family.”</p> <p>Develop a clear path of growth for volunteers, lay out the steps/levels and the conditions required to progress between steps/levels.</p> <p>Provide a clear training path to support their progression.</p> <p>Celebrate volunteer advancement, recognize their work.</p> <p>Communicate inspiring volunteer stories through various mediums (e.g., website, newsletter, magazine, email, social media, etc.).</p>
Empower your volunteers and turn them to practice champions	<p>Make sure that volunteers’ responsibilities are commensurate to their growth (don’t let volunteer competences go to waste).</p> <p>Teach them to motivate each other and remind each other of their duty.</p> <p>Put experienced volunteers in charge of training, mentoring, and coordinating other volunteers (including growing and NGNF volunteers).</p> <p>Invite high-level volunteers “at the table.” Listen to them, let them make suggestions on how to improve your organization.</p> <p>Encourage them to actively participate in the evolution of your organization.</p>

For growth relationships to thrive, a solid material presence is key. This involves investing in well-designed offices that serve as inviting spaces for volunteers to gather and receive training. Likewise, distinctive material cues like branded clothing facilitate easy visual identification of members. It might also include member magazines, or exclusive access to hotlines, lounges, or other types of infrastructure. Developing comprehensive training programs can also help support volunteers’ growth and advancement. We recommend that brand managers create documentation that clearly presents the brand’s values and history and that provides a comprehensive and clear description of what volunteering entails in terms of both expectations and duties. Finally, effective communication methods will ensure that volunteers engage frequently with the brand, while providing timely reminders of their responsibilities.

We also argue that NGNF brand relationships are highly valuable to non-profit organizations, though long overlooked by marketing scholarship. Not every practice element will be mobilized in such relationships, as the VRC case illustrates, yet managers will benefit from a



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sound understanding of the options available to them. Table 5 summarizes key elements managers should develop to foster NGNF relationships with volunteers.

**Table 5. Strategies for Brand Relationship Practices to Acquire and Activate NGNF Members**

Strategy	What to do
Change your volunteer mindset	Actively embrace the new volunteering logic: think pragmatically, accept distance; Accept that volunteers become dormant between activations.
Push your brand on the “volunteer market”	Play the numbers game: the more volunteers the better! Develop partnerships with broadcasters to reach large audiences and communicate the organization’s volunteering story and needs via social media to generate traffic on the organization’s platforms.
Invest in communication technology platforms	Develop a strong homepage for easy registration in the volunteer database. Develop an app for registration and future call-to-action communications with volunteers. Use customer relationship management (CRM) software to keep track of volunteers.
Know your volunteer needs	Identify volunteer profiles for each specific volunteer job. Identify key information to include in the registration form, such as education and training; skillset (computer programming, communication, accounting, etc.); volunteer activity preferences; potential volunteering schedule, etc. Communicate with volunteers on a “needs” basis.
Invest lightly in materiality	Develop some material element to identify volunteers during their activation (light jackets, baseball caps, etc.). These materials could potentially be lent to volunteers for the duration of their activation.

When it comes to NGNF relationships, managers should adhere to the general norm of exchange (Wichmann, Wiegand, and Reinartz 2022) by prioritizing simple, task-specific interactions with volunteers who possess the competencies necessary to effectively perform tasks. Due to the loose nature of the connection with NGNF volunteers, the number of participants in activities and events can be unpredictable. Consequently, the enrollment and activation process should adopt a mass-market logic using the principle of “the more, the better.” When reaching out to potential volunteers, carefully draft the message using the most appropriate appeal (see Jin, Wang, and Zhang 2023). Mastery of volunteer database management software and social media apps will help organizations effectively connect with and activate volunteers as

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needed. Precise knowledge of volunteers' characteristics, including relevant competencies and interests, should be acquired.

Furthermore, developing effective communication skills and designing compelling call-to-action messages will help generate volunteer activation. Additionally, since NGNF volunteers mostly rely on their existing competences, it is essential to provide clear instructions to assist them in fulfilling their duties. Other volunteers, particularly those pursuing growth-directed relationships, can potentially act to coordinate NGNF volunteers, as seen with EMs and TAs. Finally, material cues, such as the Team Austria jackets, can help identify and distinguish NGNF volunteers from growth-oriented members during events. Finally, periods of dormancy until the next activation (for example, the next conference) should be expected and respected.

Importantly, the case of the VRC illustrates the significance of catering to the plurality of brand relationship types in a symbiotic manner. Managers need to carefully conceive of practice elements that allow growth-oriented and NGNF relationships to mutually reinforce each other. The thorough integration and sound training of growth-oriented members assures that they can confidently assume the role of practice champions (Bonetti et al. 2023). This role is key at two levels. First, champions will play an important part in building and cultivating future growth-oriented volunteers, by welcoming, training, and mentoring them. This can represent a significant value for non-profit organizations that seek to optimize the use of their financial and personal resources. Second, these champions will assume a central position in the activation of NGNF volunteers by briefing and coordinating them in the field. NGNF also contribute to this symbiotic relationship with their unique skillset (for example accounting competencies or knowledge of foreign languages) and can assist growth-oriented members as they increasingly assume responsibilities and take on leadership positions.

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## ***Limitations and Future Research***

Our paper's focus on the non-profit context, while enabling a fresh look at brand relationships, also has limitations regarding the generalizability of our findings. For example, individuals engaging with non-profit brands are often driven by a calling that might be stronger than their allegiance with a corporate, for-profit brand. A more systematic comparison between for-profit and non-profit relationships established in a growth axiology and NGNF-logic could constitute an interesting avenue for future research.

Furthermore, in line with recent insights on the importance of the affective coloring of practices (e.g., Spotswood et al. 2023), researchers should address individuals' emotions in different relationship types. To date, most work has focused on positive emotions ascribed to intense relations, such as brand love. However, our data points to the potential downsides of this approach. Whereas we encountered incidences of "burnout" and medical problems among EMs due to an overly intense involvement with the VRC, the relationships of TAs were generally described as fun and worthwhile. This tendency is in line with recent work on the felt security that arises from an absence of ownership and attachment (Atanasova, Eckhardt, and Husemann 2024). Future research could explore when brands should give consumers more space to foster adaptability and when they should tighten the relationship to attenuate their worries.

In fact, it is reasonable to expect that volunteers prefer a closer relationship or a more distant one at different points in their life trajectories. There is evidence of such a case in our data: Martin, after serving decades as devoted EM, decided to pursue volunteering at the VRC as TA member after his retirement. Non-profit organizations should thus anticipate such an eventuality and evaluate the possibility of a *bridge* that facilitates movement within an organization yet across relationship types (e.g., NGNF members who eventually decide to invest

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2  
3 themselves, or growth-oriented members who need more distance). To successfully facilitate  
4 relationship transitions, such a bridge would need to include its own set of practices that allow  
5 members to decouple from their initial trajectory and acclimatize to the different teleoaffective  
6 structure before joining the other relationship trajectory. Conceptualizing these practices and  
7 investigating the impact of such transitions on brand equity generation provides an interesting  
8 avenue for future research.

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17 Lastly, our work also challenges recent ideas around brands needing to reformulate their  
18 offerings for a changing audience. For example, Swaminathan et al. (2020) suggest that  
19 connected platform brands are moving away from the rigid boundaries of single ownership  
20 (product brand) by adopting the more porous boundaries of shared ownership made possible via  
21 co-creation. Our study of the VRC suggests that this dichotomous conception of ownership (i.e.,  
22 either single or shared) is not the only solution. Indeed, a brand interacting with consumers  
23 through both growth- and NGNF relationships could develop along both pathways. On the one  
24 hand, the brand could enforce a strong brand-created, brand-coordinated value with individuals  
25 engaged sporadically, like TAs, corresponding to Maciel and Fischer's (2020) individualistic,  
26 market-driven relationships. On the other, the brand could also benefit from the capacities,  
27 strength, and expertise of strongly attached brand consumers who might seek any opportunity to  
28 directly participate in value creation, as in the case of the VRC, with EMs shaping important  
29 elements of the organization. Our research encourages consideration of more open conceptions  
30 of brand ownership models in which this juxtaposition is conceivable.

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## Web Appendix

### MANAGING BRAND RELATIONSHIP PLURALITY: INSIGHTS FROM THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR

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40	<b>Disclosure:</b>	
41	These materials have been supplied by the authors to aid in the understanding of their paper. The	
42	AMA is sharing these materials at the request of the authors.	
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## Web Appendix A: Additional Tables

### *Sample of Articles Providing Guidance Aimed at Nurturing Strong and Thriving Connections with Consumers*

*Table W1. Sample of Articles*

Reference	Explanation
Danaher, Conroy and McColl-Kennedy (2008).	Drawing on insights from diverse industries, the authors offer suggestions on tailoring relationship-building efforts according to consumers' desired relationship types. For instance, they recommend offering financial rewards, without additional special treatment to people who are indifferent to developing relationships with the organization, whereas they recommend assigning the best service personnel to people who actively seek a relationship.
Siebert, Gopaldas, Lindridge and Simões (2020).	Presents specific service design principles for the customer experience journey at both the initial and subsequent stages of the relationship, aimed at fostering loyalty. Demonstrates how to craft “sticky” and “smooth” experiences to strengthen the relationship and cultivate enduring loyalty loops.
Fang, Fombelle and Bolton (2021).	Addresses relationship-building in the context of non-profit brands. The authors conclude that non-profit organizations should develop programs that appeal to people who seek a close relationship with them—programs that emphasize peer-to-peer interactions and that provide support, value congruence, and peer identity affirmation should lead to longer and stronger relationships.
Wichmann, Wiegand and Reinartz (2022).	The article shows, in an online context, how to align specific assemblages of platform building blocks such as transaction, community, and benchmarking, with consumer goals (e.g., commercial exchange, self-improvement, and creative empowerment) to generate optimal consumer loyalty in accordance with consumer goals.
Huang and Rust (2023).	Introduces the notion of Customer Care Journey, which they define as “the process by which service providers seek to care for customer emotions, in addition to solving their service problems, during interactions and communications” (p. 3). They explore how AI could be used in all four stages of the journey (emotion recognition, emotion understanding, emotion management, emotional connection) to improve customer emotional well-being and lifetime value.

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Umashankar, Kim, and Reutterer (2023).	Concerns how to maximize online subscription to shopping boxes. Presents strategic recommendations on how to improve customer participation—or relationship—with programs.
Moorman, van Heerde, Moreau and Palmatier (2024).	Editorial paper focusing on health care markets. Conceptualizes actors as health care producers, providers and consumers. Discusses new manifestations of doctor-patient relationships influenced greatly by new communication technologies and AI.
Merlo, Eisingerich and Hoyer (2024).	The article investigates how an “immunity metric” (i.e., asking customers to think of their immunity) can help build up customer resilience to mitigate the impact of negative information on brand relationship with consumers.

***Extended Summary of Brand Relationship Practices Broken Down by Practice Elements and Connection with Existing Literature***

***Table W2. Extended Summary of Practice Anatomy for Growth-Oriented Brand relationship Management Practices***

Integrative practices	Dispersed practice	Practice Anatomy		Lower-Order Practices or Tasks	
		<i>(Note: Practice elements can be mobilized in various ways to create different practice configurations)</i>		Found in the literature	New Practices or Tasks
Managing growth-oriented relationships	Building	<b>Meanings</b>	Builds the foundation to set volunteers on the path of growth. The aim of the practice is to inculcate organizational values and a meaning of volunteering, to provide foundational knowledge, and officialise their incorporation into the organization. In other words, to set the stage for the second practice.	N/A	
		<b>Materials</b>	A main physical site for volunteers. Other sites can be mobilized depending on the organization’s activities.  Visual cues, such as a uniform.  Email, newsletters, magazines, etc.	Governing (1), Organizing (2)  Staking (1), Peer and org. Identification (2)  Evangelizing, Documenting, Justifying (1)	



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		<p>Organize open-door events where interested people can show up at the organization and ask questions to volunteers about volunteer work.</p> <p>Pair up senior volunteers and newcomers so that seniors could provide mentorship.</p> <p>Offer official trainings to newcomers to make sure they master certain basic aspects of volunteering work in line with the organization.</p> <p><b>Doings</b></p> <p>Organize events to officialise the incorporation of new volunteers (e.g., a ceremony, an awards luncheon, etc.). Offer visual cues to members.</p> <p>Inform volunteers about the organization, celebrate its values, and reinforce the meaning of volunteering. Use emails, newsletters, magazines, etc.</p>	<p>Welcoming, Justifying (1)</p> <p>Guided mentoring (2)</p> <p>Welcoming, Milestoning, Badging Governing (1), Organizing (2)</p> <p>Evangelizing, Documenting, Justifying</p>	Training
	Cultivating	<p><b>Meanings</b></p> <p>Creating continuity after integration. Making sure the meaning of volunteering persists. Making sure volunteer engagement keeps growing.</p>	N/A	
		<p><b>Materials</b></p> <p>The main physical site continues being used by volunteers. Other physical sites can be mobilised, depending on organizational activities.</p> <p>Visual cues, such as badges, mark the milestones achieved by volunteers.</p>	<p>Governing (1), Organizing (2)</p> <p>Milestoning, Badging, Staking (1)</p>	
		<p><b>Doings</b></p> <p>Continue to inform volunteers about organizational affairs, to celebrate the organization's values, and to reinforce the meaning of volunteering.</p> <p>Codify progress and identify key milestones, the criteria needed to reach them, and the visual cues showcasing their achievement.</p> <p>Teach volunteers how to properly wear and care for the uniform.</p> <p>Provided mentoring by senior volunteers.</p> <p>Offer advanced trainings to make sure volunteers always "keep their skills and abilities up to date with the latest best practices."</p> <p>Instruct and encourage volunteers to remind other volunteers of the importance of attending designated spaces and/or events.</p>	<p>Evangelizing, Documenting, Justifying</p> <p>Milestoning, Badging, Staking</p> <p>Grooming (1)</p> <p>Guided mentoring (2)</p> <p>Justifying (1)</p>	Training

**Legend:**

(1) = Practices identified in Schau et al. (2009)

(2) = Practices identified in Kelleher et al. (2019)

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**Table W3. Extended Summary of Practice Anatomy for NGNF Brand Relationship Management Practices**

Integrative practices	Dispersed practice	Practice Anatomy <i>(Note: Practice elements can be mobilized in various ways to create different practice configurations)</i>	Lower-Order Practices or Tasks	
			Found in the literature	New Practices or Tasks
Managing NGNF relationships	Acquiring	<b>Meanings</b> Attracting a substantial number of volunteers using mass communication. Being able to quickly deploy volunteers based on the ad hoc needs of the organization. Importance of the “numbers game”.	N/A	
		<b>Materials</b> Website and a mobile application. Other promotional materials like advertising banners, etc.		Platforming Promoting
		<b>Doings</b> Develop website and/or mobile application to provide information about volunteering program and to allow for registration.  Work with partner to promote the volunteer program and drive traffic toward the registration platforms (website or mobile application).  Deploy mass media tactics to promote volunteer program in the population. Emphasize ease of volunteering, flexibility, and low commitment.		Platforming  Partnering  Prompting
	Activating	<b>Meanings</b> Solicitating registered volunteers to participate in a given task and overseeing their activities in the field. Finding the right people, in the right quantity, at the right time and making sure they perform the task in the right way.	N/A	
		<b>Materials</b> Mobile phone with application ready to communicate call to action. Visual cues like jackets or baseball cap to identify volunteers on the field.  Various physical sites mobilised, depending on the activities of the organization.	Staking (1)	Reaching out  N/A
		<b>Doings</b> Use website and/or mobile phone/application to target registered volunteers based on organization’s ad-hoc needs and to share the call to action.  Dedicate senior growth-oriented volunteers to coordinate NGNF volunteers showing up on the field.		Reaching out  Coordinating

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		<p>Use visual cues, such as jackets, baseball caps, etc., to facilitate identification of volunteers on the field.</p> <p>Once activation over, thank and dismiss volunteers. Retrieve materials (such as visual cues). Allow volunteers to enter dormant phase.</p>	Staking (1)	Closing
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Legend:

(1) = Practices identified in Schau et al. (2009)

(2) = Practices identified in Kelleher et al. (2019)

Peer Review Version

## Web Appendix B: Volunteering in Austria

The objective of this document is to allow for a better understanding of the socio-cultural context of volunteering in Austria and Vienna. Please note that the references we reviewed are almost exclusively in German, so the following contextualisation contains quite a few foreign terms.

### *Volunteering in Austria has a Long Tradition and is Relatively Formalized*

The data of the European Social Survey (2022) illustrates that volunteering is traditionally high in countries that have strong social institutions and a higher economic prosperity. These characteristics also apply to Austria. In 2014, Pennerstorfer, Schneider, and Reitzinger analyzed the Austrian non-profit landscape and surveyed 831 non-profit organizations from operating in diverse fields from the Arts to refugees.

The Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (2022) states that almost half (46%) of the Austrian population of 15 years and older is engaged in some form of volunteering. In a recent study of the university of applied science campus Vienna, more than 70% of the surveyed population (N=1932) have answered affirmatively when asked whether they have ever volunteered. While the proportions are similar across different age groups, individuals with higher income and higher levels of education are more likely to volunteer (Ehrenamt Studie 2022). Also from this year, a study from the *Zivilschutzagenda Österreich*, “underpins Austria's status as a country of volunteers” but also shows that the pandemic made volunteering more difficult as individuals felt that their contribution was less appreciated (ORF 2022).

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Volunteering has a long tradition in Austria and allows to maintain a high quality of life.

Formal volunteering, that is volunteering as organized by a volunteer organization, is in the German language also referred to as *Ehrenamt*, which entails the notion of honor [*Ehre*]. Geraldine, one of the EMs we have talked with, shared with us very powerful statement (that unfortunately doesn't translate very well from German to English: "*Ich mache das ehrenamtlich, aber nicht freiwillig.*" "Ehrenamtlich" and "freiwillig" are both translated as "voluntarily" in English, but they have slightly different meanings. Geraldine expresses something along the lines of "*I am doing this [volunteering at the VRC] without being paid but I am not doing it voluntarily*". What she means when she says "not voluntarily" is that she considers it an obligation and duty of each one of us to contribute to and give back to society.

The *Freiwilligengesetz* [law on volunteering] provides the legal background and assures, among other things, that every person is covered by health and accident insurance throughout the time they volunteer (FreiwG 2022). The ministry also supports an online portal that allows interested individuals to find a volunteering activity that fits their own interests and strengths (Freiwilligenweb 2022). This illustrates the strong embedding of volunteering in the institutional environment. Initiatives backed by public bodies cannot only be found on a federal level but also in Vienna more specifically. The city of Vienna supports a network for volunteer activities called "*Freiwillig für Wien*" [Volunteering for Vienna] that aims bringing together organizations and interested individuals. The Vienna Red Cross remains the largest non-profit force.

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## *The History of the Red Cross in Austria*

The Austrian Society of the Red Cross was already founded in 1880, the Vienna Red Cross formally inaugurated in 1961. The Red Cross is “the largest humanitarian nonprofit organization in Austria” (Rotes Kreuz 2022).

**Table W4. The History of the Red Cross in Austria**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of Event</b>
14 March 1880	Foundation of the “Austrian Society of the Red Cross”
1937	The regional branch for Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland possesses over 1,100 paramedic offices
23 May 1938	The ARC is completely incorporated into the German Red Cross
1945	The original Society of the ARC is reinstated
1 February 1953	The regional branch for Vienna and Lower Austria is re-integrated into the ARC
18 June 1960	Vienna and Lower Austria split into separate regional branches due to disputes over volunteers
28 June 1961	Formal inauguration of the Vienna Red Cross with 197 volunteers and 25 employees
1962	The first district offices were founded, namely DO (District Office) “Vienna West” and DO “Vienna Southeast” (later renamed “Van Swieten”)
1970	Foundation of the DO “Bertha von Suttner” (the first District Office that allowed women in formal roles)
1976	Foundation of the DO “DDr.Lauda” (due to tensions within DO “West”)
1982	Foundation of the DO “Donaustadt”
2003	Foundation of Active Now as new category of volunteer engagement at the VRC
2007	Abolition of the 6-month maximum for Active Now
2007	Foundation of Team Austria

## *Perceptions of Volunteering in Austria and Motivations of Individuals to Donate Time*

As mentioned before, volunteering has a long tradition in Austria. The volunteers themselves are driven largely by intrinsic motivations (Scherhorn, 1999). The most recent survey

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of volunteers conducted by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection (2022) further shows that most individuals are motivated by altruistic reasons (p. 9):

“The most important motives for volunteering are: helping others (90 percent), enjoying the work and doing something useful for the common good (82 percent each). The most important motives for volunteering are: to help others (90 percent), to enjoy volunteering and to contribute something useful to the common good (82 percent each), to come into contact with people and to contribute one's own skills and knowledge (74 percent each), to stay active (71 percent), to get involved in an important cause (68 percent), to learn something new (65 percent) or to benefit myself (64 percent).”

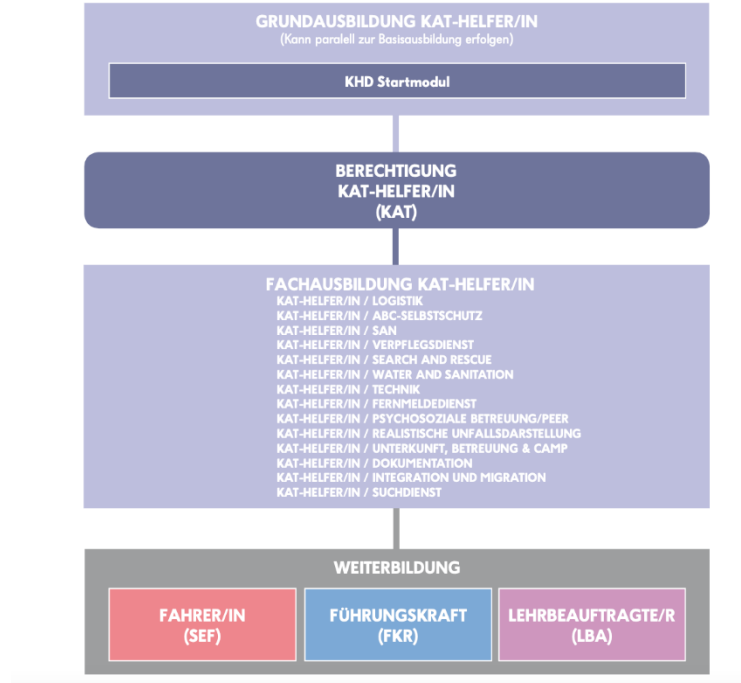


*Executive Members at the Vienna Red Cross**Figure W1. Explanations About How to Wear the Uniform*

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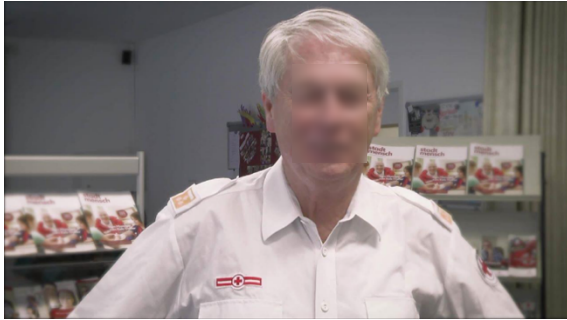
Figure W2. The Trainings Process and Possibilities in the Core Area ‘Disaster Relief Services’



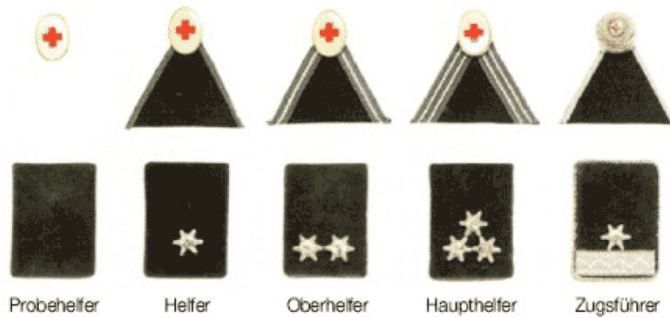
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*Figure W3. Executive Member in Uniform. The Stars on the Shoulder Indicate the Rank*



*Figure W4. Example of Badges and Stars that Indicate Different Ranks*



*Figure W5. Red Cross Stall at the Christmas Market in Front of the Vienna City Hall*



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*Figure W6. Opening Ceremony of the Red Cross Ball in the Imperial Palace in Vienna*



*Figure W7. Executive Members Overseeing a Running Event in Vienna*



*Team Austria Members at the Vienna Red Cross*

*Figure W8. Team Austria Involved in Catastrophe Prevention*





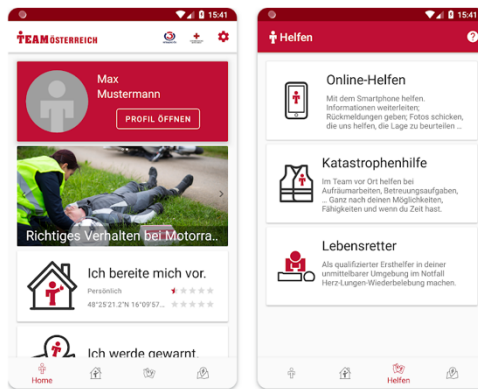
Figure W9. Team Austria working in the area of welcoming and taking care of refugees entering Austria



Figure W10. Team Austria Working in the Food Distribution at "Tafel", an Initiative to Redistribute Food to Those in Need



Figure W11. The Logo and Set Up of the Team Österreich App



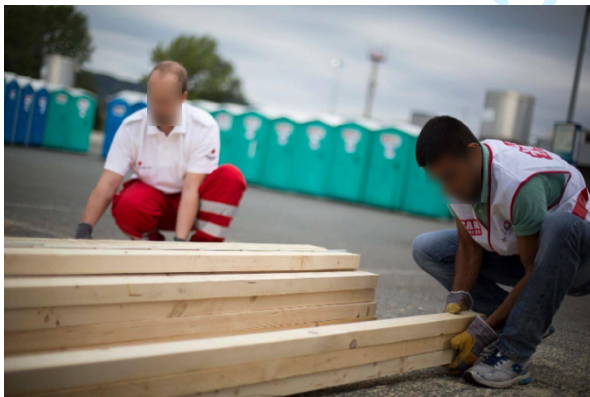
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## *EM and TA Working Together in the Field*

*Figure W12. TA and EM Working Alongside at Refugee House*



*Figure W13. TA and EM Working Alongside in Assisting Large Events in Vienna*



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