A Deeply Personal Affair: Stakeholder Engagement in Brand 'Refresh' Project of a Hospice

Fran Hyde

University of Suffolk, Ipswich, England

Correspondence: Fran Hyde (f.hyde2@uos.ac.uk)

ABSTRACT

Reporting the case of St Angela's hospice, in which stakeholders became involved in marketing work, gives key insights into the vital relationship between nonprofits and their stakeholders. Insider access to an 8-month project helps to address the paucity of work that explores the active engagement of stakeholders in the work of nonprofit organisations. This practice paper explores the emotional investment, participation and contribution, as well as the outcome aspirations of a diverse group of stakeholders involved in a project to 'refresh' a hospice brand. Recommendations are relevant for nonprofit senior leadership teams, trustees wanting to develop stakeholder involvement, as well as nonprofit stakeholders considering deepening their involvement with nonprofit organisations.

1 | Introduction

Against a backdrop of operational and strategic challenges at St Angela's (a pseudonym) hospice, the Chief Operating Officer (CEO) triggered a brand 'refresh'. Reflecting the complex operating and financial model as well as a broad range of impact St Angela's, like many charities, has an extensive network of stakeholders who could be invited to participate in the project by the CEO. Over an 8-month period, the author and this mostly willing and diverse group of stakeholders became involved in a project led by a branding agency that involved a review of St Angela's existing brand. Through a series of consultations, document scrutiny and workshops with this range of hospice stakeholders, what emerged at the end of the 8-month project was much more helpful to St Angela's than just the 'fresh' new logo.

Stakeholders are indispensable to nonprofits as they are essential in ensuring that charities are effective, accountable, and financially viable. Engagement with powerful stakeholders, such as service users, commissioners, regulatory bodies, corporate donors, and community groups, is crucial for any charity. Focusing on the engagement of a specific stakeholder group is not often the day-to-day reality and practice of many charities, so this practice paper responds to calls to develop an understanding of how to bring together and involve a very diverse range of stakeholders effectively (Lee and Bourne 2017). Stakeholder engagement is well documented and understood in the for-profit world (Gregory 2007; Lomax and Mador 2006; Mahajan et al. 2023; Miller and Merrilees 2013; Pratt and Foreman 2000) but not for nonprofit organisations. Nonprofits operate in a demanding and complex environment, and the building and conducting of more useful and productive relationships with nonprofit stakeholders should be of strategic importance (Plaisance 2023). Reporting on stakeholder involvement in the rebranding of St Angela's hospice, this practice paper advances a practical understanding of the unique challenges involved in nonprofit stakeholder engagement (Chad 2015, 2016; Chapleo and Clark 2016; Lee 2013; Lee and Bourne 2017; Mitchell and Clark 2019; Vallaster and Von Wallpach 2018).

Summary

- What is currently known about the subject?
  - Stakeholder engagement in for-profit organisations and the importance of stakeholders to nonprofit organisations.
  - The importance of brands to nonprofit organisations.

- What does your paper add to this?
  - The insider perspective and involvement for the duration of the project provide a depth of insight into the issues, challenges, and opportunities of nonprofit stakeholder engagement.
  - A contribution to understanding what occurs and emerges from stakeholder participation in nonprofit work, specifically the marketing work of nonprofit organisations.

- What are the implications of your study for practitioners?
  - Recommendations in the areas of emotional investment, participation, and contribution as well as outcome aspirations are made for nonprofit senior leadership teams and trustee boards to consider when engaging stakeholders in projects.
  - Insights for nonprofit stakeholders considering deepening their involvement with nonprofit organisations.

2 | Background

Nonprofit organisations like St Angela's are competing in a crowded environment with many charities placing greater emphasis on the building and retaining of strong brands (Chapleo 2015; Lee 2013; Lee 2023; Lee and Bourne 2017; Mitchell and Hyde 2024; Stride and Lee 2007; Wymer and Akbar 2017). Indeed, the link between nonprofit brands and income generation, for instance via donations, is well documented (Gregory et al. 2020; Mirzaei et al. 2021). However, the role and 'work' of a nonprofit brand is inherently complex; it needs to generate trust and recognisability, as well as foster a sense of pride. For example, in an increasingly competitive environment, charity brands can have a role in gaining the support of volunteers who can then act as 'ambassadors' raising the profile of a charity and generating vital funds (Mitchell and Clark 2021).

Balancing normative (social or mission driven) and utilitarian (business driven) strategies (Lee and Bourne 2017) St Angela's, like other nonprofit brands, needs to ensure that its brand encapsulates its mission and represents a set of values for a wide range of stakeholders (Kylander and Stone 2012; Lee 2013; Stride and Lee 2007). To complicate matters further, rebranding work by charities such as St Angela's can attract public scrutiny. The marketing work undertaken by nonprofits can be considered a non-core activity, and such work can draw accusations of inappropriate business-like behaviour from critics who perceive such use of resources as unnecessary, wasteful, and not in line with a nonprofit's purpose (Lee and Bourne 2017; Kylander and Stone 2012; nfpresearch 2015). For nonprofits such as St Angela's what this means in practice, and what emerged during

this project, is the challenge of undertaking a rebranding project without upsetting productive relationships with staff or passionate and engaged external stakeholders (Hankinson and Lomax 2006).

2.1 | The Case Study

St Angela's is one of over 200 hospices in the United Kingdom who exist to provide care and support to people with life-limiting or terminal illnesses with the aim of hospice care being to 'ease the physical and emotional pain of dying' (Hospice 2024). Like many nonprofit organisations, the majority of St Angela's work is not funded through statutory provision and relies on raising funds as a charity. Marketing work at charities like St Angela's can be undertaken in very 'difficult' and complex environments, and involves continually balancing the needs and wishes of service users and their families with securing income from a range of funders while maintaining relationships with statutory bodies and continuing to operate in a regional health care system (Hyde 2020; Mitchell et al. 2024). To continue to operate successfully St Angela's needs to build relationships with stakeholders from a range of clinical and business backgrounds.

2.2 | Methodology

Observation took place at stakeholder consultations, workshops and meetings of the senior leadership team of the hospice, with those involved aware that university ethical approval had been secured for the study and the undertaking of data collection. Purposeful sampling was used to identify 19 stakeholder consultation and workshop participants for a more in-depth follow-up via semi-structured interviews (see Table 1 which has details of face-to-face interviews). Interviews were conducted after the completion of the project in a variety of places ranging from a Bishop's study, six different cafes, an army training base, to a small office made from a converted broom cupboard at the hospice. Stakeholders were asked in their interviews to reflect on all the stages and aspects of their involvement; the initial approach for participation, attending consultations, the images and literature which they were asked to review and the final brand assets they were shown. A range of documentation associated with the project, as well as researcher notes, were collected during the project (see Tables 2 and 3 which have details of documents collected as well as of face-to-face engagement). Data was analysed in line with the embedded role of the author in the project or case (Stake 1995), not through the rereading and coding of transcripts, but through repeated listening to the interviews and rereading of documents to enable immersion rather than 'line by line analysis' (Silverman 2017, 154) with the aim of providing a more holistic view in the discussion of the study.

3 | Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion section explores three key themes that emerged, illuminating the most critical aspects of stakeholder engagement in the brand 'refresh' project at St Angela's.

TABLE 1 | Face-to-face interviews.

Interviewee	Role descriptor	Length of intv'
1	Specialist Palliative Care Nurse, St Angela's Hospice	40 min
2	Bishop and President of St Angela's Hospice	35 min
3	Macmillan Lead Cancer Nurse, Local Hospital University NHS Foundation Trust	38 min
4	Managing Partner large UK property and building company. Trustee, St Angela's Hospice	42 min
5	Volunteer Receptionist, Fundraising Ambassador & Service User Group Member, St Angela's Hospice	36 min
6	Army Training Officer Hospice Fundraising Ambassador. St Angela's Hospice	33 min
7	Head of Marketing and Fundraising, St Angela's Hospice	31 min
8	Hospice Fundraising Ambassador, St Angela's Hospice	30 min
9	Palliative Care Consultant, local hospital University NHS Foundation Trust	24 min
10	Clinical Director, St Angela's Hospice	26 min
11	Head of Community Services, St Angela's Hospice	38 min
12	Senior Account Director at marketing agency employed for rebrand project	34 min
13	Chief Executive Officer (CEO), St Angela's Hospice	30 min
14	Head of Business Management, Chair of Staff Voice Group, St Angela's Hospice	36 min
15	Chair of Trustees, St Angela's Hospice	39 min
16	Managing Partner Marketing at marketing agency employed for rebrand project	50 min
17	Director of Income and Deputy Chief Executive Officer, St Angela's Hospice	18 min
18	Marketing Manager, St Angela's Hospice	42 min
19	Marketing and Fundraising Assistant, St Angela's Hospice	38 min
		660min (11 h)

3.1 | Emotional Investment

Stakeholders recruited for the rebranding project held deep personal connections and relationships spanning generations of involvement with St Angela's. One stakeholder, a project nurse in the local NHS hospital, explained '*my dad died there, and my nan. My wedding day pictures were done in the hospice gardens 20-odd years ago*'. A volunteer and hospice ambassador explained that he had first visited the hospice in the 1980s as an army nurse: '*We did a visit during our training... It was only half a morning, but I always remembered that day*'. Then years later, when deciding to complete a half marathon to raise money for the hospice, he found out from his mum that his nan had been cared for and died at St Angela's, while he was deployed overseas and, because of this, renewed his relationship as a hospice volunteer and supporter. His connection with St Angela's has continued, with the hospice recently caring for his mum at the end of her life.

In the interviews, stakeholders were very self-aware of their deep emotional involvement with St Angela's. One volunteer was mindful of the possible impact of this on her involvement in the brand refresh project and shared that she was still struggling to come to terms with the death of her mother whose end-of-life care had taken place at St Angela's. Receiving bereavement counselling at the hospice, she described how the current brand logo would always represent her '*my time*' at St Angela's. She explained that she viewed her involvement in the project as a chance to be able to move on and put this part of her life behind her with the potential of the release from her association with St Angela's at the end of the project.

3.2 | Participation and Contribution

As the consultations and workshops got underway a diverse range of stakeholder views and opinions about the project began to emerge. The CEO felt that it was important to include '*the clinical voice*' in the project and this was supported by another member of St Angela's senior leadership team who felt that excluding clinicians from the project would leave them feeling '*very disenfranchised*'. But in practice when trying to accommodate the clinician's involvement in the project it became difficult to justify '*taking them away from clinical work*'. Combining stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and experiences (such as a clinician and a local business leader) was not just a logistical challenge for those leading the project. A member of the hospice senior leadership team aired some reservations that participants who had previously worked in the NHS might '*bring that culture with them like a cardigan*' and that for these stakeholders talking about marketing and brands might be a bit '*uncomfortable*'. For one long-serving staff member rather than being uncomfortable she expressed frustration about the number of marketing projects she felt she had already been asked to participate in saying in one workshop '*I wouldn't care if our logo was a banana. If it was my mum, my dad, my husband, I don't think I would care two hoots about the logo as long as I had a competent, caring person in front of me*'.

TABLE 2 | Documents collected.

Type	Title	Length
Press release	Fresh feel for local charity to help sustainability.	1 page A4
Press release	Local charity struggles to keep up with demand.	2 pages A4
Attendance list	Branding workshop attendance lists	1 page A4
Email exchange with CEO	Branding project update	1 page A4
Email to all staff	Changes to our identity for fundraising purposes	1 page A4
Email to all St Angela's marketing and fundraising staff	FAQs for St Angela messaging for fundraising	3 pages A4
Email exchange with Head of Marketing and Fundraising	Brand refresh steering group project outline & 'Good bad and ugly' workshop outline	3.5 pages A4
Email exchanges with CEO	Hospice Brand guidelines and Marketing proposal	9.5 pages A4
Notes	Brand steering group meetings	2 pages A4
Notes	Update on branding project meeting with agency	1 page A4
Notes	CEO meeting to prepare for branding project update meeting	1 page A4
Notes	Reflections after CEO and agency project update	1 page A4
PDF document prepared by Agency for St Angela's	'Our brand guidelines'	27 pages A4
Brief from agency	Initial Internal Messaging	8 pages A4
Brief from agency	Initial Internal Messaging V1	11 pages A4
Brief from agency	Basis for key messaging	8 pages A4
PDF document prepared by Agency for St Angela's	St Angela Brand Spine	2 pages A4
PDF document prepared by Agency for St Angela's	Design brief	3 pages A4
Document prepared by agency for St Angela's	Design Brief v 1	3 pages A4
PDF document prepared by Agency for Sy Angela's	St Angela proposal internal messaging plan	5 pages A4
PDF document prepared by Agency for St Angela's	St Angela's proposal marketing plan and campaign	8 pages A4
		102 pages A4

Ensuring that workshops and consultations were not dominated by a few participants and that stakeholders understood why they were being asked to contribute was noted in field notes as well as by participants in interviews. One stakeholder wished people would *'just pipe down'*, with another wondering if it had really been necessary for *'all those people to sit in a room and talk about concepts'*. Towards the end of a long presentation by the brand agency on different refreshed logo options for consideration another commented to their neighbour *'why can't a computer just choose it?'*. But a trustee stakeholder expressed the need to bring people together through a process of consultations and workshops and said that he saw the project as taking people on a journey. However, in the interview he ended his reflection by saying that another option was that *'[the CEO] could have just sat there and chosen the brand'* adding with a knowing smile *'but this would not have gone down at all well at [St Angela's]'*.

3.3 | Outcome Aspirations

The brand refresh project ended with stakeholders agreeing on a new logo as well as changes to some other brand elements. A range of opinions about the process emerged from the stakeholder participants, and one with a clinical background said that for her the process had all been *'a bit fluffy and a bit pointless, maybe'*. The majority of stakeholders involved in the project seemed pleased and even proud about what had taken place at St Angela's; a stakeholder from a clinical background expressed *'it's up there with the changes that other people have made, other*

TABLE 3 | Other face-to-face engagement.

Type	Title	Length
Workshop	Strategy workshop with stakeholders	4 h
Meeting	Brand steering group–agency presentation of findings stages 1–5	2 h
Meeting	Brand steering group-meeting of consultation panel followed by debrief of steering group	3.5 h
Meeting	Presentation of visual concepts by agency to steering group	3 h
Meeting	Presentation by steering group of visual concepts to the consultation panel	1.5 h
Meeting	CEO meeting next stages of brand project	1 h
Meeting	CEO meeting and agency on brand implementation	2 h
		17 h

*organisation*s' going on to talk about the importance for her of involvement with an organisation who were '*keeping up*' with other charities. A trustee said that the project had resulted in a brand refresh which they felt was '*professional, not too business like... I think it's still soft enough and it shows a caring side*', with *a* staff stakeholder reflected that the '*old*" logo now looked '*outdated and amateur*'.

Significantly, in the interviews when the stakeholders talked about the new logo, the word '*fresh*' came up time and time again. One of the hospice's ambassadors described the new logo and changes to brand elements saying '*it just looks fresh; exactly what we are after*' and his body language signalled a reinvigoration and, in some way, renewal as a result of his participation in the project. One stakeholder participant suggested that the new logo presented 'an opportunity to revitalise relationships with the community' suggesting that for him the refreshed logo was in some way a catalyst. These, as well as other conversations with stakeholders and notes from the final workshop, recorded a rejuvenation and, for some, a sense of recommitment to St Angela's emerging as a result of their involvement in the brand 'refresh' project.

4 | Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 | Emotional Investment

The nature of the work undertaken by a nonprofit is likely to mean that nonprofit stakeholders have a far greater connection to their organisation than stakeholders of a for-profit organisation. St Angela's stakeholders were deeply engaged with the hospice, and in involving stakeholder's nonprofits need to account for the strength of this connection to a nonprofit organisation.

4.1.1 | Recommendation 1

- Planning stakeholder involvement in a project needs to include early opportunities for stakeholders to share their involvement and connections with the organisation. For example, a session should be conducted that acknowledges stakeholder connections and explores how stakeholders will feel if, because of the project in which they are involved, changes occur to the organisation.

4.2 | Participation and Contribution

Engaging and involving stakeholders in marketing or other work needs to be undertaken whilst ensuring essential stakeholder relationships are maintained. During the project at St Angela's, stakeholders began to question the process, the value of their contribution, and their role within the project. Consideration of, and planning to sustain relationships for the duration of a project, needs to be considered from the outset when stakeholder involvement is being considered by nonprofits.

4.2.1 | Recommendation 2

To build and maintain productive relationships with stakeholders, planning for the resources and support for this additional involvement in the work of a nonprofit needs to be built into a project for example, a written briefing note or introductory session needs to include the relevant information to ensure that stakeholders understand the rationale for the project, why their involvement is supported by the senior leadership team and trustees, as well as the value and importance of their involvement and commitment to the success of the project.

4.3 | Outcome Aspirations

Stakeholder engagement in the work of a nonprofit can be used as a tool to enact and achieve some change in a nonprofit organisation. St Angela's stakeholders may not have been fully aware of the reason for the project but were still affected by their involvement in the brand refresh project. Some stakeholders expressed a renewal in their commitment to St Angela's whilst others saw the project outcome and change as a prompt to move on from their association with the hospice.

4.3.1 | Recommendation 3

- Projects involving stakeholders can facilitate stakeholder renewal or release of association and support for a nonprofit. The stakeholder 'reorientation' that occurs from project involvement provides an opportunity for nonprofits. For example, project involvement could be part of a planned stakeholder exit strategy, or a project could be used to expand or target new stakeholder networks. Project work such as looking at a brand refresh provides a nonprofit with an

opportunity to broaden and trial associations with stake-holders alongside renewing current relationships.

4.4 | Limitations and Future Research

St Angela's was a single case study, and so it is important to acknowledge some limitations to the generalisability of this project. Furthermore, whilst data was collected in a variety of ways, this study is limited by the size of the hospice and the capacity of one researcher.

Further studies could utilise different data collection methods as well as explore other aspects of marketing work, such as advertising and communication or events and fundraising, in which nonprofit stakeholders are known to be actively involved.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

References

Chad, P. 2015. "Utilising a Change Management Perspective to Examine the Implementation of Corporate Rebranding in a Non-profit SME." *Journal of Brand Management* 22: 569–587.

Chad, P. 2016. "Corporate Rebranding: An Employee-Focused Nonprofit Case Study." *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing* 28, no. 4: 327–350.

Chapleo, C. 2015. "Brand 'Infrastructure' in Nonprofit Organizations: Challenges to Successful Brand Building?" *Journal of Marketing Communications* 21, no. 3: 199–209.

Chapleo, C., and P. Clark. 2016. "Branding a Tertiary Institution by Committee: An Exploration of Internal Brand Analysis and Management Processes." *Journal of Brand Management* 23: 631–647.

Gregory, A. 2007. "Involving Stakeholders in Developing Corporate Brands: The Communication Dimension." *Journal of Marketing Management* 23, no. 1–2: 59–73.

Gregory, G., L. Ngo, and R. Miller. 2020. "Branding for Non-profits: Explaining New Donor Decision-Making in the Charity Sector." *Journal of Product and Brand Management* 29, no. 5: 583–600.

Hankinson, P., and W. Lomax. 2006. "The Effects of Re-Branding Large UK Charities on Staff Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviour." *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 11: 193–207.

Hospice, U. K. 2024. "Information and Support."

Hyde, F. 2020. "Harry's Most Important Work." *Marketing Theory* 20, no. 2: 211–218.

Kylander, N., and C. Stone. 2012. "The role of brand in the nonprofit sector."

Lee, Z. 2013. "Rebranding in Brand-Oriented Organisations: Exploring Tensions in the Nonprofit Sector." *Journal of Marketing Management* 29, no. 9–10: 1124–1142.

Lee, Z. 2023. "Building Brands for Nonprofit Organisations: A Review of Current Themes and Future Research Directions." *A Research Agenda for Brand Management in a New Era of Consumerism*, 257–272, Edward Elgar Publishing.

Lee, Z., and H. Bourne. 2017. "Managing Dual Identities in Nonprofit Rebranding: An Exploratory Study." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 46, no. 4: 794–816.

Lomax, W., and M. Mador. 2006. "Corporate Re-Branding: From Normative Models to Knowledge Management." *Journal of Brand Management* 14, no. 1: 82–95.

Mahajan, R., W. M. Lim, M. Sareen, S. Kumar, and R. Panwar. 2023. "Stakeholder Theory." *Journal of Business Research* 166: 114104.

Miller, D., and B. Merrilees. 2013. "Rebuilding Community Corporate Brands: A Total Stakeholder Involvement Approach." *Journal of Business Research* 66, no. 2: 172–179.

Mirzaei, A., C. M. Webster, and H. Siuki. 2021. "Exploring Brand Purpose Dimensions for Non-profit Organizations." *Journal of Brand Management* 28: 186–198.

Mitchell, S., N. Turner, K. Fryer, et al. 2024. "Integration of Primary Care and Palliative Care Services to Improve Equality and Equity at the End-Of-Life: Findings From Realist Stakeholder Workshops." *Palliative Medicine* 38, no. 8: 02692163241248962. https://doi.org/10.1177/02692163241248962.

Mitchell, S. L., and M. Clark. 2019. "Reconceptualising Product Life-Cycle Theory as Stakeholder Engagement With Non-profit Organisations." *Journal of Marketing Management* 35, no. 1–2: 13–39.

Mitchell, S. L., and M. Clark. 2021. "Rethinking Non-profit Brands Through a Volunteer Lens: Time for B2V." *Journal of Marketing Management* 37, no. 5–6: 464–487.

Mitchell, S. L., and F. Hyde. 2024. *The Future of Charity Marketing*. Routledge.

nfpresearch. 2015. "2 In 3 People Say Rebrands And London Offices Are a Waster of Charities Money."

Plaisance, G. 2023. "Evaluation in Nonprofit Organizations: A Defense of Perception as a Managerial and Scientific Tool." *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing* 28, no. 4: e1807.

Pratt, M. G., and P. O. Foreman. 2000. "Classifying Managerial Responses to Multiple Organizational Identities." *Academy of Management Review* 25, no. 1: 18–42.

Silverman, D. 2017. "How Was It for You? The Interview Society and the Irresistible Rise of the (Poorly Analysed) Interview." *Qualitative Research* 17, no. 2: 144–150.

Stake, R. E. 1995. *The Art of Case Study Research*. Sage Publications Inc.

Stride, H., and S. Lee. 2007. "No Logo? No Way. Branding in the Non-Profit Sector." *Journal of Marketing Management* 23, no. 122: 107.

Vallaster, C., and S. Von Wallpach. 2018. "Brand Strategy Co-Creation in a Nonprofit Context: A Strategy-As-Practice Approach." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 47, no. 5: 984–1006.

Wymer, W., and M. M. Akbar. 2017. "Brand Authenticity, Its Conceptualization, and Its Relevance to Nonprofit Marketing." *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing* 14: 359–374.