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Profit, Purpose, and Behaviour: How the Hope of Profit Shapes Organisational Decision-Making Through an Economic and Behavioural Lens

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Abstract

Economic theory mentions that a profit motive often drives efficiency, an increase in innovation, and optimal resource allocation, while it is often seen absent in mission-driven non-profit organisations. Substantive research delves into the economic understanding of the expected actions by organisations working towards the hope of profit and otherwise. However, when it comes to real-world dynamics, human behaviours are likely to cause deviations from economic theory. These deviations are dependent on a set of circumstances and external factors. This paper aims to investigate organisational actions through a combination of economics and behavioural economics lens, which further enables higher awareness of organisational decision-making and biases held. This paper utilises primary research, including a focus group discussion, to do so.This paper utilises both quantitative and qualitative methodology. A scenario-based survey was conducted with 37 total respondents, of which 10 also participated in a live focus group discussion. The respondents were primarily private sector employees aged 25 to 44. Participants answered the same set of questions using two different motivational frames: one framed around profit maximisation and one without. Results demonstrated that while the hope of profit leads to loss aversion, opportunistic pricing, and quality signalling, it does not undermine labour ethics, creativity, or environmental values as economic theory suggests. On the contrary, the lack of a profit motive drives creative risk-taking and upholds labour and environmental standards. However, it does not significantly strengthen commitments to sustainability, which remains steady across both frames. These findings indicate that organisational behaviour is influenced by a variety of factors, including economic incentives and personal values, which challenge purely rational models of decision making.

Keywords: *Behavioural Economics, Behavioural Biases, Profit Motive, Profit Maximisation, Hope of Profit, Loss Aversion, Commercial Motives, Innovation*

1. Introduction

In economic discussions, a common belief is that enterprises seeking profit drive growth, innovation and efficiency. On the other hand, if all enterprises were owned by charities or governments,

they would be expected to focus on societal well-being. While this may certainly reflect in today's economy, this is not always true. In the global economy, tensions between profit-driven and non-profit-driven organisations and their behaviour are having increasingly important impacts on social, economic, and institutional outcomes. This shift calls for further academic exploration.

This paper delves deeper and uncovers, through behavioural economics, the behaviours that come about in the presence of a profit motive and the absence of one (alternative motive). It explores why the hope of profit does not always maximise growth, as well as why charitable enterprises cannot always drive maximum wellbeing. A profit motive does not always bring out the perfect use of resources. Poor governance and actions from organisations with alternative motives are likely, since the humans who run them are pursuing objectives which need not align with economic theory (Witynski, 2024; Field Museum, 2020). More simply, human behaviour produces both positive and negative outcomes, despite what economic theory predicts. Along with irrational behaviour, a conundrum of endless factors is formed, each aggravating the other, making it hard to understand the causal effect of the existence or nonexistence of a profit motive. The past century of lived experiences has shown that economic theory itself would be inaccurate as well. This paper generalises and attempts to draw conclusions based on past instances, including both classical economic theory and aspects of behavioural economics, complemented with primary research.

Despite the prevalent belief that the hope of profit drives innovation and optimisation of resources, it may also lead to environmental degradation, worker exploitation, and a plethora of negative behavioural effects, such as panic selling, greed, and loss aversion. Charitable enterprises without a profit motive cannot always drive maximum well-being and sustainability, and are not always less risk-averse. Many studies have examined the behaviour engendered by both a purely economic theory lens and a behavioural lens; few explore the combination of the two. The objective of this paper and research is to understand whether organisations' goals of profit maximisation or not are purely driven by economic theory. The aim is to determine the role of behavioural economics, its specific underlying factors, alongside economic theory, in the actions taken by organisations. This paper contributes by evaluating the balance between positive and negative outcomes of decisions made in both types of organisations (with the hope of profit maximisation and without), addressing the lack of consensus in existing literature.

2. Literature Review

Past literature has delved into understanding the impact of the likelihood of generating returns on various factors. These include efficiency/productivity, incentives driving behaviour, and ingenuity that lead to transformation or improvement, as well as the contrary, such as exploitation and cognitive biases. This is contrasted with organisations that are not driven by profit but by motivations where propensity to take risks may be higher, and public facilities and resources may be of higher quality (in terms of sustainability as well). One such study investigates innovation specifically. Simone et al. (2024) provide evidence that profits, innovation, and investment are linked in a virtuous cycle. Anticipated returns motivate innovative activity. With the hope of selling more goods and services and standing out in homogenous markets, innovation is driven, which reinforces a loop; innovation can, in turn, increase profits.

Apart from innovation, the three following studies investigate the impact of a profit motive on productivity.

Daly et al. (2025) discuss the productivity gap between the public sector and private sector. Low productivity of the public sector has been a consistent trend for over the last three decades, and since 1995, productivity of the public sector has decreased by 20%. Each year, productivity has decreased by approximately 0.1%, reaching an extreme of 0.9 percent succeeding the 2008 financial crisis. A study

conducted in November 2023 concluded that 78% of respondents noted that public services had degenerated (Daly et al., 2025). Conversely, private sector productivity, already high, has further increased by up to 150%. Not only is there a vast difference in productivity between the two sectors, but the gap is widening. Results across 42 countries from a study at McKinsey & Company showed that if the public sector could improve productivity levels to match that of the most productive in their groups, approximately $3.5 trillion per year improvement could be achieved (Daly et al., 2025).

The same can be seen through a historical instance. A study, 'History, Russia and the Soviet Union, 1905-24,' uncovers the productive efficiency gap by comparing communist and capitalist systems (Bircher, 2021). Analysis of the results of the New Economic Policy (NEP), introduced by Vladimir Lenin in March 1921, shows that the pursuit of profit led to great economic growth. Previously, with production in a pure communist state, the hope for profit was nonexistent. Various factors, such as grain requisitioning and the inability to sell excess goods, contributed to this. As a result, producers reduced production immensely, since any excess produced would be seized anyway. However, after the NEP was introduced with the attempt to increase efficiency and productivity (which included aspects of capitalism), producers could now sell goods on the free market. In the pursuit of profits, production of grain increased by 95%, coal by 289%, steel by 1900%, and electricity by 900%.

Additionally, Adam Smith's invisible hand theory and the knowledge problem emphasise the free market's inevitable forces and abilities to determine resource allocation, particularly in comparison to a government's idealistic or populist solutions (Majaski, 2024; Davie, 2025). Public Choice theory has shown that governments and charities are less efficient and productive since there is a lesser sense of urgency and scarcity of resources in the absence of competition (Longley, 2022).

In contrast to the above, the negative aspects that the hope of profit brings about must be considered. While economic theory states that the desire to gain profits incentivises the efficient usage of resources, behavioural economics reveals that this is not always the case. Since emotional factors play a large role when humans make decisions in firms, they may be irrational and thus inefficient. This may be apparent in behavioural factors like greed, loss aversion, or panic selling. The equation below (Fig. 1) and its graphical representation (Fig. 2) outline prospect theory, which explains loss aversion (Lee, 2025; Ansari, 2024).

$$v(x) = x^{\alpha}, \text{ when } x \geq 0 \text{ (representing gains)}$$
$$v(x) = -\lambda(-x)^{\beta}, \text{ when } x < 0 \text{ (representing losses)}$$

Fig. 1: Mathematical representation of prospect theory

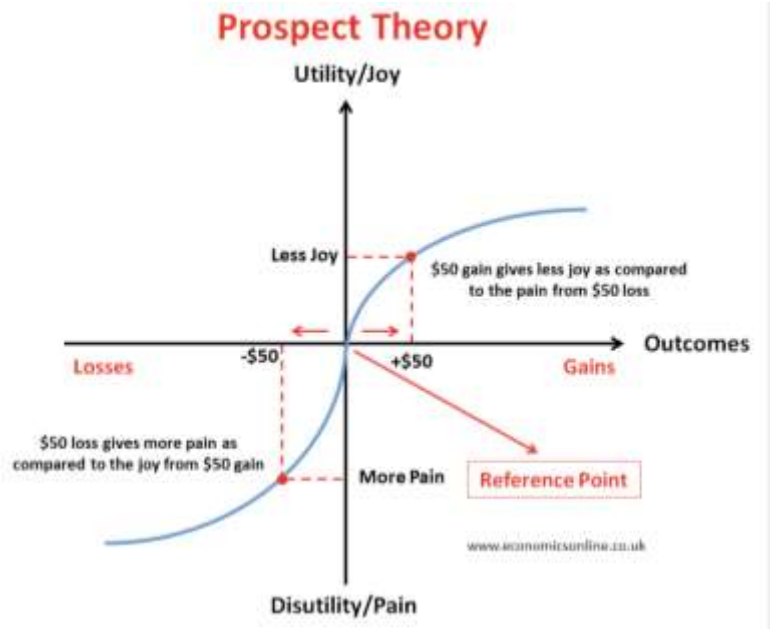


Fig. 2: Graphical representation of prospect theory

Explanatory articles by Lee (2025), Ansari (2024), and Stoffel (2025) explore loss aversion, which is outlined through part of prospect theory. The emotional toll of a possible loss is greater than that of a potential gain, almost twice as extreme. In Fig. 1, "$\lambda>1$ is the loss aversion coefficient—a parameter that captures how much more weight losses have relative to gains" (Lee, 2025; Stoffel, 2025). In Fig. 2, the *x*-axis represents either gains (positive *x* values) or losses (negative *x* values). The *y*-axis represents either joy (positive *y* values) or pain (negative *y* values). Where *x* is negative, it can be seen that the graph is steeper, meaning a loss brings more pain than a gain of the same size brings joy (Ansari, 2024). So, firms' willingness to take risks may decrease due to the fear of potential losses in the case of hope of profit solely. This can be made conspicuous through the financial crisis of 2008.

A journalistic analysis of the 2008 financial crisis, Pisani (2019), ties the 2008 financial crisis to behavioural economics. The 2008 financial crisis encapsulates a situation where the hope for profit resulted in extremes on both sides - profit maximisation snowballed into greed; when the bubble burst, it was followed by loss aversion and panic selling. Ultimately, the result of this was not only short-term distress in the economy, with GDP contracting and unemployment briefly topping at 10 percent, but also the aftermath, which left scars on society, leading some to make more conservative decisions in the market today (Pisani, 2019; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2025; Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2024; Malmendier & Nagel, 2007).

Moreover, an academic, qualitative study investigating farmworkers in Michigan gives insight into how a profit motive encourages worker exploitation and trafficking (Handal et al., 2025).

Grolleau et al. (2023) also find that observers tend to judge environmental wrongdoings as more morally acceptable if accompanied by higher profit yields for firms. This is particularly seen in

organisations that prioritise profits and are less environmentally concerned (or lack knowledge or information regarding the topic).

Shifting the focus, 'History, Changes in Medicine, c1848 - c1948,' mentions how, with a hope of profit, the provision of crucial public goods is often ignored (Warren, 2021). In the 1800s, in Britain, the public generally adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude towards government intervention. However, left to the private sector, certain public goods like sewage systems and access to clean drinking water were underprovided. This minimal government intervention also contributed significantly to the cholera epidemic and harm to the economy. After both local and national governments' increased mandated involvement in public health following the 1875 public health act, deaths and the spread of disease (Warren, 2021).

However, through behavioural economics, it is well established that governments make irrational decisions - diverging from the behaviour expected more often - with the sole aim to gain more votes and be voted in again (Longley, 2022). Charities, as well, are pressurised to meet welfare goals and, therefore, plausibly make irrational decisions. In some cases, governments and charities also prioritise the short term over the long term, explained by present bias. A current scenario which displays this dilemma is how UK Governments have routinely neglected preventive healthcare. An article by Cookson (2025) discusses the short-sightedness of governments in prioritising short-term treatment over long-term prevention. While the long-term benefits are immense (a research report by the Office of Health Economics shows that through investing in this, the return could be 19 times greater), failure to prioritise them restricts advancement in society (Cookson, 2025; Office of Health Economics, London, 2024).

On the other hand, a discussion paper (Oded Stark, 2023) emphasises the benefits of the behaviour engendered by organisations which do not have a hope for profit. It covers how altruistic individuals can be less risk-averse than similar non-altruistic individuals. This leads to the idea that non-profits are expected to be more risk-taking.

In the existing literature, the focus lies more on economic theory and models in both commercially-focused and mission-driven contexts. However, a majority of the literature fails to account for behavioural biases, like how altruism and the drive for innovation and quality impact decision-making in organisations (both profit and non-profit). This makes it difficult to understand true behaviour that comes about as a result of the hope for profit, and the absence of a profit motive. Therefore, there is a gap in existing literature of knowledge and understanding that must be addressed.

To understand the reasons behind these dynamics in today's context, this study collects data from a survey analysing the decision-making behaviours by individuals (predominantly in Singapore, the United Kingdom, and India) in two different scenarios, one in which profit maximisation is given as a motive, and the other in which there are alternative (non-profit) motives. By providing behavioural nudges, certain behavioural biases are identified, as well as how real decisions differ from standard economic theory.

3. Conceptual Framework / Theory

This study examines how the presence or absence of a profit motive influences decision-making in organisations through a primary survey and a focus group. Respondents were given two scenarios to answer questions based on. In the first scenario, they were told they were the owner of an art gallery with a clear profit motive; in the second scenario, while they remained the owners of a hypothetical art gallery, they were explicitly told that they did not have a profit motive. The profit motive represents the independent variable, and remains in Scenario 1 but is removed from Scenario 2. Participants answer questions regarding innovation, efficiency, productivity, waste minimisation, greed, panic selling, loss

aversion, proletariat exploitation, environmental harm, risk-taking ability, provision of public goods, and sustainability. These factors act as the dependent variables.

It is hypothesised that with a profit maximisation motive, organisations will be inclined to increase efficiency, limit wastage, and increase innovation, but at the cost of greed, panic selling, and worker exploitation. Furthermore, it is hypothesised that with the hope of profit, sustainable materials may not be used and secondary facilities not provided, with the aim of minimising production costs. On the other hand, it is hypothesised that without a profit motive, organisations will invest more time, effort, and resources in the production of goods and services irrespective of higher costs; they are expected to be incentivised to reduce environmental harm and worker exploitation, as well as take more risks.

4. Methodology

4.1. Aim & Research Questions:

This study aims to analyse and understand differences in organisational behaviour in the presence versus absence of a profit motive. Contrasts in results across variables mentioned in the hypotheses will be analysed across both scenarios, where Scenario 1 is the presence of a hope for profit and Scenario 2 is the absence of one.

The following are the research questions:

RQ1: Will there be a significant increase in the level of innovation in organisations with a profit motive compared to those without a profit motive?
RQ2: Will there be a significant increase in the level of efficiency and productivity in organisations with a profit motive compared to those without a profit motive?
RQ3: Will there be a significant increase in the level of waste minimisation in organisations with a profit motive compared to those without a profit motive?
RQ4: Will there be a significant increase in greed in organisations with a profit motive compared to those without a profit motive?
RQ5: Will there be a significant increase in loss aversion in organisations with a profit motive compared to those without a profit motive?
RQ6: Will there be a significant increase in panic selling in organisations with a profit motive compared to those without a profit motive?
RQ7: Will there be a significant increase in worker exploitation in organisations with a profit motive compared to those without a profit motive?
RQ8: Will there be a significant increase in the level of environmental harm in organisations with a profit motive compared to those without a profit motive?
RQ9: Will there be a significant decrease in the sustainability of materials in organisations with a profit motive compared to those without a profit motive?
RQ10: Will there be a significant decrease in the quality and quantity of secondary facilities provided in organisations with a profit motive compared to those without a profit motive?

4.2. Research Design:

This is a quantitative comparative research study to examine whether there are differences in certain factors in the presence versus absence of a profit motive, in reference to a hypothetical situation where the responder is the owner and manager of an art gallery. The factors being tested are as follows: profit maximisation, waste limitation, working hours/overtime, pricing, willingness to pay, sustainability of materials used, job losses, innovation and experimentation, and better secondary facilities. Behavioural nudges were incorporated in two different hypothetical scenarios that participants had to embody - one in

which there was a profit motive, and one in which there was no hope for profit. Participants answer 11 different questions twice, once in each of the two scenarios.

4.3. Sampling:

A sample of 37 random participants was recruited using convenience sampling and asked to answer 2 identical sets of 11 questions across two different scenarios. Respondents were informed that participation in the survey was voluntary and that they could express their opinions honestly without any pressure or influence. Over 70% of the total participants were between the ages of 25 and 44, and over 81% of the total participants were employed in private enterprises.

4.4. Instruments:

The study used a scenario-based questionnaire to understand differences in behaviour between two scenarios. In one scenario, the presence of hope for profit was emphasised, and in the second scenario, it was explicitly stated that there was no profit motive. Both scenarios referred to an art gallery where the participant is the manager/owner. Participants in the survey were also asked to respond based on the specific scenario. Participants responded to both scenarios separately, answering the same 11 questions in each scenario. The questionnaire covered topics, such as maximising profit, waste limitation, working hours/overtime, pricing, willingness to pay, sustainability of materials used, job losses, innovation and experimentation, and better secondary facilities. These factors were measured across both scenarios. The Likert scale (1-5) was used, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. Participants were asked to respond using this scale. 27 of the total 37 participants responded to an online survey. To remove thinking bias, a live focus group discussion was conducted with 10 participants. They were asked the same 11 questions for both scenarios. Participants in the focus group discussion were also asked why they chose certain answers to understand their thought processes.

4.5. Process:

The questionnaire (in the form of a Google Form) was circulated on online platforms, such as WhatsApp and Email. The aim of the study, including the scenarios (along with behavioural nudges), was explained in the survey itself. Participants were asked to answer questions based on the current scenario. Participants first answered 11 questions as part of the first scenario (hope for profit), followed by identical 11 questions as part of the second scenario (no hope for profit). Responses were automatically recorded and stored in a Google Spreadsheet. A Mentimeter presentation was used for the focus group discussion. Responses were sorted into total responses (37 responses, online questionnaire responses & focus group discussion responses), original responses (27 responses, only online questionnaire responses), and focus group discussion responses (10 responses). Notes and key points from the focus group discussion were recorded separately and stored in a Google Document.

4.6. Data Analysis:

The mean scores for each question (questions 1 to 11 for both scenarios) were calculated. Then, the mean values for identical questions between scenarios were compared. These pairs of identical questions were examined to see if, when moving from the presence of a hope for profit maximisation to the absence of it, behaviour shifts. Positive changes indicated higher agreement, whereas negative changes indicated lower agreement. Furthermore, mean values for all 27 original responses from the online questionnaire were compared to the mean values for the 10 responses to the focus group discussion. This was done to identify biases in responses. To understand response distribution, the Top 2 Box score was utilised. This was applied for all 37 responses (total): the original 27 responses from the online questionnaire and the 10 responses from the focus group discussion.

4.7. Ethical Considerations:

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study prior to completing the survey or participating in the focus group discussion. They were informed that participation was voluntary and told to respond to each question to the best of their abilities. The survey was anonymous and focus group discussion participants were reassured of their confidentiality. Responses were recorded electronically, stored confidentially, and used solely for the purpose of this academic research.

5. Study Overview and Data Outputs

This section captures the overview of the study conducted through primary surveys and focus group discussions, along with the associated data outputs.

The insights corresponding to these data outputs have been summarised in section 6 of this paper.

5.1. Study Overview

37 participants were asked to respond to the same set of 11 questions (through a survey), for a hypothetical art gallery under two distinct motivational frameworks:

Scenario 1 (S1): Profit Maximisation as a Primary Motive
Respondents were told to base decisions and responses, as art gallery owners, explicitly on the aim of maximising profit. Ratings reflect behaviours that they would adopt solely in commercially-focused settings.

Scenario 2 (S2): Alternative (Non-Profit) Motive
Respondents considered decisions as gallery owners who did not have a profit motive, without profit maximisation as a primary goal. Behaviour stimulated reflects artistic, stakeholder-oriented, or mission-driven values as primary drivers.

Each statement was rated on a 1–5 Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

5.2. Data Sample Profile

Most participants are working-age private sector professionals, which is the most relevant demographic for these kinds of decision-making scenarios.

<25 (8.1%)	**25-44 (70.3%)**	45-64 (16.2%)	65+ (5.4%)
Employment: 81.1% Private Enterprise - the dominant group			

The concentration of private-enterprise respondents increases the validity of responses (specifically, responses where there is a hope of profit). These respondents have first-hand experience in commercial settings, making their moral reasoning behind both frameworks especially meaningful.

5.3. Comparative Results of the Data - Mean Scores by Scenario

Scores represent weighted means on a 1-5 scale. Positive differences in mean values show greater agreement with the prompt in Scenario 2 compared to Scenario 1, whereas negative differences in mean values show less agreement with the prompt in Scenario 2 compared to Scenario 1.

Differences in mean responses which are less than 0.2 (4%) are considered irrelevant.

The data shown in the table below is from respondents who were part of the original questionnaire as well as respondents from the focus group (37 total responses).

	Scenario 1 Mean (Profit Maximisation)	Scenario 2 Mean (Alternative Motive)	Difference in Mean Responses (from S1 to S2)	Direction of Change
Experiment and innovate art styles to appeal to public	**4.43**	**4.32**	**-0.11**	—
Produce maximum artworks per month	**3.35**	**3.30**	**-0.05**	—
Opt for lowest cost materials	**2.54**	**2.86**	**+0.32**	▲
Limit waste (sell imperfect artworks)	**2.65**	**3.46**	**+0.81**	▲
Maximise artist working hours / overtime	**2.38**	**1.84**	**-0.54**	▼
Drastically reduce prices if market changes	**3.35**	**2.78**	**-0.57**	▼
Increase prices if willingness to pay is higher	**4.35**	**4.05**	**-0.30**	▼
Opt for sustainable materials (even if more expensive)	**3.49**	**3.46**	**-0.03**	—
Remove underperforming artists if experiencing a loss	**3.19**	**2.14**	**-1.05**	▼
Encourage artists to experiment (even with risk of not selling)	**3.68**	**3.95**	**+0.27**	▲
Ensure good studio facilities (even if higher costs)	**4.46**	**4.38**	**-0.08**	—

5.4. Comparative Results of the Data - Focus Group Effect

Again, scores represent weighted means on a 1-5 scale. Positive differences in mean values show greater agreement with the prompt in Scenario 2 compared to Scenario 1, whereas negative differences in mean values show less agreement with the prompt in Scenario 2 compared to Scenario 1.

The data shown in the table below is only from respondents who were part of the original questionnaire (27 total responses).

	Scenario 1 Mean (Profit Maximisation)	Scenario 2 Mean (Alternative Motive)	Difference in Mean Responses (from S1 to S2)	Direction of Change
Experiment and innovate art styles to appeal to public	**4.41**	**4.30**	**-0.11**	—
Produce maximum artworks per month	**3.33**	**3.33**	**0.00**	—
Opt for lowest cost materials	**2.26**	**2.81**	**+0.55**	▲
Limit waste (sell imperfect artworks)	**2.56**	**3.37**	**+0.81**	▲
Maximise artist working hours / overtime	**2.15**	**1.70**	**-0.45**	▼
Drastically reduce prices if market changes	**2.89**	**2.63**	**-0.26**	▼
Increase prices if willingness to pay is higher	**4.19**	**3.96**	**-0.23**	▼
Opt for sustainable materials (even if more expensive)	**3.41**	**3.11**	**-0.30**	▼
Remove underperforming artists if experiencing a loss	**3.26**	**2.44**	**-0.82**	▼
Encourage artists to experiment (even with risk of not selling)	**3.59**	**3.85**	**+0.26**	▲
Ensure good studio facilities (even if higher costs)	**4.41**	**4.19**	**-0.22**	▼

The data shown in the table below is only from respondents who were part of the focus group discussion (10 total responses).

	Scenario 1 Mean (Profit Maximisation)	Scenario 2 Mean (Alternative Motive)	Difference in Mean Responses (from S1 to S2)	Direction of Change
Experiment and innovate art styles to appeal to public	**4.50**	**4.40**	**-0.10**	—
Produce maximum artworks per month	**3.40**	**3.20**	**-0.20**	▼
Opt for lowest cost materials	**3.30**	**3.00**	**-0.30**	▼
Limit waste (sell imperfect artworks)	**2.90**	**3.70**	**+0.80**	▲
Maximise artist working hours / overtime	**3.00**	**2.20**	**-0.80**	▼
Drastically reduce prices if market changes	**4.60**	**3.20**	**-1.40**	▼
Increase prices if willingness to pay is higher	**4.80**	**4.30**	**-0.50**	▼
Opt for sustainable materials (even if more expensive)	**3.70**	**4.40**	**+0.70**	▲
Remove underperforming artists if experiencing a loss	**3.00**	**1.30**	**-1.70**	▼
Encourage artists to experiment (even with risk of not selling)	**3.90**	**4.20**	**+0.30**	▲
Ensure good studio facilities (even if higher costs)	**4.60**	**4.90**	**+0.30**	▲

5.5. Comparative Results of the Data - Distribution Analysis

Response distribution was assessed using Top 2 Box (T2B) scores, where the percentage of people who chose 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree) was added for each question in both scenarios. The x-axis shows question numbers 1-11, where the question order is the same as in the tables above. The y-axis shows the added percentages of respondents who selected 4 or 5.

The data shown in the bar chart below is from respondents who were part of the original questionnaire as well as respondents from the focus group (37 total responses).

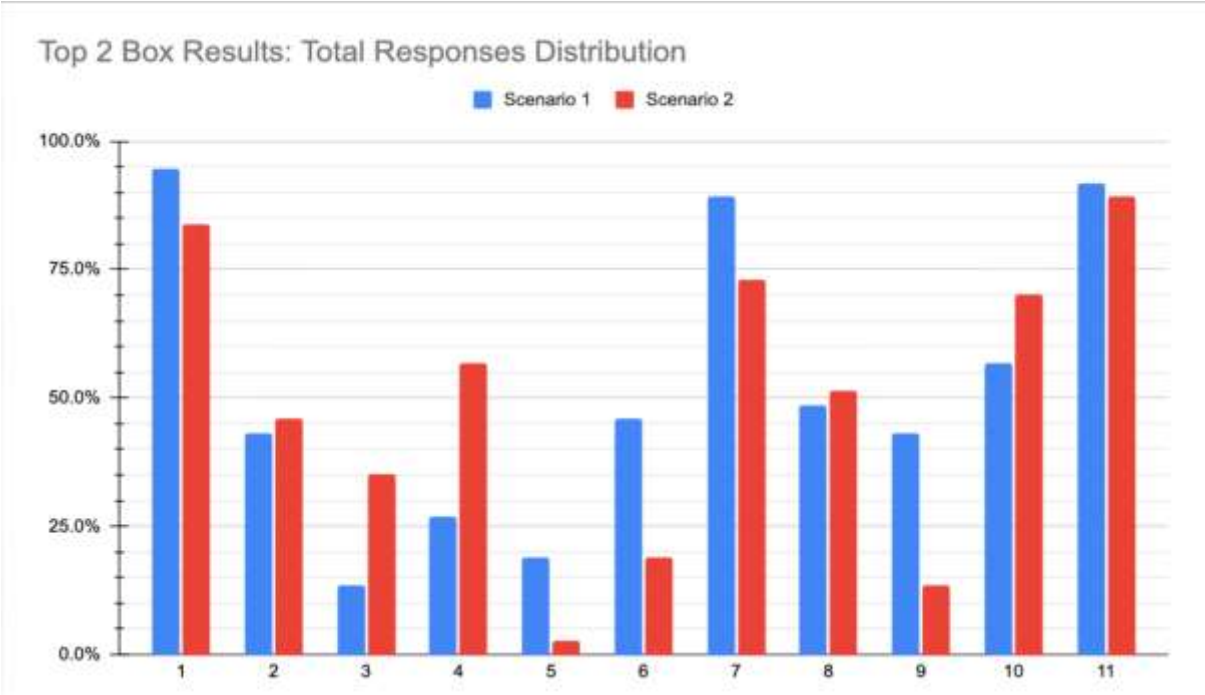


Fig. 3: Distribution of all respondents

The data shown in the bar chart below is only from respondents who were part of the focus group discussion (10 total responses).

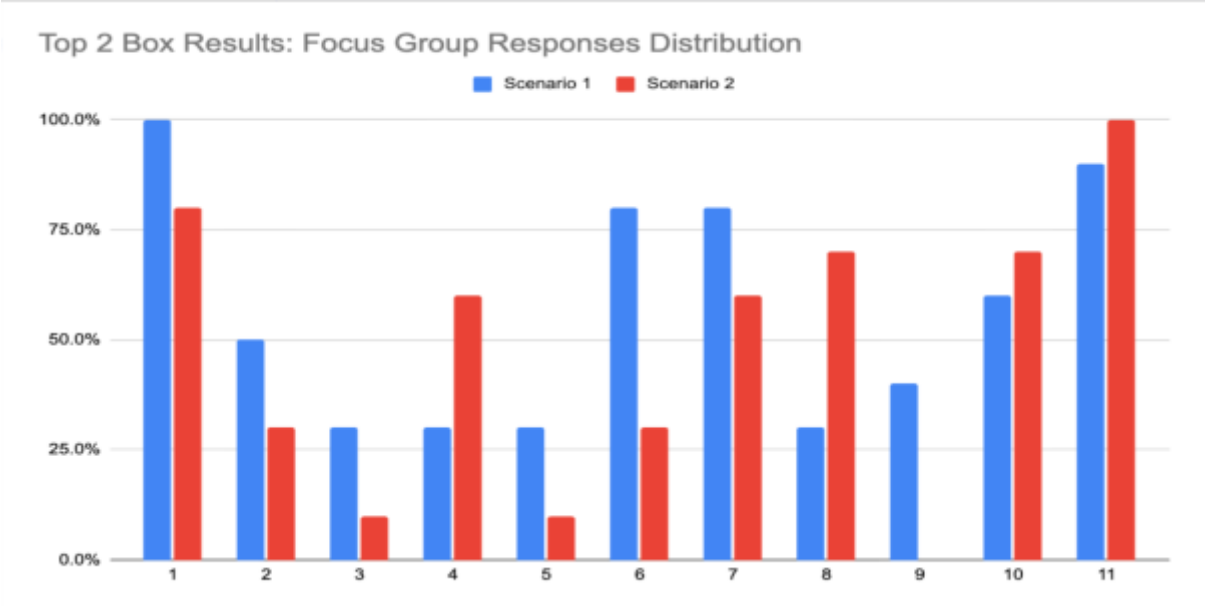


Fig. 4: Distribution of respondents from the focus group

The data shown in the bar chart below is only from respondents who were part of the original questionnaire (27 total responses).

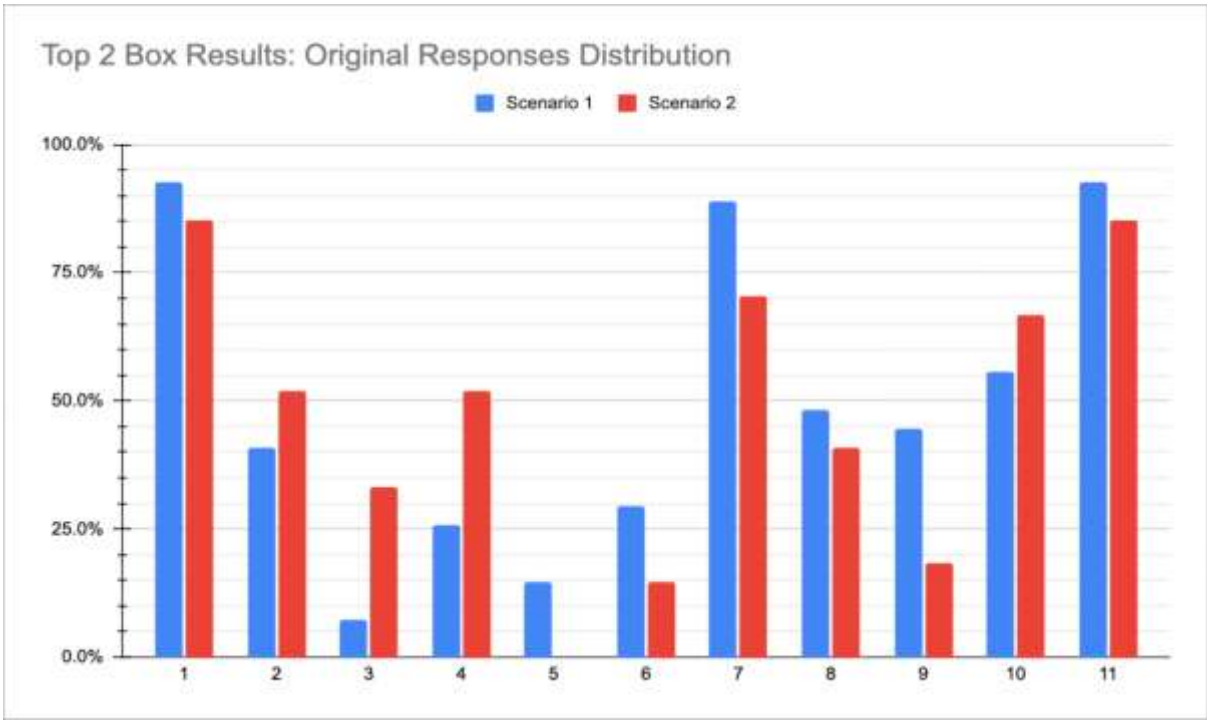


Fig. 5: Distribution of respondents from the original questionnaire

6. Key Behavioural Economics Findings

6.1. Consistent Behavioural Concepts

6.1.1 Persistent Prosocial Norms: Workplace Dignity

Referencing the mean scores for all 37 responses, ensuring good studio facilities, even at a higher cost, was the joint-highest rated statement in Scenario 1 (4.46) and remained near the top in Scenario 2 (4.38, $\Delta = -0.08$). Both scores are the highest in their respective scenarios, and the near-zero shift is striking: even under an explicit profit-maximisation frame, respondents almost universally supported investing in workers' physical environment. Furthermore, mean values for the only focus group discussion remain near the highest from all prompts in Scenario 1 (4.60) and the highest in Scenario 2 (4.90, $\Delta = +0.30$). The stability across frames (37 respondents) is stronger in this dataset than in the initial sample (27 respondents). From T2B total response results as well as only focus group discussion results, the provision of secondary facilities remains a priority (91.9% and 89.1% for Scenarios 1 and 2, respectively from total responses, 90% and 100% for Scenarios 1 and 2 respectively from focus group responses).

Behavioural Concept: Intrinsic Fairness Norms & Social Preferences

Respondents appear to hold a non-negotiable ‘dignity floor’ for worker welfare, one that cannot be rationalised by either the presence of profit logic or its absence. Aligning with work done on fairness norms, this displays how fairness and reciprocity are crucial for economic outcomes (Fehr & Gächter, 2000). The minimal drop in mean score in Scenario 2 (−0.08) and T2B score for Scenario 2 (−2.8%) for total responses suggests that this norm is alongside the most structurally stable in the data set. For a

sample overwhelmingly from private enterprise, this is a powerful counter-narrative to the assumption that commercial orientation erodes workplace ethics.

6.1.2. Exploitation Aversion: Maximising Artist Hours

Maximising working hours was the most strongly and consistently rejected statement across both scenarios for total responses (37 responses). In Scenario 1, the mean score was 2.38 (already below the neutral midpoint), and in Scenario 2, the mean score fell to just 1.84 ($\Delta = -0.54$). Excluding focus group discussion results, the statement scored even lower. In Scenario 1, the mean score was 2.15, which dropped to 1.70 in Scenario 2 ($\Delta = -0.45$). T2B scores for total responses were 18.9% and 2.7% for Scenarios 1 and 2 respectively ($\Delta = -16.2\%$), indicating that although in both scenarios exploitation of workers is rejected, the opposition towards it is stronger in Scenario 2 than in Scenario 1.

Behavioural Concept: Principal-Agent Fairness & Reciprocal Altruism

Respondents display opposition towards labour exploitation regardless of a profit motive, which disproves Karl Marx's strongly held belief that the 'proletariat' would be exploited under capitalist systems and the existence of a hope of profit maximisation. Respondents also appear to hold the belief that organisations are responsible for showing a level of care towards workers, consistent with the reciprocal altruism theory. This finding is reinforced by the sample's private enterprise background. These respondents understand commercial pressures and still reject exploitation.

6.1.3. Loss Aversion and Risk Management: Removing artists

The single largest shift in the dataset was the sudden collapse in support for removing artists after experiencing a loss. For total responses, $\Delta = -1.05$, -29.7% (for mean scores and T2B scores respectively) and for only focus group responses, $\Delta = -1.7$, -40% (again for mean scores and T2B scores respectively). Initially, scores were 3.19, 43.2% and 2.14, 13.5% for Scenarios 1 and 2 in that order.

Behavioural Concept: Loss Aversion

Loss aversion, outlined through a part of prospect theory, explains the sudden plummet in scores when going from Scenario 1 to Scenario 2. The impact of a loss is often greater than the impact of a gain of the same size. So, with the hope of profit, the fear of being unable to achieve profit maximisation may cause extreme decision-making behaviours. Along with key points taken from the focus group discussion, it is revealed that without a hope of profit, intrinsic values such as empathy come through; respondents (even under a strong profit motive) opted for understanding the root of the issue, even if artists were underperforming.

6.1.4. Waste Reduction & Utilisation of Low-Cost Materials: Signalling Relaxes Without Profit Pressure

Respondents were substantially more willing to sell imperfect artworks under a non-profit motive compared to under a profit motive. In reference to both total responses and focus group results, in Scenario 1, the mean score was 2.65 (across 37 respondents) and 2.90 (across 10 respondents), and the T2B score was 27% (across 37 respondents) and 30.0% (across 10 respondents). From Scenario 1 to Scenario 2, ($\Delta = +0.81$ and $+0.80$ for mean scores in both total responses and focus group responses respectively, and $\Delta = +29.7\%$ and $+30\%$ for T2B scores in both total responses and focus group responses respectively). When asked a question relating to the use of material, there was reluctance in the usage of low-cost materials. The mean score for all 37 responses in Scenario 1 was 2.54 and for Scenario 2, 2.86 ($\Delta = +0.32$). For Scenario 1, across 37 responses, the T2B score was 13.5%, and for Scenario 2, it was 35.1% ($\Delta = +21.6\%$).

Behavioural Concept: Quality Signalling and Market Credibility

Under profit maximisation, selling imperfect artwork and using low-cost materials threatens company reputation and, hence, long-run revenue and profits. Respondents justify unwillingness to sell imperfect artwork, use cheaper materials, and minimise waste with clear, long-term goals, which diverges from expectations. Replication of results across sample sizes signals how quality precedes short-term wastage or lower production costs. Where there is an absence of the hope of profit, while willingness to sell imperfect pieces and use lower cost materials increases, this signals a decrease in the aim to preserve quality.

6.1.5. Price Behaviour: Opportunistic Pricing and Panic Discounting

In both scenarios, when adjusted for focus group results, participants were in favour of increasing prices if consumers were willing to pay more (mean score of 4.35 for Scenario 1, 4.05 for Scenario 2, $\Delta = -0.30$, T2B score of 89.2% for Scenario 1, 72.9% for Scenario 2, $\Delta = -16.3\%$). Conversely, responses towards drastically cutting prices during market downturns were notably mixed (a mean score of 3.35 fell to 2.78 from Scenario 1 to Scenario 2).

Behavioural Concept: Asymmetric Price Symmetry, Anchoring, & Panic Under Loss Threat

Results are higher than expected and higher than the initial sample of 27 responses (excluding focus group results). This signals that in commercial setups, greed is evident, as organisations are willing to price items high regardless of certain ethical considerations. Furthermore, this displays how short-term pain overrides long-term brand and pricing integrity. Moreover, panic selling is outlined. However, the steeper fall in Scenario 2 reflects how respondents no longer feel the urgency of a revenue shortfall, so the desperation to slash prices dissolves.

6.1.6. Innovation & Experimentation as a Stable Strategy

The drive to innovate remains similar across both scenarios, according to total responses, original responses, and only focus group responses ($\Delta = -0.11, -0.11, -0.10$ respectively). The mean scores across scenarios are consistently high: 4.43 and 4.32 for Scenarios 1 and 2 respectively (total responses). T2B scores reflect similar conclusions. For total responses, in Scenario 1, the T2B score was 94.6%, and in Scenario 2, 83.8% ($\Delta = -10.8\%$). When analysing the focus group effect, Δ in T2B remains minimal (20%), and it was the highest rated statement for Scenario 1 (100%) and the second highest for Scenario 2 (80%). Output also showed that when there was experimentation along with increased risks, agreement decreased to 3.68 and 3.95 in Scenario 1 and 2 respectively (37 responses).

Behavioural Concept: Innovation as a Dominant Strategy

As can be seen through the stability of innovation scores, creative experimentation is often viewed as both a strategy to attract consumers when there is a hope of profit and also an intrinsic value; artwork needs to be modified over time as it must adapt. In both cases, there must be an appeal to consumers, meaning that the commercial imperative does not suppress creativity. Profit motives and creative ambition coexist in this sample group. However, when risk is included, with the existence of a hope of profit, experimentation is slightly diminished, showing a nominal greater risk adversity, as well as compared to organisations with alternative motives.

6.1.7. Sustainability: A Stable Value Across Frames

Sustainability appears to be a genuine value which is neither amplified nor diminished by a profit motive. The mean score for total responses in Scenario 2 (4.38) remains similar even after adding a profit

maximisation motive in Scenario 1 (4.46). T2B results show similar trends (Δ = +2.7%). The fact that across both scenarios, this remains the highest mean score signifies the extent of agreement with sustainability and objection to environmental damage.

Behavioural Concept: Values Stability & the Limits of Strategic Altruism

Due to its now emphasised relevance, sustainability affects investors' willingness to invest in enterprises. The hope of profit itself is inadequate. Enterprises often project an end goal of something more than purely profit, such as sustainable development, which could potentially intrigue investors. In the long term, this transforms the hope of profit into the hope of, say, sustainability, and has positive implications on society. Furthermore, quality standards through sustainability communicate to buyers that only work of the highest standard is offered.

6.2. Aggregate Thematic Patterns

The tables below summarise changes in T2B scores and mean scores for all 37 responses across both scenarios. Changes less than 0.2 for mean scores (4%) or less than 5% for T2B scores are considered irrelevant, most likely due to random variation.

Mean Increases in Scenario 2 vs Scenario 1	Mean is Essentially Stable Across the Two Scenarios	Mean Decreases in Scenario 2 vs Scenario 1
• Opt for lower-cost materials (+0.32) • Limit waste and sell imperfect artwork (+0.81) • Encourage artist experimentation and take risks (+0.27)	• Innovation in art styles (−0.11) • Maximise artworks produced per month (−0.05) • Sustainable materials (−0.03) • Ensure good facilities (−0.08)	• Maximise artist hours (−0.54) • Panic price-cutting (−0.57) • Increase prices drastically if people are willing to pay (−0.30) • Remove underperforming artists (−1.05)

T2B Score Increases in Scenario 2 vs Scenario 1	T2B Score is Essentially Stable Across the Two Scenarios	T2B Score Decreases in Scenario 2 vs Scenario 1
• Opt for lower-cost materials (+21.6%) • Limit waste and sell imperfect artwork (+29.7%) • Encourage artist experimentation and take risks (+13.5%)	• Maximise artworks produced per month (+2.7%) • Sustainable materials (+2.7%) • Ensure good facilities (−2.8%)	• Innovation in art styles (−10.8%) • Maximise artist hours (−16.2%) • Panic price-cutting (−27.0%) • Increase prices drastically if people are willing to pay (−16.3%) • Remove underperforming artists (−29.7%)

However, this is only a representation of total results, including responses from the online questionnaire and focus group discussion. When analysing the focus group effect and tracing specific behaviour from respondents participating in the focus group discussions, it can be seen that reactions to the following statements changed drastically.

Produce maximum artworks per month:

- Original responses (Mean: 0.00, T2B: +11.1%)
- Focus group responses (Mean: −0.20, T2B: −20.0%)

Opt for lowest cost materials:

- Original responses (mean: +0.55, T2B: +25.9%)
- Focus group responses (mean: −0.30, T2B: −20.0%)

Opt for sustainable materials (even if more expensive):

- Original responses (mean: −0.30, T2B: −7.4%)
- Focus group responses (mean: +0.70, T2B: +40.0%)

Ensure good studio facilities (even if higher costs):

- Original responses (mean: −0.22, T2B: −7.3%)
- Focus group responses (mean: +0.30, T2B: +10.0%)

6.3. Concluding insights

This survey, across an initial questionnaire and a focus group discussion, reinforces certain behavioural economic and traditional economic principles. Several key conclusions can be drawn with greater confidence:

6.3.1. Labour ethics are structurally resilient.

Opposition towards worker exploitation in the form of overtime hours, as well as ensuring high standards of facilities, are critical factors which demonstrate consistently strong workplace ethics across profit-driven and non-profit organisations. From a predominantly private enterprise sample, this is a meaningful finding, indicating that these principles seem to be deeply rooted in normative commitments.

6.3.2. Loss aversion creates the sharpest behavioural discontinuity.

The decision to remove underperforming artists shows the largest shift in the responses. This confirms that the primary goal of profit maximisation triggers loss-averse behaviours, sometimes even making extreme decisions which are not always rational. On the other hand, the opportunity of a gain of equal measure would not lead to the exact opposite action.

6.3.3. Sustainability reflects genuine values in a commercially-experienced sample

With virtually no change in sustainability scores across sample groups, the stability of this value is notable. This challenges the standard view that environmental commercial settings erode the environment, making environmental commitment appear to be an intrinsically held value in this sample.

6.3.4. Creative risk-taking is liberated, but not created, by removing profit pressure

Underlying creative deposition is rooted in both frames. Both innovation measures remain high and modestly increase in the absence of a profit motive, showing that commercial motives do not suppress creativity. However, the inclusion of risk as a factor displays how creative decision-making in organisations can be negatively affected by profit, thus underlining risk aversion.

6.3.5. Quality as a market strategy, not an aesthetic standard

Consistent and replicated willingness to maintain quality through avoiding selling imperfect artwork and using lower-cost materials (with the assumption that they are of lower quality) is seen. This supports the interpretation that quality standards and maintaining a brand are strategies to maintain long-term revenues and profits.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to evaluate organisational behaviour when there is a hope of profit maximisation and when there is not (and instead, an alternative motive). Behavioural biases were also identified, which did not align with standard economic theory. Through an online questionnaire as well as a focus group discussion, 10 different factors were investigated and 37 total data points were assessed. Data was analysed using mean scores and top 2 box scores to understand response distribution.

Overall, it was concluded that behaviour from both profit-seeking and government or charitable organisations does not always follow a purely economic paradigm. Particularly in the last few decades, the weight of behavioural economics has been noted as there are infinite factors, including emotional aspects, that sway such behaviour.

The behaviour that has arisen through the pursuit of profit has, in the past, proven to be successful - if success were to be measured by such measures as GDP and public health. However, this has not come without its costs, which include environmental degradation, income inequality, and worker exploitation, and is detrimental to, particularly, future generations. While the hope of profit allows for growth, measures must be taken to prevent the extremities in behaviour that it inevitably generates, both optimistic and pessimistic. Regulators, perhaps governments, need to introduce constraints to mitigate such risks. Nonetheless, while behavioural concepts such as loss aversion remain as expected, results have shown that alternative costs are not as prevalent as they used to be, now that sustainability, fairness, and altruism have become social aspects which cannot be compromised. Labour ethics are structurally resilient. Furthermore, the behaviour that has come about as a result of the nonexistent hope of profit continues to prioritise wellbeing and sustainability.

The results and findings of this study contain implications for a broad range of stakeholders across the private and public sectors, by increasing awareness on biases and decision-making. For organisational decision makers, understanding these complex behavioural biases can help drive more independent decision-making and compliance for better governance.

These results also hold relevance for governments and policymakers in recognising the impact of human behaviour and addressing market failures through targeted interventions without hindering business productivity. For example, the implementation of nudge policies can gently guide organisational behaviour towards socially beneficial outcomes without imposing heavy restrictions. Regulatory caps can manage greed and panic-driven decisions, and mandatory ESG disclosures can consider externalities that might otherwise be ignored in the chase for short-term profits. Policymakers can create a setting where economic growth and societal progress are not pursued as opposing goals but as complementary ones. Insights from behavioural understanding would, in turn, cast a retrospective light on the current world and continue to encourage a more sustainable and fair path for both organisations and the societies they impact.

8. Limitations

While reviewing results, the limitations of this study must also be accounted for.

Due to the sample composition, findings may only be extrapolated to groups which are highly qualified and in private enterprises. Furthermore, the respondent age group is 20-44, which may reduce the generalisability of the study as responses may not apply to age groups outside this range. If the study were to be replicated with a sample in which a majority of participants worked in public enterprises, were younger, or not as qualified, results would likely differ due to the thinking processes to which respondents are exposed daily.

Moreover, the sample size is a limitation. With only 37 respondents, 27 and 10 respondents in the original questionnaire and focus group study respectively, results may have uncertainty. Hence, this study may be more useful in providing insight and comprehension of themes as opposed to significant numeric/statistical values.

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