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Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal

Hybrid forums as a collaborative method for intervention: navigating tension and contestation in qualitative marketing research

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine how hybrid forums can be operationalised as a qualitative research method for engaging with concern-work in mission-driven market contexts. It responds to a gap in existing scholarship by shifting attention from conceptual accounts of hybrid forums to their practical design, facilitation and analysis as an interventionist research methodology.

Design/methodology/approach – This study adopts an interventionist qualitative research design based on a series of hybrid forums convened with non-profit arts organisations navigating tensions between mission-driven commitments and data-driven practices. The forums were organised as iterative, scenario-based workshops involving heterogeneous organisational actors and sector intermediaries. Data were generated through recorded discussions, workshop artefacts and reflexive observations, and analysed iteratively using multi-layered coding supported by NVivo to trace how controversies developed across forums over time.

Findings – The findings show that hybrid forums function as sites of relational concern-work, where concerns emerge, layer and evolve through interaction rather than appearing as fixed problems. The forums enabled the articulation of intertwined economic, ethical and organisational tensions, particularly around data practices and organisational capacity. Scenario-based engagement also supported the articulation of prospective market imaginaries, revealing experiences of constrained agency in which data illuminated possible futures without guaranteeing action.

Originality/value – This paper advances hybrid forums as an interventionist methodological approach for qualitative marketing research. It contributes to concerned markets scholarship by empirically demonstrating how concern-work unfolds in practice and by capturing the anticipatory and processual dimensions of market-making often inaccessible through conventional qualitative methods.

Keywords Performativity, Participatory methods, Concerned markets

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

Participatory processes are increasingly used to engage with complex, uncertain and contested socio-technical issues, particularly in organisational and governance settings where technical expertise alone is insufficient (Callon, 2009). Such approaches are expected to surface diverse perspectives and support more inclusive forms of decision-making. Participatory approaches within qualitative marketing and market studies research have also highlighted how methods participate in shaping organisational futures and socio-technical arrangements (Law and Urry, 2004; Burgess *et al.*, 2017). Yet participatory processes are not neutral. They are shaped by the arrangements through which they are convened, and their outcomes remain uneven, contingent and difficult to stabilise over time (Callon *et al.*, 2011; Farías, 2016).

In this research, hybrid forums were not only used to trace existing organisational practices, but also to explore how participants understood and responded to possible organisational futures under conditions of uncertainty. Through scenario exercises, collaborative discussion and iterative engagement across workshops, participants reflected on emerging tensions surrounding data, benchmarking, pricing, sustainability and organisational change.

Within science and technology studies (STS) and related fields, hybrid forums have been proposed as participatory arrangements for engaging with uncertainty and controversy. Designed to bring together heterogeneous actors, including experts, practitioners, policymakers and affected publics, hybrid forums foreground dialogue, contestation and multiple forms of expertise (Callon, 2009; Callon *et al.*, 2011). Rather than aiming for consensus or closure, they create space for possible futures to be collectively explored and reworked. Existing scholarship has examined hybrid forums as conceptual and methodological interventions, highlighting their role in technical democracy, future-making and the performative shaping of concerns, relations and socio-technical imaginaries over time (Amilien *et al.*, 2019). This orientation positions hybrid forums within wider debates in qualitative marketing and market studies research concerning future-making, concerned markets and the performativity of methods in shaping organisational and socio-technical arrangements, which are developed further through the literature review.

Despite this conceptual richness, comparatively little attention has been paid to how hybrid forums are operationalised as a qualitative research method within organisational settings, particularly as part of interventionist and participatory research designs. While hybrid forums are often discussed as spaces for controversy, fewer studies provide detailed methodological accounts of how they are designed, facilitated and analysed in practice, or how these methodological choices shape the concerns, relations and possible futures that emerge through participation. This gap is especially visible within qualitative marketing research seeking to understand how methods themselves participate in the shaping of organisational and socio-technical arrangements.

This paper addresses that gap through a methodological account of hybrid forums convened within non-profit arts organisations (NPAOs) navigating tensions between mission-driven commitments and increasingly data-driven practices. The non-profit arts sector provides a generative setting for examining participatory methods due to its positioning across cultural, social and market demands, alongside growing pressures surrounding digital technologies, performance metrics and organisational sustainability (Bopp *et al.*, 2017; Terras and Jones, 2024). Rather than treating data practices as purely technical, the study examines how concerns surrounding data, value, organisational purpose and future organisational direction are collectively articulated and negotiated through participatory engagement.

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Drawing on a series of hybrid forums convened as part of an interventionist qualitative research project, the paper makes two interrelated contributions. First, it advances hybrid forums as a participatory and future-oriented methodological approach for examining organisational concerns, uncertainty and market tensions, demonstrating how forum design, facilitation and analysis shape the articulation of concerns and possible futures. Second, it examines the reflexive and performative role of the researcher within participatory inquiry, showing how the researcher's simultaneous positioning as convenor, facilitator and analyst influences both the dynamics of the forums and the knowledge produced through them. In doing so, the paper contributes to debates within qualitative marketing and market studies research concerning performative methods, reflexivity and participatory approaches to studying socio-technical and organisational change.

2. Literature review

This review situates the study within three interconnected debates: research on hybrid forums as participatory spaces for collective inquiry (Callon *et al.*, 2011), market studies debates on performativity and methods (Law and Urry, 2004; Mason, 2024; Windahl and Mason, 2024) and emerging methodological discussions on digital and hybrid research practices (Alcadipani and Cunliffe, 2024; Fernandes and Mason, 2025). The review traces the development of hybrid forums from STS before examining their relationship to future-making, concerned markets, performative methods and digital hybridity in participatory research.

2.1 Hybrid forums: concept and evolution

Hybrid forums emerged within STS as a response to the democratic challenges posed by socio-technical controversies characterised by uncertainty, competing forms of expertise and contested values. First articulated by Callon *et.al.* (2011), hybrid forums were conceptualised as open participatory spaces in which heterogeneous actors, including scientists, policymakers, industry representatives and concerned publics, could collectively engage with issues that could not be resolved through technical expertise alone. Their hybridity lies in the deliberate bringing together of diverse forms of expertise within a shared space of inquiry.

Hybrid forums are closely associated with the notion of technical democracy, where uncertainty and disagreement are treated as productive conditions for collective inquiry rather than problems to be resolved through technical expertise alone (Callon *et al.*, 2011). Rather than seeking consensus, hybrid forums create space for actors to interrogate assumptions, articulate concerns and explore alternative futures and organisational possibilities. Hybrid forums prioritise dialogical engagement over closure, making them particularly suited to contexts characterised by uncertainty and competing evaluative demands.

Subsequent scholarship has highlighted tensions that emerge when hybrid forums are implemented in practice. Farías (2016) cautions that when hybrid forums are operationalised instrumentally, they risk becoming mechanisms for managing controversies rather than spaces for genuine contestation. This critique highlights the importance of maintaining their experimental and open-ended character, particularly within organisational settings where pressures towards efficiency, consensus and future planning may narrow opportunities for collective exploration and disagreement.

More recent work has extended hybrid forums beyond their original policy-oriented contexts. Amilien *et al.* (2019) introduce the notion of "Hybrid Forum 2.0", positioning hybrid forums as both methodological tools and dialogic democratic processes that support collective reflection, knowledge exchange and participatory engagement among

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heterogeneous actors. Their work emphasises the methodological potential of hybrid forums as reflexive and experimental spaces through which participants collectively explore controversies, uncertainties and possible future directions. Similarly, Leunbach and Nielsen (2020) conceptualise hybrid forums as occupying a dialogical space defined by shifting political and epistemological coordinates, where both participation and knowledge production remain contingent and emergent.

Across these contributions, hybrid forums are understood not as neutral arenas but as socio-technical arrangements that shape how issues are articulated and negotiated. They operate through an ongoing tension between structure and openness, coordination and contestation. It is precisely this tension that makes hybrid forums a generative site for qualitative inquiry into how organisational concerns, uncertainties and possible futures are collectively articulated and negotiated in practice.

2.2 Hybrid forums and future-making

Hybrid forums have been conceptualised not only as spaces for deliberation about existing practices but also as sites for imagining possible futures. Callon *et al.* (2011) argue that socio-technical controversies should be approached as productive opportunities for collective inquiry, enabling actors to explore uncertainties rather than suppress disagreement. Hybrid forums support prospective sense-making by enabling actors to interrogate existing arrangements and consider alternative organisational configurations.

Future-making within hybrid forums is closely tied to their participatory structure. Such engagement allows actors to move beyond immediate problem-solving and reflect on the longer-term implications of infrastructural, organisational and market decisions. Dusyk (2013) highlights how participatory exchanges can initiate socio-technical transformation, even when outcomes remain uneven or contested. Similarly, Leunbach and Nielsen (2020) conceptualise hybrid forums as spaces shaped by shifting political and epistemological coordinates, where new actors, knowledge claims and organisational possibilities can emerge unpredictably.

Future-oriented engagement within hybrid forums is structured around collective exploration rather than prediction. Amilien *et al.* (2019) emphasise how reflexive engagement can support the exploration of alternative future directions without requiring commitment to predetermined futures. In this respect, hybrid forums differ in orientation from forecasting-oriented approaches such as Delphi, which seek convergence around expert judgements through iterative consensus-building (Nyström and Kaartemo, 2022). Hybrid forums instead retain multiplicity and contestation, making them particularly suited to contexts where futures are normatively and ethically charged rather than calculable.

Future-oriented participatory processes must also contend with multiple forms of uncertainty. Lis and Stasik (2017) emphasise uncertainty about facts, temporal horizons and spatial consequences. Vaquero and Birochi (2025) further note that the effectiveness of such engagement depends on openness, continuity, and careful design particularly in avoiding the reproduction of existing power asymmetries.

This literature positions hybrid forums as participatory arrangements that enable collective exploration rather than predictive consensus. As a methodological approach, hybrid forums offer a means of examining how organisations negotiate uncertainty, competing values and future possibilities in practice.

2.3 Concerned markets and performativity

Concerned markets (Geiger *et al.*, 2014) provide a lens for understanding how markets become organised around social, ethical and political concerns rather than operating solely

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through economic interests. A defining feature of concerned markets is the transformation of "matters of fact" into "matters of concern" (Cochoy, 2014). Concerns are not external to markets but shape how market arrangements are configured and evaluated. Geiger *et al.* (2014) conceptualise concerned markets as dynamic socio-technical assemblages in which economic, social and political dimensions are entangled. They emphasise that concerns enter markets through practices of *relating*, *troubling* and *influencing*. Concern-work unfolds continuously rather than moving towards resolution.

This aligns with performativity debates where Callon (2009) and Law and Urry (2004) argue that markets are enacted through theories, devices and methods that participate in shaping the realities they describe. Concerns therefore become embedded within organisational and socio-technical arrangements rather than existing as external critiques of markets. Mission-driven contexts foreground how organisational practices are explicitly oriented towards balancing economic viability with social and cultural commitments. In such settings, markets are continually reconfigured through negotiations over value, responsibility and legitimacy, illustrating how concerned markets are shaped through ongoing organisational negotiations and decisions.

Taken together, concerned markets foreground the role of values, negotiations and organisational tensions in shaping markets. This orientation has important implications for how markets are studied, directing attention towards methods capable of engaging with concern-work rather than treating concerns as fixed attributes or external conditions. Within hybrid forums, concern-work involves not only negotiating existing organisational tensions, but also collectively exploring possible organisational responses to uncertainties and evaluative pressures.

2.4 Participatory methods and methodological intervention

Law and Urry (2004) argue that social science methods do not merely represent the world but help enact it. Hybrid forums exemplify this performative dimension in participatory research settings. As Jalili Tanha (2024) notes, methods are often developed iteratively in response to field conditions, with adjustments to the research process shaping what can be explored and articulated. Together, these contributions foreground a key methodological implication for qualitative marketing research: methods shape what becomes visible, discussable and actionable. Building on this understanding, hybrid forums are approached in this study as experimental methodological devices through which market concerns are articulated and negotiated in practice.

Recent work on digital and hybrid methodologies further reinforces this perspective. Fernandes and Mason (2025) conceptualise cyborg methodologies to emphasise the entanglement of researchers and digital technologies in knowledge production, while Alcadipani and Cunliffe (2024) show how hybrid ethnography blurs boundaries between online and offline relations. These approaches highlight that digital platforms and collaborative tools are not neutral channels for data collection but actively shape participation, interaction and the production of knowledge.

This performative orientation also clarifies how hybrid forums relate to other participatory approaches commonly used in market research. Delphi studies are structured, iterative procedures aimed at producing convergence through repeated rounds of expert input (Jolson and Rossow, 1971; Nyström and Kaartemo, 2022). Their strength lies in stabilising expectations Hybrid forums, by contrast, are oriented towards deliberation across multiple forms of expertise, treating uncertainty as something to be explored and re-problematised rather than progressively narrowed.

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Focus groups provide a different point of comparison. While they similarly rely on interaction to generate insight (Catterall and Maclaran, 1997), they typically operate within predefined topics and research objectives. Hybrid forums sustain controversy and negotiation over time, particularly where issues are socio-technical and normatively contested. Vaquero and Birochi (2025) highlight dialogical quality and openness as central to evaluating hybrid forums, drawing attention to how participatory design shapes what can be voiced and by whom.

Positioning hybrid forums alongside Delphi and focus groups thus highlights an epistemic distinction rather than a hierarchy. Each method stages participation differently and produces different forms of knowledge. This perspective provides the grounding for the methodological approach adopted in this study, where hybrid forums are used to engage organisational actors in negotiating concerns around data-driven practices under conditions of uncertainty.

3. Researcher positioning

This section examines the researcher's role within hybrid forums as a methodological and performative dimension of qualitative marketing research. The discussion foregrounds liminality and reflexivity as key concepts for understanding researcher agency in participatory inquiry (Geiger and Gross, 2022). The following subsections examine researcher positioning in participatory research, conceptualise liminality as a form of positional fluidity, and outline reflexivity as a methodological practice within this study.

3.1 Situating researcher positionality

Law and Urry (2004) argue that social science methods participate in shaping the realities they study rather than merely describing them, while market studies scholars show how research devices and analytical tools actively shape market practices rather than merely representing them (Callon, 2009; Araujo, 2007). From this perspective, researcher interventions influence how organisational dynamics are framed, explored and interpreted within participatory research settings. In this study, decisions concerning recruitment, facilitation and scenario design shaped how organisational tensions were explored and discussed within the forums.

Qualitative research has long addressed the relational nature of researcher involvement. Cunliffe (2016) conceptualises reflexivity as a relational practice through which researchers attend to how positioning and interaction shape knowledge production. Recent work on hybrid ethnography and digital methodologies further highlights how blurred boundaries between observation, participation and digital engagement intensify the need to account for researcher positioning and interaction (Alcadipani and Cunliffe, 2024; Fernandes and Mason, 2025). In this study, the researcher's positioning as both sector practitioner and academic shaped access, trust-building, facilitation and scenario design, while also generating ethical and analytical tensions. These interventions influenced how organisational concerns were surfaced, negotiated and interpreted throughout the research process. Attending to researcher positioning is therefore essential for evaluating hybrid forums as a methodological approach.

3.2 Conceptualising liminality

Liminality refers to threshold states in which established roles and structures are temporarily suspended, allowing new configurations to emerge. In research contexts, liminality has been used to capture the positional fluidity of researchers who move between insider and outsider roles, practitioner and analyst, and participant and observer (Ryan, 2019). Within market

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studies, Geiger and Gross (2022) conceptualise the researcher as neither fully detached nor wholly embedded within the settings they study.

The relevance of liminality to this study lies in its methodological consequences. Within the hybrid forums, the researcher's positioning as both practitioner and academic meant they did not simply observe organisational discussions but actively shaped how tensions and uncertainties were explored. Decisions concerning scenario design, facilitation and framing therefore influenced how organisational concerns were discussed and interpreted throughout the research process.

Ryan (2019) conceptualises boundary-spanning as a practical expression of liminality through which researchers translate between domains, negotiate access and enable dialogue across divergent roles and logics. In this study, boundary-spanning involved connecting organisational perspectives, designing scenarios that resonated across professional roles, and facilitating exchanges between participants with different priorities and experiences. The researcher's dual positioning as sector practitioner and academic supported access and trust-building while also shaping how organisational tensions were framed and discussed within the forums. These dynamics underscore the importance of reflexive practice, which is addressed in the following section.

3.3 Reflexivity as method

Reflexivity is approached in this research as the methodological practice through which researcher positioning within the forums was examined. Reflexivity is treated as a core principle of qualitative inquiry, requiring sustained attention to how researcher assumptions, positioning and interventions shape knowledge production. Following Pels (2000), reflexivity is approached not as personal disclosure but as an analytical practice concerned with how knowledge is produced and interpreted within the research process. In participatory methodologies such as hybrid forums, this distinction is particularly important, as the researcher does not simply observe group discussions but actively shapes how concerns are explored and negotiated. Reflexivity is therefore approached as an ongoing relational practice through which researcher positioning shapes interaction and interpretation within the research process (Cunliffe, 2016).

Cunliffe (2016) argues that reflexivity involves recognising how roles, assumptions and relationships are continually negotiated in the research process, rather than attempting to bracket out researcher influence. This perspective is especially relevant in hybrid forums, where the researcher's actions contribute to the staging of dialogue and the articulation of concerns. Alcadipani and Cunliffe (2024) show how hybrid research settings intensify the need to account for shifting role expectations and power dynamics, particularly when engagement unfolds across organisational and digital contexts. Reflexivity in these situations supports methodological accountability by making visible how research practices are embedded within broader socio-technical arrangements.

In this study, reflexivity was operationalised through deliberate methodological practices rather than personal disclosure. These included explicit role signalling during forum facilitation, the use of reflexive memos to document shifts in positioning and emergent tensions, and ongoing analytic attention to how scenario design and facilitation choices shaped discussions and interpretation. Reflexivity therefore supported methodological accountability by enabling researcher involvement and intervention to be critically examined throughout the research process.

4. Methodology

This study adopts an interventionist qualitative research design using hybrid forums as participatory workshops to examine how NPAOs negotiated tensions surrounding data

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practices, organisational sustainability and mission-driven priorities. Hybrid forums were conducted across a series of iterative engagements involving arts and cultural organisations in the UK and ROI. Data generation combined workshop discussions, scenario exercises, collaborative artefacts, facilitator notes and reflexive memos. The following sections outline the research design, participant composition, forum activities and analytical process used throughout the study.

4.1 Research design and orientation

The research focused on how organisational actors collectively explored tensions surrounding data practices, organisational sustainability and mission-driven priorities through a series of facilitated hybrid forums. The data collection was organised across a series of phases involving exploratory engagement, facilitated hybrid forums and scenario-based workshop activities. These phases informed both the development of forum scenarios and the cumulative analytical process adopted throughout the study.

The research was conducted within NPAOs navigating increasing engagement with data-driven practices alongside mission-driven commitments. This context was not treated as exceptional, but as empirically generative for examining how organisational actors confront competing evaluative logics and infrastructural demands in practice. Within this study, data practices were understood as organisational and relational rather than purely technical.

The hybrid forums were convened as a series of facilitated workshops organised through The Arts & Culture Collective (ACC), a cross-sector initiative that brings together NPAOs, infrastructure providers and sector practitioners to collectively engage with shared challenges. The forums were designed as iterative engagements rather than single deliberative events, reflecting an understanding of concern articulation as an ongoing, situated process rather than a one-off outcome (Costelloe, 2025). Rather than aiming for resolution or agreement, the forums were explicitly structured to surface, sustain, and rework controversies over time.

Forum activities were organised around scenario-based prompts designed to provoke engagement with organisational tensions and sectoral challenges. Scenarios were developed to reflect tensions already present within the industry, including benchmarking, performance reporting and the translation of artistic activity into actionable metrics. These scenarios enabled participants to explore how data practices shaped organisational decision-making and evaluation. Scenarios were fictionalised yet plausible, allowing participants to engage critically without attribution or defensiveness. In this sense, scenarios functioned as boundary objects, providing enough structure to orient discussion while remaining open to divergent interpretations and concerns.

Scenarios were refined iteratively across workshops in response to participant discussions and emerging sectoral issues and were presented to participants using the online whiteboard platform Miro. Miro boards were used throughout the forums as collaborative workspace environments through which scenarios, prompts and participant responses could be visually organised, annotated and revisited collectively across workshops.

The research design evolved across three interconnected phases: troubling, influencing and relating. These phases reflected how emerging organisational concerns identified during earlier engagements informed the development of subsequent forum activities, scenario exercises and analytical priorities over time. Rather than following a fixed research instrument, the hybrid forums developed responsively through ongoing engagement with participants, sector discussions and issues identified across earlier phases of the study. This structure enabled the research design to remain responsive to changing organisational contexts while supporting cumulative analytical development across the forums. Table 1

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Table 1. Overview of research phases, hybrid forums and data set development

Research phase and timing	Methodological orientation	Forum activities and research design	Participants and organisational context	Data generated	Participatory outputs and materials	Analytical purpose
Phase 1: Troubling Conducted June–August 2022	Exploratory engagement with emerging sectoral concerns	Introduction calls, exploratory interviews and internal company presentations used to identify recurring organisational tensions, infrastructural pressures and emerging concerns surrounding data practices and organisational sustainability	Early engagement with NPAO senior leadership across the UK and Republic of Ireland from regional theatres, international festivals and events groups, and nonfunded venues	Primary: 6 call/interview transcripts (approx. 150 pages), participant feedback materials and researcher reflexive notes (approx. 16 pages)	Internal presentations, workshop planning materials, early scenario development, poster presentation, podcast recordings	Informed the design of the hybrid forums and surfaced recurring concerns shaping subsequent workshop discussions and scenario exercises
Phase 2: Influencing Conducted September–December 2022	Participatory hybrid forums designed to collectively explore organisational tensions, practices and responses to uncertainty. These forums were online apart from one (Northern Ireland Cohort) which was conducted in person	Five hybrid forum workshops delivered across ROI, UK and Northern Ireland cohorts using collaborative discussion, prompts and scenario-based exercises to explore organisational concerns surrounding data, benchmarking, operational pressures and sustainability		*Primary:* 5 workshop transcripts (approx 250 pages), facilitator notes (approx 30 pages). *Secondary:* 1 industry report, 2 conference discussions, various sector articles/blogs	Scenario exercises, collaborative Miro boards, annotated prompts, preparation packs, participant discussion materials, industry presentations, workshop artefacts	Enabled examination of how participants articulated concerns, negotiated organisational tensions and collectively reflected on possible responses to changing evaluative and infrastructural demands
Phase 3: Relating Conducted May 2023 and June 2023	Future-oriented and reflective engagement with organisational practices and sectoral imaginaries	Two scenario-based workshops focused on pricing, benchmarking, evaluation and organisational sustainability, designed to explore how participants negotiated future organisational possibilities under conditions of uncertainty and limited capacity	24 participants from 11 arts and cultural organisations (with some repeat attendees for both workshops and the previous series/Phase 2) UK and ROI arts professionals, infrastructure actors and sector partners participating in pricing and benchmarking workshops	*Primary:* 2 workshop transcripts (approx. 100 pages), facilitator notes and researcher reflexive memos, participant feedback materials, collaborative workshop discussions and Miro board outputs generated through pricing and benchmarking exercises	Benchmarking and dynamic pricing whitepapers (2), collaborative boards, 2 podcasts, 4 blogs, promotional campaign materials including videos and solus emails	Supported analysis of how hybrid forums enabled participants to collectively negotiate organisational futures, benchmarking practices and data-led decision-making under conditions of uncertainty

provides an overview of the three research phases, including their methodological orientation, associated data sources, participatory outputs and analytical purpose.

Adopting an interventionist orientation meant that the research design did not simply observe organisational dynamics, but actively influenced how organisational tensions and priorities were explored within the workshops. The methodological aim was therefore not to minimise researcher involvement, but to examine researcher intervention reflexively and transparently throughout the research process.

Participants were recruited through The ACC on a purposive basis from a range of arts and cultural organisations across the UK and ROI, including theatres, arts centres, festivals, orchestras and intermediary organisations. Participants occupied marketing, audience development, operational, strategic, leadership and sector-support roles across both regional and city-based organisations. This approach prioritised relational positioning and diversity of perspective over sectoral coverage, aligning with qualitative sampling strategies that emphasise relevance, insight and processual engagement rather than representativeness (Suri, 2011; Parker *et al.*, 2019). Table 2 summarises the composition of the hybrid forums, including participant roles, organisational representation, geographical context and the methodological contribution of each forum.

Participation was relatively stable across the series of forums, enabling organisational tensions and discussions to be revisited and developed over time rather than repeatedly reintroduced. Sustained participation also facilitated the development of shared reference points and artefacts, which played an important role in maintaining analytical continuity across the research process (Callon *et al.*, 2011; Farías, 2016).

4.2 Data analysis

Data were generated across the three research phases through exploratory calls and interviews, facilitated hybrid forums, scenario-based workshop activities and the artefacts and documentary materials produced throughout the research process. The primary sources of data included audio recordings of forum discussions, facilitator notes, visual and textual artefacts produced during workshops (including scenario materials, annotated prompts and shared documents), and post-session reflections recorded by the researcher. Workshops were recorded with participant consent and transcribed *verbatim*. Table 3 illustrates how multiple forms of data informed the development of analytic categories and findings.

Analysis proceeded iteratively alongside forum delivery. Transcripts, Miro boards, workshop artefacts, facilitator notes and participant outputs were imported into NVivo to support systematic coding, comparison across workshops and analytic memoing. NVivo was used as an organising and analytic aid rather than as a prescriptive coding framework, supporting close reading and the development of the analytic findings presented in Section 5.

First-cycle coding stayed close to participants' language. Second-cycle coding focused on relational patterns, including how participants negotiated organisational tensions, evaluative pressures and responses to sectoral uncertainty. Analytic memos were used throughout to document interpretive decisions and to trace how provisional codes developed into the findings sections.

Analysis involved comparing transcript excerpts with workshop artefacts, participant outputs and reflexive memos to trace how organisational tensions were discussed, interpreted and developed across the research process.

5. Findings

This section presents findings from the hybrid forums by tracing how organisational concerns developed and were negotiated across the forums over time. Drawing on the

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Table 2. Participant and organisational profile across hybrid forums

Hybrid forum	Organisational context and representation	Participant roles and expertise	Geographical context	Workshop format and composition	Methodological contribution
ROIA	Five ROI-based arts and cultural organisations, including theatres and arts venues	Participants held marketing, audience development, operational, strategic and leadership roles across regional and city-based organisations Cohorts included middle-management workshops, senior leadership workshops, mixed-role regional cohorts and expert/intermediary participants from audience development, local authority and research organisations	Republic of Ireland; city and regional organisations including Dublin, Cork, Galway, Wexford, Longford and Limerick	Online workshop with participants drawn from five separate organisations	Enabled early exploration of organisational concerns surrounding data practices, operational pressures and organisational sustainability
ROIB	Four ROI-based arts organisations including theatres and cultural venues	Participants working in a more senior position across marketing and organisational coordination functions	Republic of Ireland; city and regional organisations	Online workshop with cross-organisational participation	Extended discussion of staffing pressures, resource constraints and organisational resilience
UK workshop	Four UK-based arts organisations including theatres and arts centres	Participants occupying strategic, marketing and operational roles varying in seniority but with extensive years of experience in their position	England and Northern Ireland	Online workshop bringing together participants from multiple organisational contexts	Surfaced recurring concerns surrounding digital practices, organisational change and infrastructural pressures
Northern Ireland In-Person Forum	15 organisations including theatres, orchestras, festivals, arts centres and intermediary organisations	Cross-sector participants including organisational leaders, venue staff, marketing professionals and intermediary actors located in NI	Northern Ireland	In-person forum involving 23 participants and cross-sector discussion	Generated rich interactional and collaborative data relating to collective concern articulation and organisational negotiation
Partner forum	Infrastructure and intermediary organisations supporting arts and cultural organisations	Participants occupying advisory, infrastructure and sector-support roles	UK and ROI-linked infrastructure organisations	Hybrid workshop combining sector partners and organisational stakeholders	Introduced infrastructural and intermediary perspectives on benchmarking, reporting and organisational support practices
Pricing workshop	Arts organisations and infrastructure stakeholders across UK and ROI contexts	Participants working across marketing, audience development, organisational leadership and operational management with an interest in the practice of dynamic pricing	UK and ROI participation across theatres, arts centres and cultural organisations	Hybrid workshop using pricing scenarios and collaborative exercises	Enabled participants to collectively reflect on benchmarking, pricing tensions, organisational value and sustainability pressures
Benchmarking workshop	Arts organisations and sector stakeholders engaged in data and benchmarking discussions	Participants occupying strategic, operational and infrastructure-related roles with experience in grant applications and conducting evaluations	England, Wales and ROI participation	Hybrid workshop structured around collaborative benchmarking exercises	Supported exploration of future organisational responses to benchmarking practices, data infrastructures and changing evaluative demands

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Table 3. Iterative coding and analytical development across the hybrid forums

First-cycle coding and initial observations	Emerging concerns, practices and organisational tensions	Second-cycle analytical development	Participatory and material data sources	Analytical and theoretical contribution
Concerns and challenges: Initial coding captured recurring references to rising costs, staffing pressures, organisational precarity, funding concerns and operational uncertainty across the workshops 322 references	Participants frequently discussed organisational sustainability, workforce pressures, relevance, leadership and the challenge of balancing mission-driven priorities with increasing economic pressures	Concerns were interpreted not as isolated operational problems, but as interconnected organisational tensions shaping how NPAOs responded to uncertainty, negotiated value, and articulated organisational futures Key words included: rising costs, relevance, funding, leadership; development of organisational models including "firefighting", "bums on seats", "keeping the lights on" and "data culture"	Workshop transcripts, facilitator notes, participant reflections, collaborative discussions, scenario exercises	Supported analysis of how hybrid forums surfaced and sustained collective concern-work surrounding organisational change, precarity and evaluative pressures
Practices: Coding focused on references to organisational routines, reporting, benchmarking, audience engagement, programming and decision-making practices 611 references	Participants described both routine and strategic practices surrounding data use, reporting, programming decisions and audience development activities	Organisational practices became understood as socio-technical and relational arrangements through which data practices became embedded within everyday organisational decision-making	Workshop transcripts, collaborative Miro boards, participant annotations, organisational reflections	Contributed to analysis of data as embedded organisational practice rather than a neutral technical resource
Data: Initial coding captured references to reporting systems, dashboards, benchmarking tools, evidence practices and institutional uses of data 337 references	Data was frequently discussed in relation to organisational accountability, strategic planning, benchmarking and operational sustainability	Data was interpreted as a performative organisational device shaping how organisations understood audiences, justified decisions and negotiated future organisational priorities	Benchmarking workshops, pricing scenarios, participant-generated materials, facilitator reflections	Supported findings relating to performativity, organisational valuation and the infrastructural role of data practices
Time: Coding identified recurring references to time scarcity, overwork, "firefighting", and tensions between strategic and creative labour 64 references	Participants reflected on limited time for creativity, planning, experimentation and long-term organisational thinking under conditions of uncertainty	Time emerged as an organisational and evaluative resource linked to visibility, capacity, strategic decision-making and the pressures of digital transformation	Participant reflections, workshop discussions, reflexive memos, facilitator observations	Contributed to analysis of how organisational pressures shaped responses to data-driven and evaluative demands
Problem-solving and organisational responses: Coding focused on collaborative discussion surrounding organisational adaptation, experimentation and responses to sectoral challenges 309 references	Participants collectively explored pricing strategies, audience engagement approaches, benchmarking practices and operational adjustments	Problem-solving practices were interpreted as collective negotiations through which participants explored possible organisational responses and future-oriented strategies under conditions of uncertainty	Scenario exercises, collaborative boards, workshop artefacts, pricing and benchmarking discussions	Supported analysis of hybrid forums as participatory and future-oriented methodological spaces enabling collective negotiation of organisational possibilities

Notes(s): Codes developed iteratively across transcripts, workshop artefacts, collaborative Miro boards, facilitator notes and reflexive memos

process of becoming concerned (Geiger *et al.*, 2014), the analysis follows how familiar organisational issues became interconnected with broader tensions surrounding sustainability, organisational responsibility and future sectoral change.

Section 5.1 examines how concerns became intertwined and layered through interaction. Section 5.2 analyses how tensions were negotiated across organisational and sectoral boundaries. Section 5.3 explores how future organisational possibilities and constraints were articulated through scenario-based discussion.

5.1 Surfacing intertwined and layered concerns

Across the hybrid forums, concerns emerged through ongoing discussion, collaborative exercises and scenario-based engagement rather than appearing as fixed organisational problems. Early discussions tended to centre on familiar sectoral critiques, including dissatisfaction with funding structures and uncertainty around the interpretation of data insights. As conversations progressed, these issues became increasingly interconnected with wider concerns surrounding organisational autonomy, sustainability, relevance and future sectoral direction.

Early workshop activities invited participants to reflect collaboratively on their working routines, organisational priorities and competing pressures through calendar-based and scenario-led exercises. Across multiple forums, participants frequently described their organisational contexts as characterised by sustained pressure and limited capacity, often framed in terms of constant responsiveness and constraint, described by one participant as:

> […] a relentless stress of firefighting and being stretched and not having enough resources (Marketing Manager, Opera House, ROIA, December 2022).

The language of "firefighting" captured a wider sense of organisational precarity in which immediate operational demands limited opportunities for long-term planning and future-oriented organisational development. Discussions throughout the workshops surrounding staffing pressures and limited capacity frequently became connected to wider concerns surrounding organisational resilience, audience expectations and the increasing pressure to demonstrate value through measurable outcomes.

Concerns around audience engagement following COVID-19 illustrate this layering in practice. Discussions initially focused on declining attendance and the challenge of filling seats, but these issues quickly became intertwined with questions of financial sustainability, pricing strategy and shifting audience behaviours. Participants spoke about the loss of older audiences, reduced confidence in attending live events and an increase in last-minute booking patterns, all of which reshaped box office practices and planning horizons.

These tensions emerged particularly strongly during a scenario-based workshop on dynamic pricing, where participants were invited to reflect on how pricing strategies aligned with organisational priorities, audience accessibility and financial sustainability. One marketing director explained:

> For a standard show, we'll have three price types, matinee and preview shows are the cheapest possible, then midweek shows, and then weekend shows (Marketing Director, Producing Theatre, Pricing Workshop, May 2023).

Matinees and previews were priced at approximately £15, a strategy intended to encourage attendance among audiences less likely to attend evening performances. As the participant explained, "We run the whole week from Friday through to Thursday at about £15 purely for word of mouth", highlighting how pricing was used to support accessibility and audience development.

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The same participant explicitly framed pricing decisions as morally charged. While acknowledging that increasing matinee prices could generate additional revenue, they noted that maintaining lower prices aligned more closely with organisational values: "It's a moral decision rather than a financial decision". Pricing discussions became entangled with broader organisational tensions surrounding accessibility, financial sustainability and commercial responsibility.

Discussions surrounding pricing and audience behaviour prompted participants to compare organisational approaches and reflect on how financial pressures shaped strategic decision-making. Rather than producing consensus, these discussions highlighted the ongoing negotiation between audience accessibility, organisational sustainability and revenue generation within increasingly uncertain operating environments.

5.2 Negotiating tensions across sectoral boundaries

A recurring feature of the hybrid forums was the negotiation of tensions across organisational and sectoral boundaries. Participants entered discussions with orientations shaped by their roles, professional experiences and relationships to data-driven practices within the sector. These differences became particularly visible during discussions surrounding evaluation, benchmarking and organisational decision-making, where participants often held contrasting assumptions about what effective data practice should involve.

These tensions emerged particularly strongly during a benchmarking-focused workshop exploring the role of evaluation within organisational decision-making. The design of this workshop was informed by the analysis of concerns surrounding "firefighting" and organisational overstretch identified during earlier forum discussions, with scenarios developed to explore how participants navigated competing demands around evaluation, strategic planning and organisational priorities. A consultancy representative introduced their organisation as:

> […] a data-driven consultancy firm that works with arts and cultural organisations like your own to build thriving organisations basically on the foundation of building loyalty and making sure that you understand what your audience's behaviour is telling you and how you respond to that (Benchmarking Consultant, Benchmarking Workshop, June 2023).

This framing positioned audience insight and loyalty measurement as central to organisational sustainability.

Arts practitioners responded by challenging the implicit assumption that such practices were absent or underdeveloped within their organisations. One marketing manager described extensive existing efforts to engage audiences following attendance:

> We're contacting them straight away afterwards and asking them about their experience and whether they enjoyed it and what else they'd like to see. So we're doing that and then we're trying to make use of the feedback that we get (Head of Marketing, Theatre Royal, Benchmarking Workshop, June 2023).

Implementing these practices required substantial organisational labour, including coordinating ticketing systems, customer-relationship management (CRM) platforms, email tools and audience communications. Participants repeatedly highlighted the gap between strategic expectations surrounding data use and the practical realities of implementation. As the practitioner noted: "It's just hours in the day and number of people to do it."

These exchanges revealed tensions between strategic framings of data-driven practice and the organisational realities required to sustain them. Participants did not reject evaluation practices outright, but instead highlighted the labour, coordination and infrastructural support required to translate strategic expectations into everyday organisational activity. Discussions repeatedly

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returned to questions of capacity, prioritisation and what forms of evaluation were realistically sustainable within resource-constrained organisational environments.

Rather than converging on a single interpretation of best practice, participants frequently reflected on what forms of evaluation and organisational success were realistically achievable within the constraints of their organisations. These discussions also prompted broader reflections on whether long-standing assumptions surrounding growth, productivity and organisational sustainability needed to be reconsidered.

5.3 Producing prospective market imaginaries

In addition to surfacing existing concerns, the hybrid forums generated prospective market imaginaries through scenario-based exercises. These imaginaries were grounded in participants' current organisational constraints yet oriented towards possible future practices in areas such as pricing, audience engagement, evaluation and organisational sustainability. As workshop discussions and analysis developed across the research process, participants increasingly articulated organisational futures beyond the continual "firefighting" and short-term responsiveness described throughout earlier discussions.

These future-oriented discussions frequently emerged through reflections on organisational exhaustion, resource constraints and the pressure to demonstrate continual productivity. Participants repeatedly returned to the difficulties of sustaining long-term planning within organisational environments characterised by urgency and continual responsiveness. During one discussion exploring ideal organisational futures, participants reflected on the possibility of creating more space for strategic thinking, experimentation and reflection.

One participant described this aspiration as:

> […] being allowed to simply be and not having to prove your worth by doing all of the time (Director, Festival Organisation, UK Workshop, December 2022).

Another participant described the need for "the ability to breathe", while others reflected on the value of creating time for "thinking time" and longer-term organisational planning rather than continual operational responsiveness. Rather than rejecting evaluation outright, participants questioned organisational cultures in which value was primarily demonstrated through constant activity, productivity and measurable delivery.

These future imaginaries nevertheless remained shaped by organisational constraints and competing priorities. One marketing director reflected on long-term audience data collected since 2007, describing how insights revealed unmet demand for children's theatre in the city of Liverpool. Despite recognising this need, the participant emphasised their limited capacity to respond:

> The data is telling me that the city needs a children's theatre or children's theatre provision and no one's doing it. And I haven't got time to do it and it's like for the love of God (Marketing Director, Producing Theatre, Benchmarking Workshop, June 2023).

While the data highlighted potential opportunities aligned with social and cultural value, organisational constraints shaped which possibilities could be pursued.

Rather than producing agreed organisational futures, the scenarios enabled participants to explore how aspirations for sustainability, reflection and social value remained constrained by existing organisational capacities and evaluative pressures.

5.4 Methodological limitations

As an interventionist and participatory study, the methodological approach adopted here entails specific limits that shape the scope of the findings. First, participation in the hybrid forums was facilitated through The ACC, an existing sectoral infrastructure that enabled

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sustained engagement but also shaped who was able to participate. Organisations or individuals operating outside such collective networks, or with limited capacity for ongoing involvement, may experience different constraints or concerns that are not fully captured in this study.

Second, the study does not aim for representativeness in a statistical sense. Participants were recruited on a purposive basis due to their involvement in organisational decision-making and their capacity to engage in iterative forums over time. As such, the findings should be understood as situated and context-dependent rather than generalisable across the non-profit arts sector as a whole.

Third, the use of hybrid forums foregrounds collective articulation and interaction, which may privilege concerns that can be expressed, debated and sustained within facilitated settings. Other forms of concern, including those that are less readily verbalised or that unfold outside formal organisational spaces, may remain partially obscured.

Finally, as an interventionist design, the forums themselves contributed to shaping the issues under examination. Rather than treating this performative effect as a methodological limitation to be eliminated, the study approaches it as a defining condition of participatory inquiry requiring ongoing reflexive attention to how research interventions shape the articulation and negotiation of concerns.

6. Discussion

This discussion considers how hybrid forums function as participatory spaces through which organisational concerns, evaluative tensions and future organisational possibilities are collectively explored under conditions of uncertainty. It examines how hybrid forums support the layering of concerns through interaction while enabling participants to articulate constrained organisational futures.

6.1 Hybrid forums as sites of relational concern-work

The findings illustrate how hybrid forums function as sites where concerns are not simply expressed but are produced relationally through interaction, negotiation and scenario-based engagement. Rather than surfacing discrete organisational issues, the forums enabled concerns to become layered over time as operational frustrations, evaluative tensions and organisational futures became increasingly interconnected through discussion. This dynamic aligns with Geiger *et al.*'s (2014) account of markets as sites of ongoing concern-work, in which troubling, relating and influencing unfold through situated practices rather than linear stages.

Across the forums, participants rarely began with abstract or explicitly moralised claims. Instead, discussions initially centred on familiar operational frustrations, such as funding pressures, audience volatility or the limitations of existing data tools. As conversations developed, these surface critiques became connected to deeper anxieties concerning organisational autonomy, professional identity and the future role of non-profit arts organisations within increasingly data-intensive environments. The findings therefore extend Geiger *et al.*'s (2014) account by illustrating how concerns do not simply emerge relationally, but accumulate and intensify through interaction as participants connect immediate organisational pressures to broader organisational and ethical questions.

Concern-work unfolded through interaction as participants related their own organisational experiences to those of others and to the scenarios under discussion. In this sense, valuation practices became sites where economic, social and ethical considerations were held together rather than resolved through calculation. This resonates with Callon's (2009) performativity argument, in which valuation practices are understood not as neutral calculations but as socio-technical arrangements through which market realities are enacted.

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Hybrid forums facilitated this process by providing a collective setting in which concerns could be revisited and reconfigured across interactions. The use of fictional yet plausible scenarios encouraged participants to engage with contested issues without immediate organisational accountability, allowing tensions to be articulated that might remain implicit in more individualised research settings. As Callon *et al.* (2011) suggest, hybrid forums operate as experimental spaces in which heterogeneous actors can explore controversies without the expectation of closure, enabling uncertainty to be worked with rather than managed away.

The contribution of hybrid forums therefore lies less in generating consensus than in sustaining spaces where layered organisational concerns can be collectively explored without requiring resolution. In doing so, they offer insight into how market controversies are lived and negotiated in practice, revealing concern-work as an ongoing accomplishment rather than a discrete outcome (Geiger *et al.*, 2014).

6.2 Prospective market imaginaries and constrained agency

The findings also highlight the role of hybrid forums in enabling the articulation of prospective market imaginaries as situated visions of possible market futures that emerged through collective engagement with uncertainty and constraint. Rather than abstract speculation, these future orientations were grounded in participants' existing organisational practices and infrastructural conditions, revealing how future-oriented thinking in non-profit arts contexts is shaped by both aspiration and limitation. This resonates with Callon *et al.*'s (2011) characterisation of hybrid forums as experimental spaces in which actors collectively explore possible futures without the expectation of immediate resolution.

Scenario-based activities were central to this process. By inviting participants to consider alternative trajectories for pricing, ticketing, and audience engagement, the forums created space for anticipatory reflection that extended beyond immediate operational problem-solving. Participants used scenarios to surface anxieties, test assumptions and articulate possibilities that were difficult to express within routine organisational settings. Scenarios functioned as devices through which participants could collectively explore organisational possibilities without requiring immediate enactment. This aligns with Farías' (2016) argument that participatory spaces often intensify awareness of socio-technical tensions rather than resolving them.

Future organisational possibilities were negotiated through competing evaluative orientations rather than shared visions. These tensions illustrate how organisational futures are shaped through divergent evaluative logics rather than consensus. This reflects Geiger *et al.*'s (2014) emphasis on markets as sites where concerns are provisionally stabilised through ongoing negotiation rather than consensus.

A recurring feature of these discussions was the experience of constrained agency, where data illuminated unmet needs or alternative possibilities without expanding participants' capacity to act upon them. Rather than directing action, valuation devices intensified the visibility of trade-offs between societal commitments and economic sustainability. This suggests that valuation devices do not simply inform organisational futures, but also shape which futures become organisationally actionable under existing resource conditions (Callon, 2009).

Prospective imaginaries therefore became a key site through which participants negotiated the moral, strategic and practical implications of organisational decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. Hybrid forums facilitated this process by sustaining collective spaces in which anticipatory tensions could be articulated and examined, making visible the affective and organisational dimensions of future-making that are frequently absent from retrospective research accounts.

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Taken together, these findings suggest that hybrid forums contribute to qualitative marketing research by making visible how organisational futures are collectively negotiated under conditions of uncertainty, resource constraint and competing evaluative pressures.

6.3 Contribution to research practice

This paper contributes to qualitative marketing research by advancing hybrid forums as an interventionist, participatory method for studying market controversies as they unfold, rather than as settled topics to be documented retrospectively. While hybrid forums are well established in STS as political and dialogical arrangements for engaging uncertainty and controversy (Callon *et al.*, 2011; Farías, 2016), fewer accounts specify how they can be designed, facilitated and analysed as a rigorous methodological approach in organisational settings. This study addresses that gap by offering a practical and analytic account of how hybrid forums can be operationalised to generate processual insight into concern-work.

Methodologically, the paper makes three moves. First, it specifies how scenario-based prompts can function as participatory devices that hold controversy open and enable contestation without forcing consensus, supporting inquiry under conditions of organisational constraint (Callon *et al.*, 2011; Farías, 2016). Second, it shows how hybrid forum analysis can move beyond participant accounts alone by incorporating interactional dynamics, collaborative artefacts and iterative coding practices to support the interpretation of concern-work as it developed across the forums (Catterall and Maclaran, 1997; Cunliffe, 2016). Third, it approaches reflexivity as an ongoing methodological practice through which researcher intervention, facilitation and scenario design are treated as analytically consequential to the research process (Pels, 2000; Cunliffe, 2016).

These contributions demonstrate how hybrid forums can function as rigorous participatory research methods for studying organisational tensions, future-oriented sense-making and concern-work under conditions of uncertainty (Law and Urry, 2004).

7. Conclusion

This paper examined how hybrid forums can be operationalised as a qualitative research method for engaging in concern-work within mission-driven market contexts. Drawing on an interventionist study within non-profit arts organisations, the paper demonstrates how hybrid forums enable organisational concerns and future organisational possibilities to be explored under conditions of uncertainty. The findings contribute to research on concerned markets by showing how concerns become layered through interaction as operational pressures, evaluative tensions and organisational futures become increasingly interconnected over time (Geiger *et al.*, 2014).

Methodologically, the paper advances hybrid forums as an interventionist and reflexive research approach capable of engaging both present organisational tensions and future-oriented sense-making (Callon *et al.*, 2011). The findings reinforce arguments that methods participate in the enactment of organisational realities rather than merely describing them (Law and Urry, 2004). Reflexivity therefore becomes central not as retrospective disclosure, but as an ongoing methodological responsibility through which researcher intervention, facilitation and their performative effects are rendered analytically visible.

The non-profit arts sector provides a generative context for examining how data practices, organisational values and evaluative pressures are negotiated under conditions of uncertainty and limited capacity.

Future research could extend this approach to other contested or mission-driven settings where tensions between data, values and organisational capacity persist. Overall, the paper demonstrates the value of hybrid forums for studying how organisational concerns and future organisational possibilities are negotiated in contemporary market contexts.

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