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Intuition vs Data: Exploring the Role of Alternative Cognitive Tools (Tarot) in Startup Decision-Making Reasoning and Approach

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Abstract
The focus of this research paper is to evaluate perceptions of decision-making that startup professionals use when using analytical data versus intuition. This paper proposes the use of tarot as an alternative reflective tool to aid decision making in entrepreneurial scenarios where data is unavailable or there is uncertainty (Gigalova, V. 2017). Towards this purpose, this study uses primary data from a survey of 33 respondents, explores the demographic patterns, the use of intuition, awareness of tarot and its use, apart from the professional attitude towards intuitive tools in scenarios where data is unavailable. The data when analyzed showed that the respondents typically chose a blended decision-making approach. Nearly 60.6% agreed that intuition would be their first choice and rated it a high 4 or 5 on a scale of five points. Additionally, 87.5% of respondents believed strongly that it was natural for founders to leverage both intuition and data during decision making. The awareness of tarot was high at 81.8%, but only 24.2% used it, highlighting a gap in awareness-to-practice of tarot. Further findings of the study, have led to the conclusion that tarot cannot be used instead of analytics, but is very useful as a reflective and symbolic prompt. It supports efficient sensemaking, multiple option generation and reduces uncertainty when used with evidence-based methods.

Keywords: intuition, data analytics, tarot, startup decision-making, uncertainty, alternative cognitive tools, reflective practice

1. Introduction

Decision making in startups is often under conditions where information is incomplete, ambiguous and under pressure of a deadline. Traditionally, data analytics provides the inputs for decision makers ensuring precise and accountable outputs. But in the case of early-stage ventures, the industry typically does not have historical data, or predictable patterns or market validation. As a result, managers or entrepreneurs rely on personal judgement, intuition, and experience to support the limited formal analysis that is available (Cristofaro, M. 2025).

In this research paper we study the relational dependencies of data and intuition in alternative cognitive tools, such as tarot, for entrepreneurial and business processes. The premise of the evaluation of tarot as a business tool is not as a forecasting or deterministic mechanism but as a reflective tool. The implications of tarot is more as a prompt that triggers in-depth questioning, contextual-scenario driven questioning and creating self-awareness. The primary line of research here is to identify if tools such as tarot, can offer decision-making clarity without the need for rational, reason-based analysis.

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2. Review of Literature

It is often contended that most decisions made by managers are, not purely, rational. It is believed that managers are most likely to use intuition, based on their past experiences, to explore decision-making processes whenever there is ambiguity or possibility of multiple outcomes and there is no historic data or information to arrive at conclusions. In such scenarios, entrepreneurial processes are further complicated, and these situations demand higher cognitive flexibility, value-based judgement and personal perceptions (Gilbert-Saad, A. 2025).

Other academic studies point out that there is no major logical difference when comparing entrepreneurship data and intuition. Typically, entrepreneurs leverage analytical evidence with tacit knowledge, along with their experiences in their entrepreneurial venture or personal conviction. Such a process is mostly common in startup ventures, where the speed of decision-making, experimentation and opportunity utilization are most important. Additionally, research studies highly recommend using AI and analytical tools for opportunity evaluation and decision-making, but human intuition remains the most important tool for interpretation and action(Kanzola, A. M. 2024).

Currently, research studies on the use of symbolic tools such as tarot are very limited. On the other hand, when the use of these symbolic tools can be redirected as a reflective practice instead of predictive certainty, tarot can become a very important meaning-making aid. This research paper studies the use of tarot as an alternative cognitive prompt for users and understands the surface assumptions, probabilities and uncertainty reflection (Leo, G. 2025).

3. Research Objectives

The following objectives shall be the focus of this research paper:

- Evaluate the extent to which managers rely on intuition for decision-making.
- Evaluate the level of awareness and tarot usage
- Evaluate value of intuition in startup decision-making
- Evaluate tarot use as a support tool to analytics and not to replace data
- Evaluate the influence of cultural and personal beliefs in using tarot as a tool for decision-making

4. Research Methodology

In this study, the research is designed using descriptive and survey methods. In April 2026, a structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data. It includes 33 valid responses. The components of the questionnaire included: rating for the use of intuition on a five-point, demographic items, yes/no questions on tarot awareness and usage. It also includes Likert-scale to examine intuition, tarot, uncertainty and startup decision-making.

The analysis leverages descriptive statistics, Likert-scale mean score, percentage distributions including Spearman correlation analysis. It is likely that the small size of the sample does make the research study largely exploratory. It can be considered that the findings will be indicative in nature and cannot be applied directly to startup managers and entrepreneurs.

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5. Respondent Profile

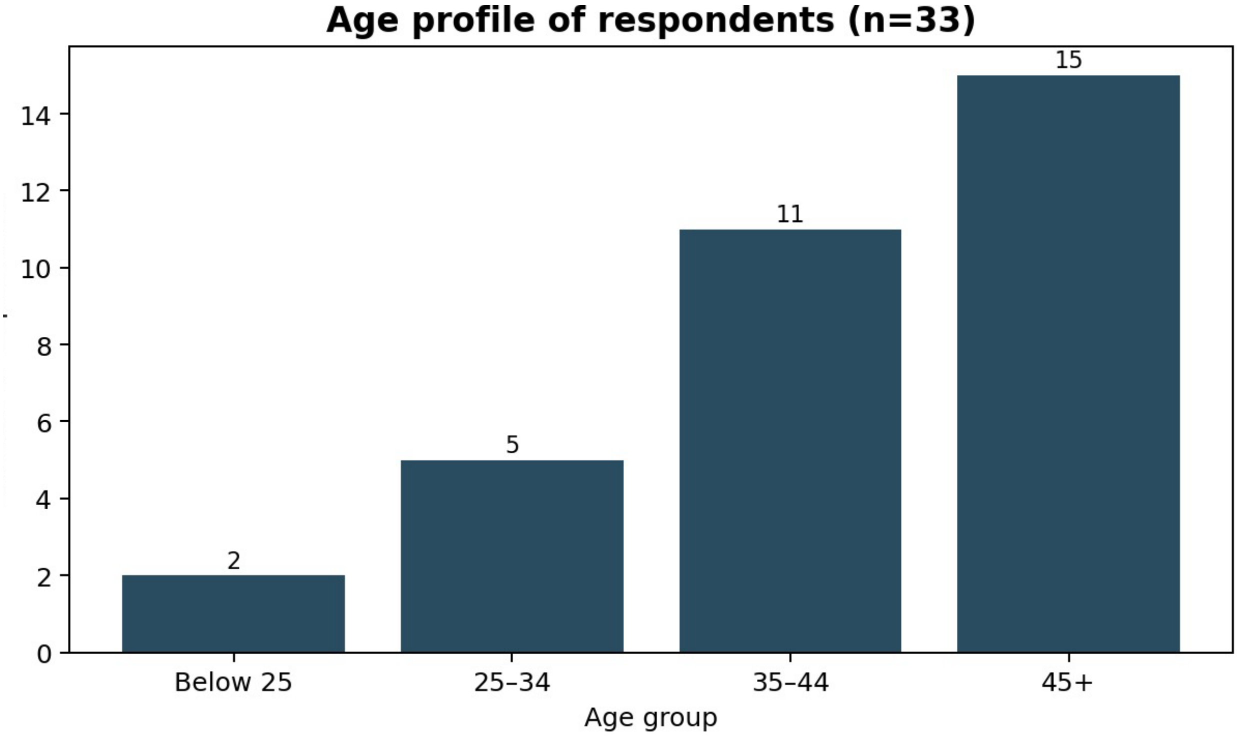

Figure 2. Age distribution of respondents

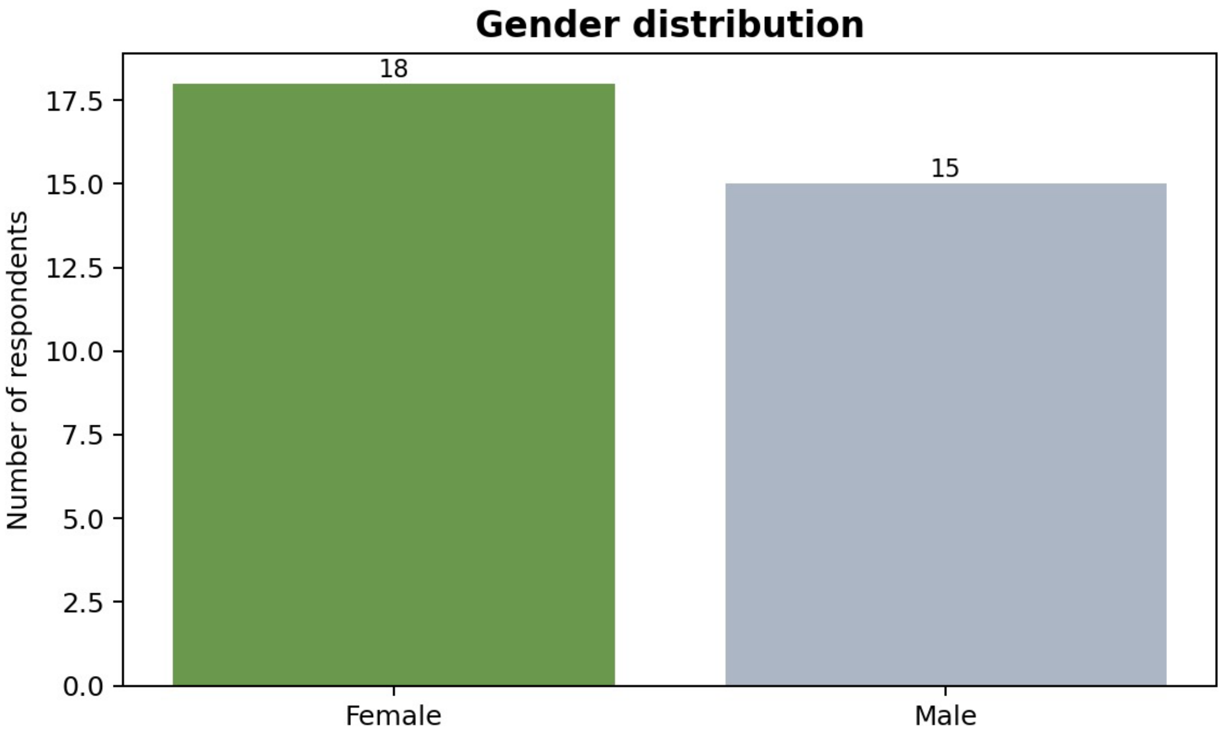

Figure 3. Gender distribution of respondents

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The age range in the sample was diverse, with the average age of 45+, being the largest (15 respondents, 45.5%). The sample also included female 54.5% respondents. The group included wide-range of participants as their roles and industries varied from professionals from the education industry, students, administrators from educational institutes, content creators and managers.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

6.1 Reliance on intuition

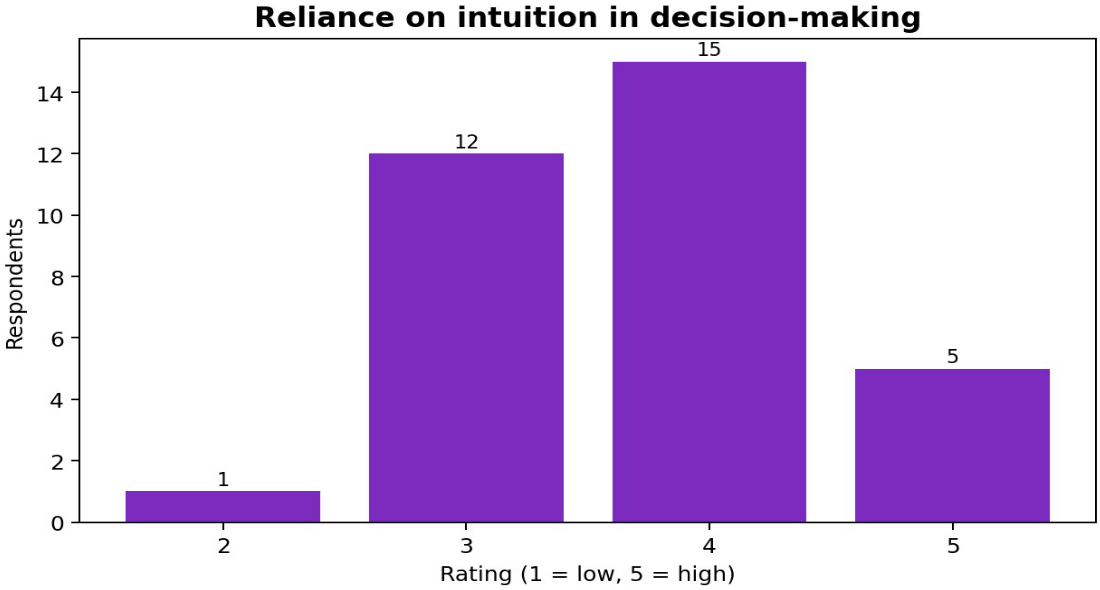

Figure 4. Reliance on intuition in decision-making

As per the findings, out of 5, the average intuition reliance score was 3.73. Similarly, 60.6% participants chose 4 and 5, indicating that intuition is an integral part of practical decision-making.

6.2 Tarot awareness and usage

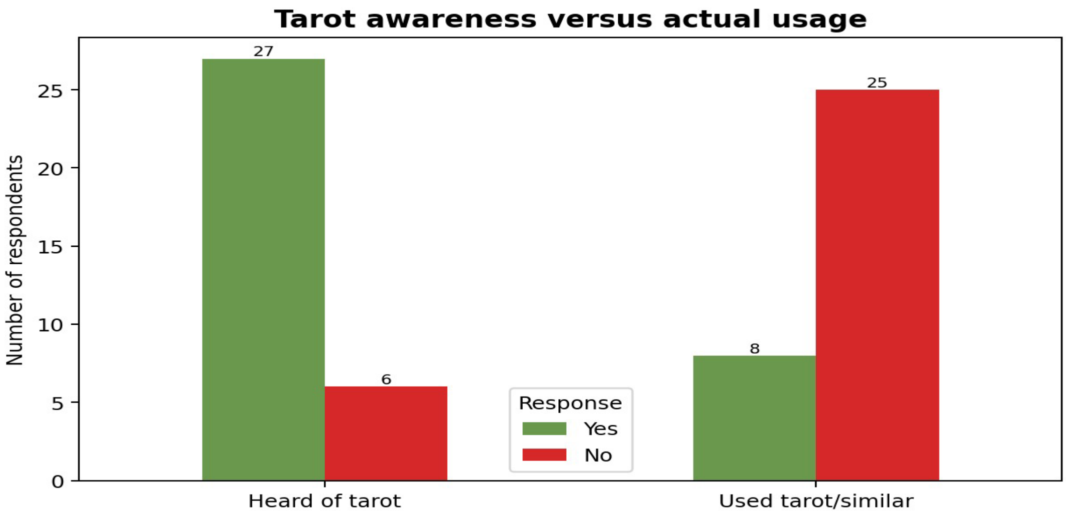

Figure 5. Tarot awareness compared with actual usage

Although 81.8% were aware of Tarot, only 24.2% had used it or similar tools. The difference between awareness and use was high, indicating there is hesitation in using it directly as a decision-making tool. This may be due to lack of access to tarot, skepticism, cultural pressure or doubts about the process of integrating tools such as tarot into mainstream decision-making tool sets.

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6.3 Attitudes toward intuition, data and tarot

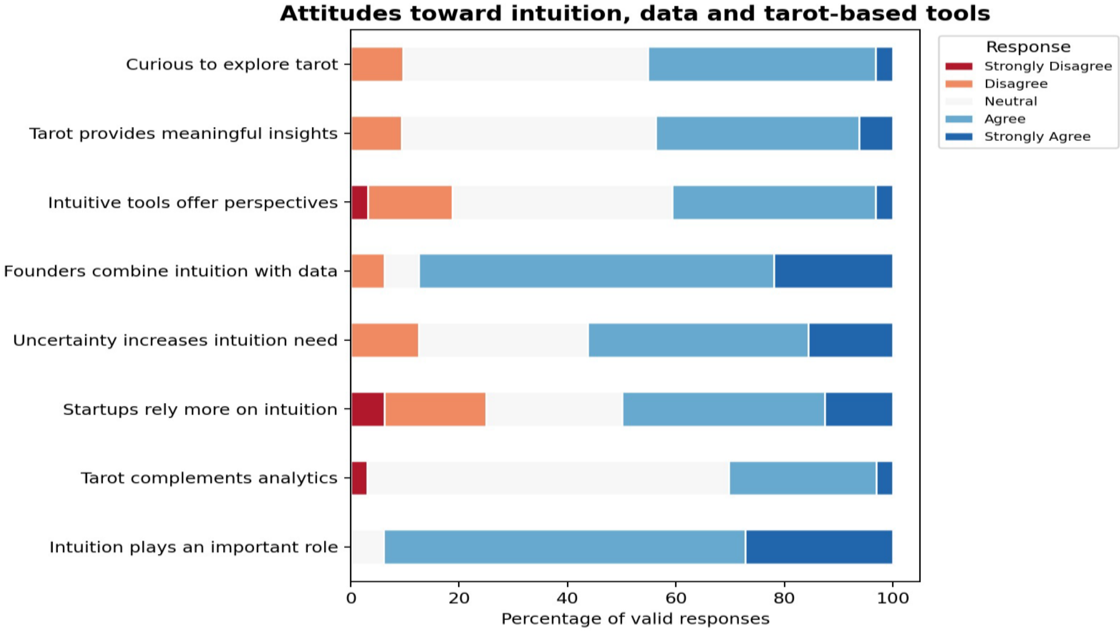

Figure 6. Stacked Likert analysis of key attitude statements

In the above graph, the primary theme is accepting multiple or hybrid decision-making. However, 87.5% agreed emphatically that founders combine intuition with data when making strategic decisions. Additionally, 56.2% are of the opinion that the existing high level of uncertainty in decision-making in startups should be addressed with intuitive decision-making tools. At the same time, 43.8% agreed that tarot can provide meaningful decision insights, and 45.2% expressed curiosity to explore tarot-based approaches in business contexts.

6.4 Correlation analysis

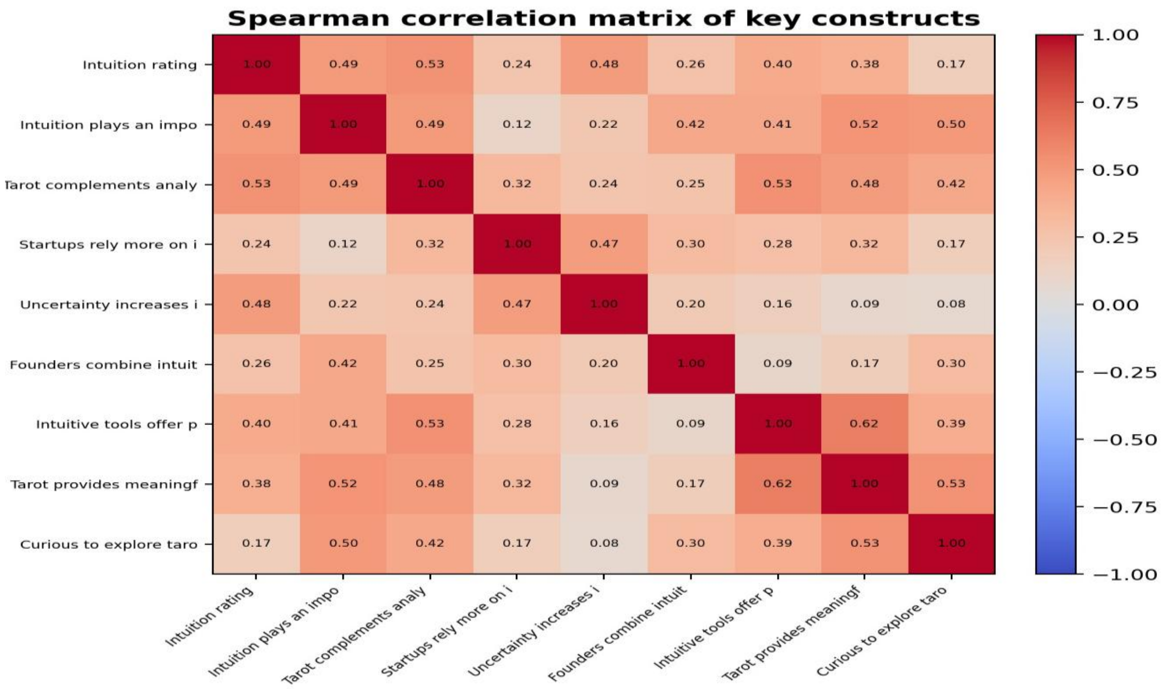

Figure 7. Spearman correlation matrix of key constructs

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The above matrix on correlation demonstrates the cluster-type view of perceptions about use of tarot in decision-making process. The higher associations for tarot is interesting as it indicates an openness to using it and reiterates the inclination to use alternative approaches in business and entrepreneurial decision-making. However, it should be understood that this correlation is reflective or exploratory in use, since the study sample is very small and cannot be regarded as conclusive in proving the hypothesis.

7. Key Findings

The inference from the study are as follows:

• Use of Intuition: With a mean score of 3.73 out 5, intuition is regarded by 60.6% as a meaningful decision input

• Low adoption of tarot despite extensive awareness: Although 81.8% knew about tarot, the usage of tarot as a tool or similar tools for decision-making was comparatively low at 24.2%.

• Preference for blended model: As high as 87.5% of entrepreneurs agreed that using intuition along with data is strategically important.

• Startup ecosystem reiterates need for perceived role of intuition: As many as 56.2% concluded that the environment of uncertainty in the startup economy needs higher adoption of the use of intuition.

Thus, tarot can be regarded as a powerful tool for reflection of an event for decision-making and cannot be used as a substitute for analytics or managerial judgement.

8. Discussion

The conclusion from the above study is that respondents are not looking at using alternative tools such as tarot as a question of intuition or data, but as a complementary tool to reinforce choices in situations of uncertainty. Respondents preferred an integrative approach to the use of tools in this category - using data for its structure, accountability and evidence, and the use of intuition for judgement in an ambiguous situation. Therefore, the use of tarot for symbolic prompting would create an opportunity for deeper reflection, analyse, reconsider assumptions and arrive at additional perspectives.

As a result, such a blended model can prove to be very efficient within the startup environment. It will be helpful in bridging an existing gap in historical data, commonly available in established environments. Since startups usually innovate and offer new solutions to existing problems there is no availability of proven data or proof of work to base their decisions. Thus, in such uncertain situations, there is over-reliance on data, leading to false certainty and in over-reliance on intuition will most likely be based on attenuated bias. As a result, tarot could prove to be a successful reflective tool, when it is bound by an ethical framework. It is not to be used as a predictive tool but as a reflective tool. It should widen the scope for critical analysis of the decision-event and not replace available evidence. It should be used voluntarily, and ensure transparency for accuracy.

9. Practical Implications

• It can be used to document assumptions, while making major decisions, and thereby becoming a structured input tool.

• It should be the established practice to use analytics as the primary base for measuring business decisions, including pricing, or market sizing and financial planning.

• Tarot also becomes an important reflective tool for brainstorming, scenario exploration and looking at personal reflection. It cannot be a tool for conclusive decision authorities.

• Emphasis should be placed on teaching managers to integrate data literacy and building awareness of cognitive bias, intuition and reflective judgement.

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10. Limitations and Future Research

The population of the sample size at 33 respondents is very small, with the majority of respondents belonging to the fields of education, academia and professional service roles. Hence, it is difficult to generalize the findings to a typical startup founder cohort. In the future, if research work could be expanded to include a larger participation group, differentiate founder and non-founder responses, conduct reviews and deploy inferential methods like regression or factor analysis. It is highly recommended to use longitudinal design to review reflective tools usage in decision making in the long term, and determine its quality.

11. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study establishes the role of intuition is complementary to the use of data during decision-making situations. The responses of participants clearly established the use of intuition in decision-making and to recognize that uncertainty situations in startups demands judgement, which goes beyond all available analytical methods. The use of tarot, as a reflective and symbolic tool, will offer alternative perspectives, and it can be bound by evidence, ethics and managerial accountability. As a result, intuition and tarot is a model that is likely to attract a lot of discussion, but its best use at this point of study, is a tool reinforcing the use of data for reflection and arriving at conclusive decisions.

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Appendix A. Survey Instrument Overview

The questionnaire covered age, gender, organizational role, industry, decision-making style, reliance on intuition, tarot awareness, tarot usage and Likert-scale attitudes toward intuition, data, startups, uncertainty and cultural beliefs.

Appendix B. Key Descriptive Results

Measure	Result	Interpretation
Sample size	33	Exploratory primary survey
Mean intuition reliance	3.73/5	Moderately high
High intuition reliance	60.6%	Selected 4 or 5
Tarot awareness	81.8%	High familiarity
Tarot/similar tool usage	24.2%	Lower adoption
Founders combine intuition with data	87.5% agree/strongly agree	Strong support for hybrid logic

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