Coyotes and road runners as managers: methodological approaches and survey results on cross-cultural perceptions of management roles through silent cartoon characters.

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Abstract

We extend the Collins’ Hedgehog Concept in ways that allow eliciting managerially relevant information from viewers of silent cartoons. We report early results from a web-based survey replied by over 600 MBA alumni from over 40 countries during late 2008. Respondents explain why they side with each character and state what managerial roles they see fitting each one. The low-cost method also gives voice to research teams in developing countries, helping to add context to received mainstream managerial wisdom, democratizing the generation of cross-cultural managerial perspectives. Future validation of the method may render low-cost digital technology cartoons offering vignettes to support allocation of staff to teams and roles.

A PROPOSITION OF A “NEW” METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This is a short exploratory paper conveying two arguments. In first place that cultures may differ across countries in ways that may be reflected in reactions to cartoons more effectively than has been traditionally provided by text-based surveys. To argue this we resort to Chuck Jones’ famous Wile E. Coyote and the Roadrunner - cartoon by Warner Bros.

In second place we wish to argue that the emotions that are elicited in response to the images of the Coyote’s pursuit of the Roadrunner may lead to important evidence regarding cultural differences in business attitudes towards leadership, allocation of talents, or the blending of personalities in teams.

If further validation supported this assertion we could be at the beginning of a revolutionary way of assessing cross-cultural information. For now the argument is based on evidence gathered initially from an MBA classroom survey and focus
group that was expanded to an international survey covering over 600 MBA students or alumni distributed in over 30 countries but concentrated in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, France, India, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, the UK and the USA.

The international survey reported here has helped to illustrate how viewer allegiance to either Coyote or Roadrunner determine the portrayal of the Other; thus helping to foster understanding within and between organizations. Should this research avenue trigger wider and deeper professional interest, beyond the wonderful non-pecuniary scholarly international collaboration that made this research possible, one can envision the development of person-to-role fitting tools that make use of silent moving images that ought to render better fits than those so far obtained based only on responses to text questions.

Cultural convergence no time soon
Yes, we are in the age of President Obama, but it took the USA, almost a century to forcefully desegregate the schools at Little Rock (Arkansas, 1957) after the end of the war of secession. President Obama was four years old when forced school desegregation took place, and he was already thirteen when mainstream America would come to accept the beauty of an African American woman in the centerfold pages of Playboy magazine. That it would take only four more decades for America to accept an African American President is wonderfully stunning, but let us not forget that it happened after over a century and a half of Yankeeification of American culture, and such sustained mass conversion is something that the rest of the World has not seen yet. World cultures are less isolated than ever, but the Little Rock crisis signals that cultures take a long time to shift. For business purposes, cultures are unlikely to converge anytime soon, besides, English language is only one of the options along which convergence may make progress.

We have become used to accepting management knowledge as a decontextualized area of thought. It is developed and taught mostly in English and accepted as proven just about everywhere. Yet English, whether spoken as a mother tongue or a second language, is limited to only about half a billion people,
about 12% of the World’s population. In addition, language is a carrier of culture. Surfing on language, values express themselves as attitudes, preferences, behavior, artifacts and more. It is no wonder that sharing a language is not enough for effective communication.

In developing countries, where much of the growth of consumption is expected to come from, proficiency in language alone may not be enough. Indeed, in emerging markets the written language is poorly assimilated, besides the spoken one being very fragmented. Take India for instance; there are 324 languages in use, 22 of them officially recognized. In the Americas, altogether, we have close to ten economically significant languages, a number comparable to the one Europeans must handle in the European Union.

The fragmentation of emerging markets in several spoken languages, with additional limitations to written communication, is a major challenge to developing global advertising strategies, let alone managerial ones. One simple reminder is the withering of the European cinema industry, incapable of competing on scale with the one-language-one-market approach of the American film industry.

Towards using non textual survey material

If written or spoken languages were such a poor option to elicit cross-cultural managerial knowledge across emerging markets, could silent moving images fare better? After all, silent Charlie Chaplin conveyed a lot of meaningful information. Yet the complexity of accessing and viewing filmic evidence, let alone the quoting of it, has prevented the academic profession at large from making the best of the available filmic evidence.

The alternative, relinquishing filmmaking as a tool is too sad, particularly for cross-cultural endeavors. It entails discarding one of the most dynamic cultural industries. Filmmaking and psychoanalysis have borrowed intensely from each other, helping build the understanding of “projection” onto the Other of the ego-ideal self-concept we construct of ourselves in the mirror image we see. Filmmaking taps into this psychological confusion, between our self and the projected Other, by displacing rather than replacing the subject by his or her identification with the Other. It is this
process of identification, demanding similarity, which produces our alienation onto the film’s star, whether it is Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, the Coyote or the Roadrunner. Whether we choose to identify with the Coyote or the Roadrunner depends on a variety of personal and social issues and on the dexterity of the filmmaker; but also on the sharing of cultural values between the latter and ourselves. When that congruence is ensured the renowned filmmaker can hope to achieve his intention. Cross-cultural management is a tricky field. Language pitfalls are always lurking in the dark, but those pitfalls at least are rather obvious. Cultural differences in people’s reactions to text are harder to deal with. We owe much to the pioneering efforts of Hofstede, but four more decades of statistical clustering of questionnaire-based data has not rendered better cultural clustering than what was suggested by Samuel Huntington applying a fine mind to paper and pencil. Besides, Behrens has pointed out that Hofstede’s conclusions on the ranking of a people’s cultural aversion to risk may be way off the mark, largely due to an understandable ethnocentric interpretation of a foreign people’s desire for books of procedures at work or to differences on the labor market’s phase which cannot be adequately captured by once-only surveys. When responding to survey questions people have a lot in their minds which is not known to those who designed the questions and yet the surveyed reply to the questions from their own standpoint, influenced by all their history. This is why shantytown dwellers in Rio de Janeiro may respond that the water supply is satisfactory even if water only comes out at 2 am of the only faucet in the shantytown. To those shantytown dwellers, water supply is not OK only when it fails to show up in the early morning, frustrating everyone who turned up to fill their buckets trusting that water would be available at that ungodly time. That is why probing through vignettes may be preferable to relying on traditional survey questions. The vignette may state something like: “Pedro expects water to come out of any faucet at his house every time he needs it, at any time of the day or night. How much to you agree with Pedro’s expectation?” Now, that is something more likely to elicit a revealing reply from the same shantytown dwellers.
We wish to take this a step further. Rather than exposing respondents to written vignettes we wish to test the usefulness of extracting managerially relevant information from the reactions of people responding to silent cartoons like Chuck Jone’s Coyote vs. the Roadrunner.

In being silent, the Coyote vs. Roadrunner cartoon series allows to reduce the risk threshold of translations. Besides, the cartoon series was widely seen on TV screens across the world since the late fifties, needing no additional explanation to most. In addition, the cartoon was not a haphazard creation, but was substantially disciplined by Chuck Jones. Indeed, rules limited, for instance, the Coyote’s chase of the Roadrunner to a path if for no other reason that the Road Runner was expected to run on roads. But, above all, Chuck Jones designed the cartoon to ensure the audience’s allegiance to the Coyote. Chuck Jones had the American audience in mind, not the world audience that the cartoon subsequently reached.

It would be safe to argue that if functionally comparable nationals of different countries, like MBA alumni, chose to identify with the Roadrunner instead of the Coyote, or if they identified with the same character but for different reasons, we would have a cultural issue at play. If, in addition we can extract some managerially relevant information from those differences of identification, we would then have the embryo of a cross-cultural methodology which could be developed, for example, into a means of selecting staff to make-up effective teams given their responses to silent moving images that could be built with the moving avatars that are becoming increasingly common in the digital age.

Could only two characters be a limitation in extruding the wealth of the world’s cultural diversity through? Perhaps yes. On the other hand, there is no other cartoon that one could rely on as easily, and cheaply, as the Coyote vs. the Roadrunner, in that it is mostly silent, widely seen and constrained by rules. Besides, there is an advantage in keeping things simple.

Take Isaiah Berlin’s metaphor of the Fox and the Hedgehog. For all his cunning talents, the fox rarely overcomes the hedgehog’s boring defensive style: curling upon itself to show his prickly spines to the fox’s mouth. Borrowing on the Greek poet Archilochus (c. 680 BC - c. 645 BC) who said: ‘The fox knows many things,
but the hedgehog knows one big thing’, this “big thing” while not particularly creative, is crucial for the hedgehog’s survival; that is what makes the strategy a ‘big thing”. Sir Isaiah went on to argue that the fox vs. hedgehog metaphor was useful in analyzing the wide spectrum of thought styles into which the human species can be split.

Sir Isaiah believed that some people accept a unifying vision, even if not fully articulate, on which all-embracing basis they interpret, at times fanatically, the world around them. There are others who pursue various disparate ends with no reasonable or aesthetic unifying theme because their thought processes, for physiological or psychological reasons, lack any tendency for a centripetal coalescence. To Sir Isaiah, the hedgehog and Dante, Dostoyevsky, Plato, Pascal and Hegel all represent the first type of thought process; while the fox and Shakespeare, Erasmus, Pushkin and Joyce represent the second type.

Sir Isaiah was well aware of the risk of oversimplifying, but argued, as we do in the case of the Coyote vs. Roadrunner, that the fox vs. hedgehog dichotomy should not be rejected outright for it embodies a degree of truth, allowing for a comparison, which is the starting point for a genuine investigation. Sir Isaiah then goes on to explain why Pushkin is the arch-fox and Tolstoy the arch-hedgehog, while Jim Collins goes on to argue that the level 5 leader is a hedgehog. Indeed, the fox vs. hedgehog metaphor has already made it into management circles through Jim Collins.

But before we move on to Collins use of the Berlin metaphor, we will argue that Berlin's metaphor does not only split humanity into two sets, for he also argues that the divide helps to portray one group according to the vision of the other. For reasons that need not detain us here, Sir Isaiah argues that Tolstoy was by nature a fox “but believed in being a hedgehog” and in this he left no doubt in his readers, whether in diaries, religious or social works, as to where he stood. Yet Sir Isaiah believes that nowhere as in Tolstoy’s attitude to history did he betray himself as much. It is there, according to Sir Isaiah, that Tolstoy went on to distort Pushkin’s protean genius to fit Pushkin into Tolstoy’s own hedgehog’s perspective. In this paper we argue that the chasm between the hedgehog’s and the fox’s cultural
outlook, or that between the Coyote’s and the Road Runner’s, lead not only to two worlds, but also to two outlooks on the worlds and on the fit of each member into an organizational world.

Indeed, for all its frailties, Jim Collins brought into management the fox vs. hedgehog metaphor, because he, following Sir Isaiah, believes that the Hedgehog Concept can separate the best leaders from the plain good ones. The hedgehog leaders waste no time in figuring out the relevance of a bit of information that does not fit his Weltanschauung. That information which does not fit is discarded, not because of some frivolous pursuit of an overarching simplicity; much on the contrary, hedgehogs strive to perceive underlying connections, they are guided by the pursuit of a systemic understanding: “Hedgehogs see what is essential, and ignore the rest.”

That selective attitude gives place to a clear-cut template, Collins’ Hedgehog Concept, that guides all efforts of prime performing corporations. The development of the Hedgehog Concept begins by a) identifying what you are best at; b) what assures profitability and c) what you are passionate about. The intersection of all three, according to Collins, allows us to identify the area where we should concentrate our efforts on. The “not so great” companies never quite master the Hedgehog Concept and are forever forced to walk back on their own steps after each wrong turn, and there are lots of potentially wrong turns.

The hedgehog corporate behavior celebrated by Collins is not totally devoid of drawbacks. For instance, the world is too complex for the available cognitive tools to be capable of yielding a complete understanding of the political or economic phenomena that affects business. If understanding is difficult enough, predicting political or economic phenomena is overwhelmingly difficult. Yet it is precisely in this field, so dependent on knowing many little things about diverse sources and agendas that the better improvisational talents arise. The latter are more adroit at responding to a changing environment than the talents of the hedgehog allow, for the hedgehog knows only one big thing. Knowing only one big thing, or single-mindedness, may help you win an ideological debate but does not allow you to accurately predict a complex event.
In fact, Tetlock argues:

“In this age of academic hyper specialization, there is no reason for supposing that contributors to top journals—distinguished political scientists, area study specialists, economists, and so on—are any better than journalists or attentive readers of the New York Times in ‘reading’ emerging situations.”

Hedgehogs, “who know one big thing” may overextend themselves forcefully but well beyond the actual domain of their knowledge, which is, by definition, narrower than that of the fox. The latter, on the other hand, knows a little about lots of things; foxes are skeptical of “big theory” and are adept at stitching together information of various sources, gauges and credibility. This makes foxes better at predicting naturally complex and evolving phenomena, and presumably also better at adapting to them.

Furthermore, if, like hedgehogs, we were to subject information to higher degree screening, or to systematically dismiss information that does not snugly fit into our beliefs, we would be failing the Popperian falsifiable axiom. That is, if we believe that all swans are white we should be on the lookout for black swans, not for more white swans. But searching for unsystemic alternatives is not in the hedgehog’s prescription book for life. This is why hedgehogs, according to Tetlock, ought to make poorer forecasters.

In support of our choice of the Coyote vs. Roadrunner paradox, so far we have quoted thought experts in fields as afar as philosophy, business and psychology, who have borrowed the fox vs. the hedgehog adage from the Greek poet Archilochus. We may be failing as Popperians, but, with Sir Isaiah, we would not dismiss all of this that quickly, for in what these similar dilemmas have common, they are useful to discriminate between groups in search for an explanation, which we now turn to.

What is behind the endless chase of the Road Runner by the Coyote?

Chuck Jones designed a little short of fifty Coyote and Roadrunner eleven-gag-seven-minute cartoons from 1948 on. The cartoon’s structure is basic enough to be universal: no language, one character and his prop; only one appetite and one fate, even if an elusive one. The Roadrunner is the protagonist’s prop. The
Roadrunner is hardly more than a constraint, a force of nature, an elusive goal, like Captains Ahab’s Moby-Dick. This monomaniacal pursuit is what makes the cartoon quintessentially American. The cartoon is polysemic in that can be read to many meanings and it is this combination of traits which renders this particular cartoon an ideal option to cross-cultural analysis.

Coyote and the Roadrunner cartoon is a show of discipline. For instance, if not for any other reason that he is a Roadrunner, the Roadrunner cannot leave the road, unless he is lured by the Coyote by a detour sign or something like it. Then there is no dialogue, another discipline. Further, the Roadrunner never harms the Coyote, except by making a nuisance of him through his unnerving nasal Beep beep! There are altogether ten disciplines, or rules, that govern the Coyote vs. Roadrunner cartoon, as listed on the Looney tunes site. Yet it is the last one we wish to emphasize for the sake of our argument: the cartoon was designed to assure the audience’s solidarity with the Coyote, not the Roadrunner. Indeed, Chuck Jones believed that

“The Coyote is what we all of us would want to be, a perfectionist in whatever we’d like to accomplish...”

The gags are based on the Coyote’s ineptitude. The Coyote is anthropomorphized, Chuck Jones believed that the Coyote is what all Americans are when working on home basement workshops, for no matter the amount of tools they buy for themselves, the output is unlikely to be as good as that of a professional; “this is how the Coyote falls always in a slight error, that’s what usually happens.” Yet, Chuck Jones always comes in the Coyote’s rescue, always attempting to preserve his dignity. The Coyote’s failure may lead him to be crushed like an accordion, but Chuck Jones will lift him up and have him brush himself off; for being a Coyote may not be much, but it is better than being an accordion.

The Roadrunner simply runs, usually past by the Coyote. Occasionally the Roadrunner will defy the Coyote, though it can be argued that the Roadrunner’s nasal Beep beep! is a provocation in itself, it ought to be harmless. However, the Coyote is his worst enemy and in his relentlessness he reminds Chuck Jones of
George Santayana’s dictum “A fanatic is a man who redoubles his efforts when he has forgotten his aim.”

Aesthetically the cartoon is set on the American South West and draws from Laurel and Hardy’s elaborate narratives on nothing getting done. Jones also drew from Buster Keaton’s look into the camera in anticipation of utter failure. Also, Chuck Jones borrows from Tom Mix the eerie stillness preceding disaster, only broken by little eyes flickering back and forth, from left to right and back. One could rightly argue that the fun in the Coyote and the Roadrunner derives not so much from incongruence, but from the release of the tension of an anticipated failure, powered by fictional distance.

The Coyote manager and problem solving

The Coyote does not seem to be able to have more than an idea at a time. One suspects that he may even be stressed out by weighing alternatives and outcomes. Though occasionally there is a hint and the Coyote’s machination; one senses that, intimately, the Coyote feels more comfortable when acting out of a very limited repertoire. ACME is the mail delivery shop that delivers what the Coyote believes he needs out of what he finds in a mail order catalogue. Nothing else is made available to the Coyote, thus his limited repertoire. Actually, that is also one of the cartoon rules. Once fixed onto an idea, the Coyote develops the idea into a plan which is not gauged for weaknesses or deficiencies. Victor Newman believes many managers behave in the same way: they are the victims of their own monomaniacal pursuit of an elusive Roadrunner. Coyotes look busy, but they actually waste their time. Yet, if so, how could the Coyote be the cartoon’s hero?

That the Coyote is the hero, or ought to be, is granted by Chuck Jones’ firm sensitivity to American culture. He designed the cartoon so that the audience would identify with the Coyote. So what is so positive about the Coyote, if he repeatedly fails?

In first place, the Coyote is industrious. The Coyote is an Emersonian character in that he is self-reliant and relentless in the pursuit of his goal. In addition, the Coyote repeatedly picks himself up from utter defeat to recoil into another attack. He may lose, but he is not a loser. Every defeat fuels the Coyote’s determination to
succeed. This why the Coyote, not the fast paced Roadrunner, was chosen to sell the Pontiac Grand Prix at the 1998 SuperBowl. An un-American character would not have done as well.

On the other hand, the Road Runner seems to be rather aimless. He does what his name says he will do: run on roads. But besides that there is not much more to the Road Runner, except if you read between the lines. Just as you may read rank in a military uniform, you may also read prestige and authority. In the Road Runner there is, yes, a hint of wit and defiance or provocation, there is also some allusion to a deeper and broader knowledge such as may be implied by notions like the expansion of the universe. After all, how else could the Roadrunner run into a tunnel only hinted at by the Coyote’s drawing of an arched black entrance on the surface of a rocky mountain? There is a fancy-free attitude to life in the Roadrunner, as expressed in taking risks for the fun of it, courting tragedy, again, alluding to a richer or deeper dimension of life.

The Roadrunner is unencumbered by either mass or fat. He is all zig-zag, joy, ingenuity and innocence. In the Roadrunner’s life-style there is no patience for politicking, sign-off approvals, meetings to waste time on. There is nothing of that; the Roadrunner is a free soul and his defiance of the authority, as portrayed by the Coyote, and of the rules of Newtonian physics, as when entering a tunnel only recently painted on a rock by the Coyote, may more be appealing to inhabitants of countries with authorities unworthy of their mandates, authoritarian bosses at work, or inhabitants of not fully de-enchanted societies.

Yet, while one can read all these greater-than-life powers into the Road Runners character, there is no hard evidence of them. The Road Runner’s style is as real as Don Quixote’s dream. The Road Runner is hardly a character that one can hope to build or run something with. The Road Runner is the nemesis of the industrious Coyote. The Road Runner appears un-American in comparison, although this is open to dispute, as in Bell and Harari. A kind respondent of our international survey, an under 35 British female working for a manufacturing company headquartered in the USA, in a managerial position at four levels from the local boss told us: “I found this hard to complete because I feel that the roadrunner is a
free spirit, who doesn’t commit to anything. The coyote is a malicious, bungling fool. I'd rather not employ either of them!". Nonetheless, she identified more with one of them.

It is not surprising that Chuck Jones construed the cartoon in the way he did. To Americans, the Coyote ought to appear closer to a heroic dimension capable of triggering the audience’s identification. This is what Henry Allen, Pulitzer award winner, Washington Post columnist, contributor to the New York Review of Books and The New Yorker, discovered, much to his amazement, when confronted with the honors students of the University of Maryland attending his Culture seminar in 2000. Nineteen out of twenty-one of his students would they actually “identify with the Coyote, root for the Coyote, see themselves as Coyotes?” “Of course,” the Maryland students replied, and advanced explanations as to why they sided with the Coyote:

“The Coyote ...keeps trying in the face of adversity...” or ”...I feel sorry for the Coyote...” or ”...Road Runner has no personality...” and ”...Road Runner is a typical baby boomer, had everything handed to him, feels responsible for nothing except himself...”.

Mr. Allen tried to persuade the Maryland students otherwise: “the '60s could not have happened if students had thought of themselves as the Coyote. Back then, "Mr. Allen argued, “the Coyote was cops, parents, the draft board, the dean of students, and suburban tail-fin gray-flannel-suit conformity. It was a droopy-nosed old loser like Nixon trying to talk about football with anti-war demonstrators.” But, all Mr. Allen’s efforts were to no avail. His young undergraduate students would have nothing of Mr. Allen’s talk. Chuck Jones knew that too well, back in the fifties, they would have also fallen for the Coyote.

Startled, Mr. Allen later went around checking his views with whom he would bump into: "Your students said they identified with the Coyote?” asked Paul Feigenbaum, 53, a commercial lawyer in Albany, N.Y. "That makes no sense. You have to be adept at tap-dancing through life. The Road Runner thought outside the box. He was like Einstein. He understood that the universe stretches."
Still according to Mr. Allen, Jeffrey Meikle, 50, of the University of Texas at Austin would argue that he still dreamed of being the Road Runner, but that "as chairman of the American studies department, I am the Coyote."

Mr. Allen would still recall with pride how to his generation “the Road Runner was freedom, immunity, innocent victimhood and entitlement. It was the mascot of John F. Kennedy's "new generation." Yet, he argued, that from his limited impressionistic sample, “It seemed that Road Runner identification is strongest for people in their fifties” and that people in their early forties would be somewhat ambiguous in their identification, while the under-thirties would identify with the Coyote with neither doubts nor remorse: “He's (the Coyote) going after his goal,” said a 21 year old from Ohio University. A dreadlocked 23 year old was even more explicit in his vengeance-ridden affiliation to the Coyote: "I want him to get the Road Runner." He did not see the Coyote as a loser either, for he wouldn't lose if he were a Coyote, he would get even cooler artifacts to get at the Road Runner. Some under-thirties from other walks of life would argue for the Coyote on the ground of compassion: "He never gets a break," adding, "He tries hard. It's like, would you rather have a student who tries hard or a bright one who's kind of sarcastic?"

It would seem that in the Coyote- Road Runner dyad there is a more complex identification process at play. Youngsters, like presumably the ones that Chuck Jones had in mind as primary viewers of his Coyote and Roadrunner cartoon, tend to associate with the Coyote’s more linear, focused style of problem-solving and decision-making. While the relatively mature and more experienced, would side with the Road Runner, in whom they see greater versatility and therefore adaptability to an increasingly complex and evolving world.

The Roadrunner manager

There is some evidence that successful managers shift towards more complex thought process and decision-making as they climb to the top of the organizational ladder. Some people would act upon little information and consider only one alternative. That type of thinking and decision-making is most appropriate when action is at a premium, mostly at the lower levels of organizational hierarchy, say, like at the Supervisor level. At higher levels of hierarchy, more complex thought
processes and considered decision-making are required and prized, as in the realm of CEOs.

One could hypothesize that “knowing one big thing” and acting upon it would be more appropriate to what is required at the lower organizational ranks than at the top. The appropriate metaphor would no longer be the Fox vs. Hedgehog one put forward by Sir Isaiah Berlin, and endorsed by Collins, but the Coyote vs. Roadrunner one. In the new metaphor, the Coyote would not stand for Sir Isaiah’s Fox but for his Hedgehog, while the quick footed Road Runner would side with the Fox. We would then have the pairing of ideas and thought processes: the Fox, knowing a little of many things, would side with the Road Runner, whose broader knowledge of things we can only intuitively guess at, but which evidently seems to comprise more than the monomaniacal Coyote, who knows only “one big thing:” to use ACME products to hunt down the Road Runner.

Furthermore, the fact that Americans across their lifecycles may shift their allegiances towards one or another of the Coyote vs. Road Runner cartoon characters provides some indication that the same will happen across cultures. For instance, in most of hands-up classroom surveys we carried out in Brazil, regarding allegiance to one or other of the same cartoon characters, at least two thirds of the students systematically sided with the Road Runner. Brazilians tend to enroll in MBAs when slightly older than American students do, the students in our classes, on average, were about 39 years old.

Brazilian students told us more than that. They revealed that those that rooted for the Road Runner thought of the Coyote as tedious, controlling, censorial character, fit mostly to be an Auditor or Comptroller. Yet the Road Runner type was considered preferable to the Coyote for functions requiring wit and inventiveness such as asset managing, or even high responsibility ones as a medical doctor. Not surprisingly, Road Runner types would not stand the idea of having a Coyote type for their boss. This is why we decided to expand the survey to seek validation of the classroom exercise and eventually to, perhaps, pave the way for moving images based personnel selection tools.
EARLY RESULTS OF AN INTERNATIONAL SURVEY

From FIA’s International MBA at São Paulo, we launched an international survey aiming at eliciting managerially relevant information from the respondents’ reactions to each of the cartoon characters. We made available a web-based questionnaire in Spanish, Portuguese and English and links calling for respondents were placed at the London Business School’s discussion boards from October to mid-December, 2008. In addition we secured the help of several kind colleagues in different countries who sought to elicit responses from their MBA alumni networks. We focused on MBA alumni networks because these alumni are trained roughly in the same way, read the same journals and books almost everywhere and have relatively common professional aims. Below we provide vignette reports based on early tabulations of results.

Indeed, within each age group, the shares of respondents that express allegiance with the Coyote rather than the Road Runner fall with age of the respondent. See Figure 1. These results confirm a certain managerial drift. One could argue that while we are all born Coyotes most die Road Runners. Still, aggregate data confirm Mr. Allen’s hunch regarding allegiance to the Road Runner in the USA, our own early classroom exercise in Brazil and also fits studies finding that more complex and broad decision-making is prized at the corporate C-level, where experience is prized. These results, based on 460 replies, are still to be analyzed in more detail by cultural background. More detailed analysis may well render that Brazilians and Indians tend to side more readily with the Road Runner than Anglophones would, at any age. But our results are robust and validate earlier
considerations: maturity favors the Road Runner who knows a lot of little things, while the action-oriented Coyote type predominates among the relatively younger. In grouping the data for cultural clusters we could have taken the well-sanctioned route and passively grouped survey data by statistical clustering methods. However, as argued earlier, statistical methods have not rendered a more illuminating alternative than sound decisions grounded on cultural history, on which statistical methods must rely for validation in any case.

To group respondents by cultural cluster we followed religious signals like the geographical footprint of the expansion of Lutheranism, the shared Mediterranean codes of family honor and shame, the geographical roots of the large demographic flows that populated the Americas. This helped us to trace the impact of the allegiances as reflected today in survey responses. The grouping path taken is explained when interpreting the results in the tables below.

In Figure 2, All Anglophones were grouped in four categories. Britons (43), Canadians (11) and New Zealanders (3) into one group called Anglophones, strongly pro-Coyote. Australians, stood out as different, their respondents siding mostly with the Road Runner. Americans were split according to the cultural group they showed greatest allegiance to: steadfastly Americans – who did not qualify their cultural background, or declared themselves Caucasians, Whites, or WASPS - all these were grouped under Apple Pie Americans. Americans were grouped into Foreign Flavoured ones if they showed a broader national cultural exposure, like being expatriates or having been brought up in a mixed American cultural environment, like that expressed by Americans who qualified their cultural background: Hispanic, Asian, Jewish Americans. It was this latter group of Americans that showed less allegiance to the Coyote character, lower even than the Brazilian group.
Other Mediterraneans includes the standard Southern Europeans, like Italians, Greeks Rumanians, Bulgarians, but also Turks and Egyptians, on account of the permeating role of family shame and honor in those societies, and the symbols, literature and sports they give place to. 

On account of the significance of Lutheranism in Germany, Holland, Denmark and Scandinavia, respondents from these countries were grouped under one. German respondents prevail because of their larger numbers, and they tend to side with the Road Runner. See Figure 3. Of all European cultural roots of the Americas it is the Iberian one the one which shows today least allegiance for the Coyote, in sharp contrast with the Anglophone group, remarkably pro-Coyote. By the Anglo group standards, even the American Apple Pie group looks a moderate pro-Coyote.

The distribution of respondents from Latin American and other Mediterranean countries are shown in Figure 4. Iberia, 27 respondents, is shown as the most pro-Road Runner helping explain the similar orientation of Argentina and Brazil which are nuanced by the influx of Other Mediterranean, more sober in terms of their allegiances. There seems to be no worse place to be a supporter of the Coyote than in Iberia, particularly Spain, where all seven respondents sided with the Road Runner.

This leaves us with Argentines (30) and Brazilians (91), or even the rest of Latin America, as staunch Road Runners while Mexico and Colombia stand out as siding with the Coyote. Sample numbers are smaller, 20 each, for both Mexico and Colombia. Also, about half of the respondents for both came from calls placed at the London Business School while the other half were culled by calls at only one
institution in each heterogeneous country and may not be as representative of the rest of the MBA population there. The Rest of Latin America group includes four replies by Puerto Ricans, eight by Ecuadorians, three from Chile, one from Panama, three from Perú, one from Uruguay, two from Philippines. Yes, anyone who has seen the Philippino urban structure, understands how it was brought about, and has even a cursory acquaintance with the fervor of their devotion for the Black Nazarene knows where Philippines belongs in this study. The World Bank manages their affairs with the Philippines from the same division as Latin America.

Coyote type respondents praise the Coyote because he does not give-up: 58% offer this explanation as the first reason for siding with the Coyote. A further 11% argue that they side with the Coyote because he is “focused”. Remember that “being focused” is meant to be a positive sign in managerial circles. Still, a further 9% argue that the Coyote’s obsesiveness is a positive enough trait for them to side with the Coyote. Altogether we have 79% of Coyote supporters perceiving the Coyote’s relentlessness as a positive sign.

Yet it is this relentless of the Coyote which is perceived as Obsesiveness by the supporters of the Road Runner; 45% of whom give Obsesiveness as the first reason not to support the Coyote; a further 29% perceive in first place a malicious intent in the Coyote.

Coyote supporters claim that they cannot side with the Road Runner, in first place (27%), because the Road Runner escapes, while the second highest reason (18%) is that the Coyote type resents what they perceive as the Road Runner’s immunity.

On the other hand, Road Runner types explain they side, in first place, with the Road Runner on account of his or her joyfulness (35%) and because he or she escapes (17%).

Road Runners do not thrive on confrontation; and Coyotes want to make the Road Runners pay. The first of the six Seligman virtues appreciated by the Coyotes is Courage; but it is Wisdom (with Temperance as a close runner-up) for the Road Runners. Not only are Coyotes and Road Runners different. They do not like each
other. Full stop. It would be hard imagining one working under the command of the other.

Yet, the Road Runner, in the eyes of the beholder – the Coyote – is seen in a much kinder light when it comes to deciding on who should run the business. Of course the Coyote would rather work under another Coyote. Nonetheless, the share of Coyote respondents who would have a Roadrunner as Head of the Organization is four times larger than the share of Road Runners that would have a Coyote running the organization. See Figure 5. The perceptions on the suitability of the other are similar on the rest of the organizational roles except for legal counseling and running a plant, where the Coyote’s relentless industriousness is seen, by the Road Runners, as more of a bonus than a handicap.

Yet the choices of each for the organizational role to be taken by the other are clouded by the first and foremost desire, to get the Other off their backs by not having him or her as their boss. This becomes apparent by the larger discrepancy regarding roles when it comes to analyzing their second choice for organizational role for the Other, shown in Figure 6. There the Road Runner’s opinion of the Coyote’s talents reign: Coyote is perceived as a Comptroller/Financial apparatchik. His or her relentlessness is seen as better deployed in the Legal litigation area, or even in Sales; but obviously not in Human Resources, where according to the Coyote, the Road Runner reigns.

The reasons why Road Runners would not have Coyotes as their bosses can be found in the low opinion they have of them. These results vary considerably by country. Brazilians siding with the Coyote would not have a Road Runner for boss, full stop. Neither would the staunch Coyote supporters in the Anglophone group have a Road Runner for boss. Apple Pie Americans are more flexible at this. Of the
16 Apple Pie Americans siding with the Coyote, 31% would indicate a Road Runner for head of the organization. Only 7% of Brazilians siding with the Road Runner would have a Coyote for head of the organization. Even this is better than the Foreign Flavored Americans, the only other group with more than 20 responses, in that only 4% of those siding with a Road Runner would have a Coyote as Head of the organization.

Female allegiance with one or the other may have some role in the choice of boss, as they side with the Road Runner more frequently (60%) than men do (53%) though there were only 23% of females in the data that allowed checking allegiance by sex. See Figure 6.

Figure 7 here

\begin{figure}
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\caption{Figure 7 here}
\end{figure}

\section*{SOME INITIAL CONCLUSIONS}

This paper has called attention to the importance of contextualizing managerial theory and instruments by pointing out how traditional quantitative survey methods designed in the Northern hemisphere may distort perceptions of the populations they purport to portray, particularly in the Southern hemisphere. In addition this paper has offered a low-cost alternative method of eliciting information from the surveyed populations. Rather than attempting to design better written surveys, it has pointed out to a hitherto untapped source of information: readily available cartoons seen by almost everybody. In particular we chose Coyote vs. the Road Runner because it is silent and disciplined. It does away with expensive and tricky translations and the roles of its characters are not haphazard. We are well aware that the wealth of human diversity cannot be reduced to the roles depicted in a dyad. But we see in those roles, like our precursors Berlin and Collins among others, value in the method of discriminating into groups to allow for comparisons to be made, that, in its essence, is a stepping-stone for scientific enquiry. Furthermore, we chose to apply the method firstly among MBA students as we
believe that the way in which they are trained, the nature of their work and the environment in which they deal with their tasks, including the literature they read is perhaps unfortunately but necessarily similar, wherever they are. We first applied the method in a classroom exercise in Brazil, expanded it to a larger audience through a web-based survey in Brazil and then made it available to MBA alumni elsewhere. Alumni at networks in Latin countries were by far the most reticent to report among those that whose responses we sought, giving place to considerations regarding possible distortions due to self-selection which we cannot deal with yet. One possible way to overcome this is to elicit further cooperation from our colleagues abroad and have all their students reply to a questionnaire in class. That worked for us in Brazil, as well as it worked for a generous collaborator in Mexico, but it is more cumbersome to deal across several institutions in several countries.

Nonetheless, we have built a database with 515 valid replies which provide a fair glimpse of close to a dozen of countries and cultural groupings. This data has validated the method in that the cultural differences it reveals across countries and regions follows the expected pattern, but has also allowed us to reveal useful cross-cultural managerial information.

In particular it has allowed us not only to suggest how those differences are manifested in organizational roles but it has also allowed us to suggest that there are very important perceptions regarding the importance of intuition at play in managerial environments, particularly in developing countries like Argentina, Brazil and India. It is mostly intuition that drives those MBA alumni to side with a character whose talents are not disclosed but which help decide the most apt organizational roles for the character.

The role of intuition in the managerial environment is shamefully limited in mainstream management literature but it is important in not fully de-enchanted societies, where it can have a larger role without one having to make excuses for it. Further, it is in these economically and politically volatile business environments, where quantitative information is less available and less reliable, that the
managerial role of intuition gains a much wider and important role, as was indicated in this paper.

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Figures to be inserted in the text.

Figure 1 Role of age in identification with cartoon characters.

Figure 2 Percentage distribution of respondents identifying with either cartoon character, by cultural clusters.
Figure 3 Distribution of Latin's respondents' identification with cartoon characters. This includes the categories Rest of Latin America and Other Mediterraneans. See text for meaning.

Figure 4 Distribution of respondents according to identification with cartoon characters, by root cultural clusters with India provided for comparison.
Figure 5 Distribution of 1st choices for organizational role for the Other.

Figure 6 Distribution of 2nd choices for Organizational Role for the Other.
Figure 7 Identification with cartoon characters by gender.