



# Feature Films in Management Education: Beyond Illustration and Entertainment

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**Abstract.** Feature films are now widely used by organizational behaviour instructors, as a means of illustrating topics and concepts, and as a source of pedagogical material that is more entertaining and motivating than conventional teaching methods. The aim of this paper is to establish that, while the aims of illustration and motivation are valuable, film has further pedagogical potential, explored through the concept of film as theory-laden narrative. Various, different applications of films in classroom instruction are suggested.

**Keywords:** film, teaching, organizational behaviour, instructional techniques.

## 1. Introduction

The use of feature films in the teaching of organizational behaviour within management programmes is not new (Daniels, 1982), and has numerous advocates (Gioia and Brass, 1985; Kinnunen and Ramamurti, 1987; Michaelson and Schultheiss, 1988; Flores, 1989; Harrington and Griffin, 1990; Serey, 1992; Banthin and Stelzer, 1993; Gallos, 1993; Huczynski, 1994; Ross, 1996; Foreman and Thatchenkery, 1996; Rappaport and Cawelti, 1998; Comer and Cooper, 1998; Livingstone and Livingstone, 1998; Graham et al, 1999; Champoux, 1999; Comer, 2000; Roth, 2001). Marx et al. (1991) catalogue management teaching resources in which films play a prominent role. Champoux (2001a; 2001b) summarizes 160 scenes from classic and contemporary movies that illustrate organizational theories, concepts and issues. Huczynski and Buchanan (2001) have the first mainstream organizational behaviour text to include 'home viewing', identifying movies with themes relevant to chapter material. Observing that film was the 'defining medium' of the twentieth century, Monaco (2000) notes how, with developments in the use of video, DVD, and the internet, both the availability and consumption of film has changed dramatically since the 1970s. Thirty years ago, few people owned movies. Today, few people do not. Technological developments have thus potentially enhanced the educational

scope of film, making a range of material more readily available to a wider audience.

The popularity of film as a teaching vehicle relies on its unique educational properties. Champoux (1999, p.206) argues that, 'film enhances the learning process in ways unavailable in other media', by illustrating organizational behaviour themes, in a graphic and memorable manner, and by providing entertainment which can motivate students and stimulate interest. Hobbs (1998, p.263) argues that film can be used to gain attention, to illustrate subject matter, and also to encourage the analytical and critical viewing of film as 'text'. Hobbs' reference to text is particularly significant as fictional narratives are typically accounts of events that unfold sequentially, and chronologically, thus suggesting causality (Putnam, Phillips and Chapman, 1996, p.386; Czarniawska, 1998 and 1999). To the extent that narrative-based films contain embedded explanations for events, they are potentially theory-rich, suggesting premises for arguments, and offering frames of reference for the interpretation of organizational actions. While scientific understanding seeks to understand events in terms of covariation, in the form of general laws, narrative understanding is concerned with making sense of flows of social and organizational action in context.

Film, as narrative, can therefore be 'read' as advancing an argument, or arguments, or thesis, which is often 'the good guys always win', or 'the course of true love is never smooth'. However, as we shall seek to demonstrate, many films have more interesting and complex theses of relevance to management and organization studies. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to establish the wider pedagogical value of film beyond the illustration of themes and the entertainment of students, based on the narrative potential of film as thesis.

## **2. Film as Illustration**

Instructors who use film report a range of objectives, relating to process, to the experience of viewing a film, to content, and to the substance of the plot. The process of watching a movie has characteristics not shared by conventional instructional methods. As a teaching medium, movies belong in the same category as lectures and case studies, providing learning material to consider, discuss, and analyse. However, viewing film allows students temporarily to suspend everyday concerns, to let imagination roam, to experience vicariously the richness of organizational life (Golden-Biddle, 1993). Hunter (1990) notes the ability of films to offer a 'transcendent' experience, creating 'a sense of engagement' with events on the screen. For Harrington and Griffin (1989), a movie's imagery produces a higher level of student involvement. Serey (1992) argues that movies produced a 'powerful, compelling, intense experience'. Film can thus trigger greater participant involvement, which can in turn enrich the learning experience (Michaelson and Schultheiss, 1988).

Champoux (2001a; 2001b) has done much valuable work in identifying relevant film content, and encouraging its use in organizational behaviour instruction. In particular, he identifies the eight ‘ways of using’ film, summarized in Table 1 (Champoux, 1999), using stimulating content to illustrate and highlight topics difficult to convey through lecture and print.

Table 1: Ways of using film in teaching (Champoux, 1999)

<b>case</b>	presenting narrative for analysis
<b>experiential exercise</b>	going ‘inside’ a setting, for problem solving and decision making
<b>metaphor</b>	portraying complex, abstract ideas in vivid and memorable ways
<b>satire</b>	using humour, ridicule, exaggeration, understatement
<b>symbolism</b>	communicating with visual imagery, language, music
<b>meaning</b>	giving substance to abstract theories and concepts
<b>experience</b>	bringing vicarious experience, such as life in other cultures
<b>time</b>	illustrating historical events, temporal dimensions of behaviour

Echoing Champoux’ recommendations, most instructors appear to use movies for illustrative purposes, for presenting, portraying, communicating, substantiating, and emphasizing concepts and topics more difficult to convey with more conventional methods. From an inspection of the literature, there appear to be seven main approaches under this heading:

1. demonstrating relevance
2. motivating the boring
3. concretizing the abstract
4. changing the mode
5. reframing the perspective
6. comprehending complexity
7. revealing the hidden

Having examined these applications, we will then consider how the narrative perspective of film as thesis leads to three further powerful pedagogical uses of film.

## 1. Demonstrating Relevance

Films can reinforce the argument that course content has personal and career relevance. Hunt (2001) uses film to demonstrate the pervasiveness and practicality of theories and concepts. The problems of cross-cultural communication are highlighted in *Rising Sun* (Philip Kaufman, 1993). Organization socialization methods are illustrated in *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987) and *The Firm* (Sydney Pollack, 1993). Individual differences in work motivation are explored in *Bringing Out the Dead* (Martin Scorsese, 1999).

## 2. Motivating the Boring

Some instructors candidly confess that not all aspects of their subject are equally interesting. Liedtka (2001) is not alone in aspiring to engage student interest in less exciting topics, such as the typical features of bureaucracy. The sequence in *Crimson Tide* (Tony Scott, 1995) where the submarine crew work through a practice drill to launch nuclear missiles, may heighten awareness of the characteristics of bureaucratic structure better than most lectures or print materials could hope to achieve. With respect to learning theory, discussion of the practical and ethical dilemmas of conditioning and reinforcement regimes can be triggered by a sequence from *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971, rereleased 2000).

## 3. Concretizing the Abstract

Many instructors use film to exemplify course content which is difficult to conceptualize, and to provide examples that ground abstractions (Harrington and Griffin, 1989). For example, *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986) illustrates the power bases identified by French and Raven (1958; Baker, 1993). *The Breakfast Club* (John Hughes, 1984) exemplifies the stages of group formation. Postmodern perspectives concerning the illusory nature of reality are deployed in *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999) and *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999); these movies leave viewers challenging their own perceptions of reality. ‘We are still in the game, right?’, asks one of the characters at the end of *eXistenZ*, but neither he nor viewers can confidently answer this question.

## 4. Changing the Mode

Accounts of film use reveal references to encouraging particular modes of thinking, particularly to critical thinking. Roth (2001) uses film to develop

critical thinking by asking students to evaluate what they observe. Shaw and Locke (1993) use film to develop ‘a skeptical eye’, and encourage students to ‘get away from narrow functionalism and develop management judgement’. Invite students critically to assess the ‘greed is good’ sequence from *Wall Street* (Oliver Stone, 1987). Is it appropriate for a manager to engage in such intimate self disclosure with a subordinate? Does Gekko’s perspective on the value of greed underpin capitalism? In stockbroking, or indeed in any other occupation, is ruthlessness a prerequisite for career success? Is this perspective and accompanying behaviour consistent with other social values and the maintenance of ‘normal’ social relationships outside work ?

## 5. Reframing the Perspective

Some instructors argue that immersion in a fictional narrative enables students more effectively to ‘reframe’ issues from contrasting points of view (Harris, 1991). Gallos (1993) defines reframing as exploring a situation from multiple perspectives, and identifies two approaches, ‘within a film’ and ‘with a film’. Reframing ‘within a film’ involves selecting scenes in which one character encourages others to challenge their assumptions. There are several examples in *Dead Poets Society* (Peter Weir, 1989). Keating (Robin Williams) challenges conventional learning methods, and invites students to stand on their desks to see the world from a different perspective. Gallos identifies similar ‘within a film’ examples of re-framing from *The Karate Kid* (John G. Avildsen, 1984), *Rude Awakening* (David Greenwalt and Aaron Russo, 1989), *Bananas* (Woody Allen, 1971), *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989), and *Working Girl* (Mike Nichols, 1988). In contrast, ‘with a film’ reframing involves viewing the same film sequence from different perspectives. The early sequences in *The Magnificent Seven* (John Sturges, 1960), where Mexican villagers and Chris (Yul Brynner) recruit six gang members, can be analyzed first from a motivational perspective (what needs is each gunman seeking to satisfy?), and second from an influencing perspective (what tactics are used to persuade each gunman to join?) (Huczynski, 1994).

## 6. Comprehending Complexity

Film can help students to comprehend the multidimensional complexity of organizational issues, by displaying ambiguity and uncertainty at an interpersonal level by illustrating different experiences, perceptions and interpretations of the same events, encouraging tolerance for ambiguity and avoidance of the search for ‘one right answer’. Film can also demonstrate linkages between social and organizational issues and personal and work experience (Roth, 2001). Topics

characterized by contradictions and inconsistencies, such as leadership and power, are also suitable for exploration through film (Harrington and Griffin, 1989). *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999) is a story of 'the perfect family' falling apart. Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey) quits his dead-end management job to serve burgers in Mr. Smiley's (a dead-end job of a different kind), while his wife Carolyn (Annette Bening) has an affair with her main local competitor in the real estate business. This film displays the corrosive effects of dissatisfying, demotivating work on personal identity, family, and wider relationships. This movie also supports a depressing thesis concerning the fate of those who decide not to comply with 'normal' social values.

### 7. Revealing the Hidden

Film can portray aspects of organizational behaviour that are normally neither disclosed nor discussed. Hassard and Holliday (1998) observe that orthodox texts offer 'sanitized' images, adding that film and television, 'play out sex, violence, emotion, power struggle, the personal consequences of success and failure, and disorganization'. Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) argue that most texts overlook organizational *misbehaviour*, such as 'soldiering', sabotage, and practical jokes. The damaging consequences (for all concerned) of an employee's unfortunate personal history, combined with access to customers' intimate family lives through work in a photo-processing booth, are revealed by the 'misbehaviour' in *One Hour Photo* (Mark Romanek, 2002). The degree to which perceptions can be deceived by contextual cues is powerfully displayed in *The Sixth Sense* (M. Knight Shyamalan, 1999). The subtle and compelling combination of body language, physical positioning, and conversation style that contributes to interpersonal influence is graphically displayed in a humorous sequence in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (Frank Oz, 1988), where Freddy Benson (Steve Martin) influences a woman on a train, a complete stranger, to buy him an expensive meal. Viewing this sequence with the sound muted reveals more immediately the subtle pattern of behaviours, each innocuous considered alone, that contribute to Freddy's success.

### 3. Film as Thesis

The above analysis, while valuable, has limitations. The functions of film which Champoux identifies are restricted mainly to the entertaining and memorable illustration of concepts, theories, ideas and frameworks. In his discussion of film characteristics, Champoux (1999) explains the use of, for example, close-ups and long shots, editing, collage, sound and special effects. These issues are more central to the technical understanding of film imagery and impact (Monaco, 2000)

than to reading its content in terms of argument or thesis. Champoux (1999, p.207) also notes that film provides a 'greater feeling of reality', a comment which reflects a his own view of the nature of both social and organizational 'reality', based on the presumption that there is a social or organizational reality waiting for film to capture. Many academics would challenge this view. For example, postmodern commentators (Foreman and Thatchenkery, 1996; Hobbs, 1998; Czarniawska, 1999) argue that narrative fictions (novels and films) can be equated with the work of organizational researchers, as they both generate outputs which seek to pose questions about the social and organizational world, focus on the complexity of experience, test ideas, carry knowledge, and generalize findings. The substance and imagery of film thus represent one communication modality through which our apprehension of 'reality', and of multiple realities, is constructed and achieved. This perspective recognizes film as thesis as a source of data, equivalent to the fieldwork-based case study report. Film does not *reflect* 'reality'; film is *real* (or in some treatments, hypereal (Appignanesi and Garratt, 1995)).

The main limitation of Champoux's analysis is that it stops short of exploring the full pedagogical potential of film. Film is capable of more than 'showing' things, or 'reinforcing a message'. Film creates fresh substance, challenges, dilemmas, provocations, disputes, and theories of its own. A film as thesis perspective has one further overarching feature. 'Reading' a film depends in part on the narrative substance and plot, but also relies significantly on the experiences, perceptions and interpretative frameworks of the viewer. One viewer may 'read' more than one thesis in a movie, and different readers may identify different theses in the same film. Usually when 'reading' the work of a conventional academic author, what counts is the one 'correct' interpretation of the author's intent. Readings of fictional narratives are typically more open, contingent, and unstable.

Building on the illustrative uses of film, therefore, three further applications of the medium can be identified. First, film can be used to introduce controversial themes, positions, and arguments not found in most organizational behaviour texts. Second, as film presents extended narrative with multiple actors, it can provide a platform for analysing the integration of topics normally taught discretely. Third, film can open up analysis of the complex contextualized relationships between theory and practice.

## 8. Exploring the Controversial

One aspect of the further potential of film is suggested in Burrell's (1998, p.52) view of what organization theory neglects: 'there is little mention of sex, yet organizations are redolent with it; little mention of violence, yet organizations are stinking with it; little mention of pain, yet organizations rely upon it; little

mention of the will to power, yet organizations would not exist without it'. Film offers a platform for the analysis of significant topics that are outside the 'safe' contents of conventional texts. *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993) portrays the management discrimination inflicted on a law firm employee with HIV/AIDS, who also refuses to conform to the conventional stereotype of the gay male. The potential theses of this movie concern the inadequacy of gay male stereotypes, and the entitlement of gay males to equality of treatment at work. *Disclosure* (Barry Levinson, 1994) explores the themes of sexual harassment and female rape of a male management colleague. One thesis of this movie is that a powerful woman is just as likely to manipulate, dominate and harass a member of the opposite sex as a powerful man. The 'motivational' speech which Alex Baldwin delivers to his real estate sales team at the beginning of *Glengarry Glen Ross* (James Foley, 1992), using language which some viewers will find offensive, invites discussion of theses concerning the motivating power of threat, and of the relationship between career success and the stereotype of the aggressive salesman. Two films by Shekhar Kapur, *Bandit Queen* (1994) and *Elizabeth* (1998) advance the thesis that leaders have to be uncompromisingly ruthless in order to maintain their positions of power and to achieve their goals. This thesis is rendered more controversial in these movies as the leaders in question are not fictional characters, and both are female.

## 9. Exploring Topic Integration

Topics such as, for example, management decision making, interpersonal influence, group dynamics, and organization politics, are usually presented discretely in organizational behaviour texts, encouraging a similarly fragmented and topic-based approach to course delivery. Film can provide a platform for illustrating the integration of such discrete themes in practice. The film *Thirteen Days* (Roger Donaldson, 2001) portrays the decisions taken by John F. Kennedy and his advisers during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The film explores various dimensions of the decision making process, including interpersonal influence, group dynamics, organization politics, and the role of advisers. The unfolding action also demonstrates the impact of contextual, emotional, and temporal factors. Most theories of interpersonal influence (Kipnis et al. 1984; Cialdini, 2001) are dyadic and decontextualized. *Thirteen Days* locates influence attempts within an emotionally charged, fast moving, and intricate power play, with a number of stakeholders whose negotiations, bargaining and behind-the-scenes manoeuvres contribute to outcomes; strategic decisions are not, on this account, based on 'evidence'. As indicated, conventional texts address these themes discretely, and the role and interactions of contextual, temporal and emotional factors are rarely explored. *Thirteen Days* demonstrates how, in theory

and practice, these themes are interwoven and mutually influential in shaping decision outcomes.

## 10. Exploring Contextualization

Context or environment in organizational behaviour texts is typically treated as a distinct and significant topic, with implications for degrees of rigidity or bureaucracy in organization structures (Burns and Stalker, 1961; Kanter, 1983; Ansoff, 1997). However, context has other dimensions which impact aspects of organizational behaviour. *Thirteen Days* demonstrates the effects on strategic management decision making of time pressures, aggressive competition, external media intrusion, incomplete information, competing internal stakeholder groups, backstage manipulation of key players, heightened emotional tension, and the probable known consequences of both inaction and inappropriate action. Such contextual issues are rarely mentioned in models and theories of the management decision-making process. The central theme of *Twelve Angry Men* (Sidney Lumet, 1957) concerns the use of a range of influencing techniques to reverse a jury verdict in the face of initially overwhelming opposition. However, the effect of context on the influencing process is highly significant, including the cramped physical location, the fixed seating layout, the changing weather outside, other external events placing differential time expectations on the individuals involved, and the past experiences which members of Henry Fonda's jury have brought to their current deliberations.

In *Contact* (Robert Zemeckis, 1997), the project leader Ellie Arroway (played by Jodie Foster), is repeatedly pushed into a subordinate organizational position, despite the success of her project, her leadership role, her technical expertise, her superior knowledge, and her prior access to vital information. She has limited understanding of the wider organizational structures, relationships, alliances, and political manoeuvring in which her project is embedded, and is thus unable effectively to remain in control of her work. Considered in isolation, Ellie as project leader appears to possess an unassailable power position. Her lack of contextual understanding, her honesty, and her inability to manage that context mean that she is an easy target for another senior figure who 'steals' her success and the accompanying acclaim, despite having previously criticized her work and cancelled her funding.

The seven ways of using film as illustration, and the three ways of using film as thesis, are summarized in table 2 below, which suggests a typical example for each application. We have treated these two broad types of film use as distinct for the purposes of explanation. However, the same film can be used in different ways. For example, the five-minute 'dinner on the train' sequence in *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* can be used to demonstrate relevance (influencing tactics), motivate

the boring (through humour), reveal the hidden (the subtle combination of verbal and non-verbal behaviour), explore the controversial (the ease with which interpersonal manipulation is accomplished), and explore contextualization (the significance of time, place, victim selection, seating arrangement, gender relations).

In addition, the three modes of using film as thesis, to explore controversy, integration, and contextualization, can similarly occur in the same movie. For example, *Elizabeth* can be viewed as a corporate ‘turnaround’ scenario, facing a newly appointed and inexperienced chief executive, set in the context of an organization in decline, facing multiple competitive threats, while riven with fundamental internal disagreements and conflicts with regard to appropriate strategic responses. *Elizabeth* also offers the controversial thesis that a (female) leader must be ruthless, and reveals the interdependence of leadership style and behaviour, personal learning, impression management techniques, top team dynamics, senior management decision making, and organization political tactics.

Table 2: Film as illustration, and film as thesis

application	example
<b>film as illustration:</b>	
demonstrating relevance	individual differences in work motivation are illustrated in <i>Bringing Out The Dead</i>
motivating the boring	characteristics of bureaucracy are illustrated in <i>Crimson Tide</i>
concretizing the abstract	individual power bases are illustrated in <i>Aliens</i>
changing the mode	prompting critical thinking about capitalist greed with <i>Wall Street</i>
reframing the perspective	viewing events first from a motivation perspective then from an influencing perspective in <i>The Magnificent Seven</i>
comprehending complexity	illustrating links between job satisfaction, work motivation, and social and family life in <i>American Beauty</i>
revealing the hidden	illustrating organizational <i>misbehaviour</i> and illicit employee-customer relationships in <i>One Hour Photo</i>
<b>film as thesis:</b>	
exploring the controversial	the thesis that (female) leaders must be ruthless in <i>Elizabeth</i>
exploring topic integration	the thesis that management decisions are a product of interpersonal influence, group dynamics, organization politics, the role of advisers, and contextual, emotional, and temporal factors, as well as information, in <i>Thirteen Days</i>
exploring contextualization	the thesis that project managers require a blend of technical and organization political knowledge and skill, along with the ability deliberately to deceive others in <i>Contact</i>

#### 4. Choices in Using Film

In addition to pedagogical intent, instructors must also make a range of logistical choices concerning the use of film. Accounts of film use suggest that five main choices are significant, concerning learning outcomes, briefing, duration, viewing, and location. These choices are summarized in table 3:

Table 3: Logistical choices in using film

Choice	Options		
1. location	class	voluntary	home viewing
2. duration	clip	section	whole film
3. viewing	interrupted	sequential	continuous
4. briefing	none	limited	extensive
5. outcomes	recognition	understanding	debate

*Location* will usually be in a scheduled *class*. It may also be during a specially arranged *voluntary* session. In both cases, all students watch the same film at the same time. A third option is *home viewing*, where students watch in their own time alone or with friends. The relative merits of these options depend on learning objectives, logistics, copyright constraints, and available facilities.

*Duration* concerns how much of a film is used; clip, section, or whole film. The ‘motivational’ speech in *Glengarry Glen Ross* lasts about ten minutes. There are three sections in *Contact*, each lasting 15 minutes, where political skill and naivety, respectively, are on display. A comprehensive analysis of leadership development, behaviour and style, power politics, gender and contextual issues in *Elizabeth* requires viewing the whole movie, which lasts about two hours, although viewing can be interrupted for discussion at three or four ‘turning points’ in the plot, thus generating an intense session of three to four hours.

*Viewing* can be paused for discussion (*interrupted*); or jumps can be made between sequences (*sequential*); or the whole film can be shown (*continuous*); or some combination of approaches may be appropriate. Choice depends on learning objectives, logistics, and plot structure. Where discontinuous clips or sections are to be shown sequentially, DVD, which allows direct track access, is more effective than video.

*Briefing* concerns the way in which instructors ‘prime’ the audience. If film is used primarily for entertainment, as a change of medium during a lengthy session, there may be no briefing beyond ‘watch this’. Where film is used for illustrative purposes, briefing may be limited to identifying examples of the theory or

concepts under consideration. More extensive briefing is required where viewers are asked to consider the thesis or theses supported by a film.

*Outcomes* concern the instructor's learning objectives and expectations. First, this may concern *recognition* (of influencing tactics, of a mode of behavioural conditioning, of a leadership style, of political skill, of individual differences in motivational profile). A second outcome is improved *understanding* (of a concept, framework, or theoretical perspective) informed and illustrated by characters, behaviours, contexts and events in the film (perceptual selectivity, stages of group formation, features and strengths of bureaucracy, the problems with a scientific management approach to job design). A third outcome is *debate* (of a controversy or dilemma, such as the appropriateness of an action or a decision, ethical behaviour, solutions to problems, the veracity of the film treatment). Choice depends on a mix of factors; topic, learning objectives, characteristics of the student group, film availability, and the ingenuity of the instructor.

It is evident from this discussion that 'showing a movie' presents the instructor with a range of options, particularly with regard to facilities, student briefing and learning objectives. These choices influence audience response, and the value of the learning experience.

## 5. Methods for Using Film

Considering the main choices for the instructor, concerning learning outcomes and student briefing, this categorization suggests that film can be used in an extraordinary wide range of different ways in management teaching. Champoux (1999, p.211) suggests that: 'You can use film scenes before or after discussing theories and concepts. You also can repeat scenes for more emphasis'. The following methods seek to elaborate a wider range of film uses.

### *Tell and show*

The learning objective is to illustrate a concept, and the outcome is recognition, although debate can also be generated. This is achieved by first explaining the concept, or theory, as Champoux suggests, then asking students to identify examples of this idea from a film clip or section, typically shown without interruption. The desired outcome is accurate recognition. For example, sensitivity training (also known as T-group training and the encounter group), the classic organization development technique for enhancing understanding of feelings and emotions, and for reducing interpersonal conflict, is illustrated in the

opening sequence of *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* (Paul Mazursky, 1969). Sensitivity training is a difficult notion to describe, but the representation here is typical, according to viewers who have experienced such settings. If students complain that this movie is dated (an accurate observation reinforced by hair and dress styles), it is helpful to note that the technique of sensitivity training remains in use, and that it has recently been ‘repackaged’ by Goleman (1995; 1998) as ‘emotional intelligence’; an idea, concept or method is not ‘out of date’ merely because it is half a century old. If students observe that this movie reflects American behavioural norms and values, it is helpful to conduct a debate concerning the cross-cultural transferability of organizational theories and techniques, including sensitivity training.

### *Show and ask*

The learning objective is to identify contrasting perspectives, achieved through introduction to a broad topic, or topics, followed by an appropriate clip or section viewed continuously. The outcomes are recognition and debate. The briefing can be limited, such as, ‘what did you see here?’. A good example (mentioned earlier) is Gordon Gekko’s ‘greed is good’ speech in *Wall Street*. This clip raises controversial issues concerning personal motives, the exploitation of relationships, individual and corporate ethics, and the nature of capitalism.

### *Show and find*

The learning objective concerns the ability to identify concrete examples of an abstract concept. The instructor introduces the concept of interest, then shows the clip or section, asking students to identify examples. For example, having introduced the concept of organizational socialization, show the section from the beginning of either *The Firm* (Sydney Pollack, 1993) or *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987) and ask students to identify examples of socialization techniques. The primary outcome is recognition. However, these films can trigger debate concerning the appropriate use of socialization methods.

### *Tell and show in series*

The learning objective is to demonstrate examples of a theory or concept, by introducing the relevant idea before asking students to identify it in several consecutive clips. Understanding can be checked following each clip. The desired outcomes are recognition and understanding. Respondent or Pavlovian conditioning can be illustrated using three clips in sequence from *The Truman*

*Show* (Peter Weir, 1998). First, where Truman's father (Truman is played by Jim Carrey) falls from the boat and drowns. Second, where Truman has difficulty walking along the jetty from the ticket office to the ferry. Third, where he shuts his eyes and pushes down the automobile's accelerator pedal while his TV wife steers their car over the bridge.

### *Show and analyse in series*

The learning objective is to demonstrate the practical application of a theoretical perspective. The instructor first introduces the perspective, which will form the viewing framework for each clip or section. The film is then shown with predetermined interruptions, where the chosen perspective is used to analyse what has just been viewed. The primary outcome is understanding, and this can be extended to debate concerning the appropriateness or effectiveness of the application of the theory under analysis. The recruitment section, in the first half of *The Magnificent Seven*, presents an opportunity either to identify the psychological need or needs which motivate each gunslinger to join up (based on Maslow, 1943), and the various influencing strategies used to persuade them (Kipnis et al., 1984).

### *Film-based case study*

The learning objective is to demonstrate the practical application of theoretical perspectives, using film as case study. Students are given a limited number of questions, but answers can draw from a range of relevant course content. The whole film is shown, but is interrupted at predetermined points, for analysis (individual, syndicate or plenary) of the section that has just been viewed. *Twelve Angry Men* (Sydney Lumet, 1957) can be used as a case study in behaviour change or influencing methods, where pre-briefing concerns a search for explanations of why each of the jurors change their minds. Explanations can be sought at individual, interpersonal, group and contextual levels of analysis. One central thesis of this movie is that decisions are not based on 'evidence' alone.

*Twelve O'Clock High* (1949, director Henry King) is a Second World War movie, based on real people and events, using actual combat footage. Based in England, the American 8th Air Force, 918 Bomber Group fly daylight bombing raids over Germany in the early stages of the war. Their Commanding Officer, Colonel Keith Davenport (Gary Merrill) is a 'friend to the men' and well liked, but ineffective. Casualties are high, and morale is low. General Frank Savage (Gregory Peck) takes command to restore morale and improve fighting performance. This is an excellent case study of leadership traits, choice of leadership style, the impact of contextual factors, and the role of 'followers' in

supporting leaders. The theses that can be read in this movie concern the pressures and stress of the leadership role, and the significant part played by subordinates in helping a leader to maintain position and achieve objectives.

### *View and report*

The learning outcome is to generate recognition, understanding and debate in relation to a given perspective, application, or behavioural display. Students are asked to view all or part of a film outside class time, with a pre-briefing and interpretation of what they will see. For example, moving to television, students may be asked to view an episode from one of the popular drama series about hospital life. These series are rich in illustrations of stereotypes; overworked staff, dispassionate doctors, promiscuous nurses, overbearing nursing managers, 'difficult' patients. They also illustrate aspects of work design, job stressors, role conflict, problems of 'office romance', and conflict between units and hierarchical levels.

### *Film course*

It is possible to design a whole course (depending on content and objectives) entirely around a small number of films. Content, including lectures, guest speakers, texts and journal articles, and tutorial topics, are selected in such a way that film viewing acts as both a reinforcing and an integrating device. Roth (2001) describes an approach structured around three modules which used the films *Other People's Money* (Norman Jewison, 1991), *The Efficiency Expert* (Mark Joffe, 1991), and *Gung Ho* (Ron Howard, 1986). We have run successfully a leadership module based on *Elizabeth*, *Twelve O'Clock High*, and *Contact*.

## **6. Opportunities, Problems and Solutions**

Successful film use depends on the characteristics of the student group, on the ability of the instructor to identify and exploit film opportunities, and to recognize and address problems. While film has many positive strengths, problems can be encountered.

### *Problem: preferred learning styles*

Paradoxically, Giola and Brass (1985) argue that students' exposure to television and movies has led them to favour 'observational learning', which conflicts with

conventional classroom experience. Students are now accustomed to visual imagery to aid interpretation and understanding. Giola and Brass cite Bandura's (1977) concept of 'learning by watching'. Comer (2001) notes that her undergraduates prefer to watch a film rather than read a book. Liedtka (2001) finds that students who are taught using video cases are comfortable with the medium, and find movies fun. Evidence suggests that as film can be arousing and motivating, students will become less appreciative of lecture-oriented styles (Rubenstein, 1983).

Does 'lots of fun' equate with 'lots of learning'? Does the recreational viewing of film and television prepare students to learn from the same movies in an educational context? The underlying assumption is that recreational familiarity with the medium leads to tacit understanding, which in turn implies that no additional training or special briefing in the interpretation of film is required (Hobbs, 1998). Monaco (2000) argues that our consumption of film and other visual imagery is typically unquestioning, but that film as a medium of communication is complex and operates on a number of related levels, which are more readily comprehended through prior instruction. The recreational viewing of film may thus be counterproductive for learning purposes, if it encourages the passive and unchallenging receipt of what appears on the screen. Roth (2001) expressed surprise at how many of his students lacked basic critical, interpretative and analytical skills. The implication is not that films should be avoided, but that students may require assistance to gain the most value.

*Solutions:* We use a combination of short, but challenging and focused task briefings; frequent viewing interruptions for personal reflection followed by syndicate sharing to expose contrasting perceptions, flipchart sheets each headed with one of the task questions and taped to the wall, and asked nominated pen-holders to record syndicate thinking.

#### *Problem: attention deficit*

Smith (1991) observes that a 'fatigue factor' appears when the image on the screen remains constant for about ten seconds. Bunch (1986) notes that viewers prefer 'near-constant' motion. Audiences in Britain, Australia and America are conditioned by television advertising to watch intensively for brief periods of ten to fifteen minutes (Taylor, 1988). Professional video production companies suggest an attention span of 15 minutes, and 10 minutes is probably the longest viewing time, without some sort of interrupting activity.

*Solutions:* We provide students with a pre-briefing in visual and media literacy, including film interpretation skills based on, for example, Hassard and Holliday (1998), Champoux (1999) and Monaco (2000), designed to encourage proactive reading. Written task briefings with answer blanks require students to 'self interrupt' viewing to record thoughts, ideas and answers. Plan viewing

interruptions around critical incidents in the action, and turning points in the plot. For example, we have used the two-hour movie *Elizabeth*, with a post-experience management group, with detailed pre-briefing, four headed flipchart sheets on the walls, and five interruptions, generating a productive four-hour session, without attention deficit displays.

### *Problem: focus*

Recreational movie watching operates at a more general level of attention than is required for educational viewing. Typically we passively *look at* a movie, focusing on entertaining action and dialogue. For educational purposes, we need critically to *look for* examples of theories, concepts and applications, in the visual imagery, and also through dialogue and sound track.

*Solutions:* Roth (2001) argues that students need an orientation on how to watch movies, how to follow action and plot, and how to draw inferences about characters and their interests from small behavioural cues. Liedtka (2001) similarly suggests that students need to be taught how to 'see' characters and events on film. Her solution is to slow the process down. After a section has been played, ask students to interpret the meaning and intention of the action, and ask what assumptions underlie the characters' positions. If task questions are on headed flipcharts on the walls, invite students to walk over and accumulate points as they arise, rather than waiting for a viewing interruption.

### *Problem: listening deficit*

Visual imagery can take precedence, leading to a potential lack of focus on dialogue. Active listening involves selection, integration, evaluation and interpretation (Brownell, 1994).

*Solutions:* Roth (2001) recommends instruction and practice in listening and summarizing. Before showing a film, Liedtka (2001) suggests asking students to identify what they will be listening to and looking for, and relating responses to learning objectives. Once the film is interrupted, but prior to discussion, she recommends asking students what they heard and saw. Another simple tactic is to play a critical clip with the sound off to focus on, for example, non-verbal behaviour, then play the same clip with sound, but with the picture covered, to focus on dialogue, before playing the clip normally.

### *Problem: emotional overload*

As noted earlier, instructors use film because it can affect an audience emotionally. This can generate high involvement, and have enduring impact. Serey (1992) describes *Dead Poets Society* as an intense experience, which

moves some students to tears. However, excess emotional content can lead students to revert to recreational viewing. The ‘motivational’ speech at the beginning of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, mentioned earlier, contains offensive language. Some audiences find this humorous and entertaining, while others find it repellent and insulting. Either emotional response, if extreme, could shift the viewing focus onto the language, and away from other learning objectives.

*Solutions:* It is essential to anticipate audience reactions when selecting films. Reactions may not always be predictable, and may have to be explored through experience. The film *Crimson Tide*, used to illustrate bureaucracy, contains a section in the plot, in which the crew are shown preparing for what may be a real nuclear missile launch. However, the intensity of the accompanying music immobilized our students who were unable to focus on the organizational features portrayed. Consequently, we replaced this section with a practice drill sequence of the same event, portrayed earlier in the same film, which did not have this intensive background music, thus permitting the required level of detachment.

#### *Problem: taking notes*

Taking notes while watching a movie is not a ‘natural’ behaviour or skill, and most students will have no prior experience of this. Movies in cinemas are viewed in the dark. In the classroom, the impact of a movie can be enhanced by total or partial blackout, even though this may not be technically necessary. Blackout, however, precludes note taking. In home viewing mode, it is more possible to take notes, and to stop, rewind and review.

*Solutions:* The instructor’s brief can incorporate answer blanks where appropriate. If lighting cannot readily be adjusted, then more frequent viewing interruptions may be necessary to allow notes to be taken and ‘collective memory’ to be constructed. Flipchart sheets can be taped to a wall at the other end of the room where lighting is good. Note taking in dim lighting improves with practice.

## **7. Beyond Home Entertainment**

There are compelling arguments against the use of film as an educational medium. Hobbs (1998) reminds us that films sensationalize, glamourize and potentially trivialize in order to shock and amuse. A basic understanding of film requires no prior training. Watching film is effortless compared with reading, speaking, writing and discussing. Time spent with film can reduce student exposure to printed media which, through making demands on the ability to manipulate language, contribute to the development of analytical and critical reasoning skills.

To accept these arguments is to overlook the observation that film is also a powerful communication channel through which ideas about work and organizations are not merely represented, but are constructed and reinforced (Hassard and Holliday, 1998). As we have sought to establish, in addition to the sensation, the glamour, and the entertainment, films can present complex, multi-faceted narratives which can enrich understanding of both theoretical constructs and the practical application of organizational behaviour ideas. With some groups, instructors may be content with a teaching medium that serves only to stimulate student interest in aspects of the subject matter. With other groups, the ability to illustrate complex and abstract arguments in a clear and memorable manner can be of significant value.

The concept of film as thesis suggests that the medium can not only illustrate and stimulate, but can also be used to introduce controversial topics not explored in mainstream texts, to demonstrate the integration of organizational behaviour topics usually taught discretely, and to explore contextualized interdependencies between topics, concepts, theory and practice. Accomplishment of these separate aims may on occasion be combined in one film, as may the range of other content objectives identified earlier. Instructors who reject the use of film to complement conventional teaching methods thus reject a range of innovative and powerful opportunities to illustrate ideas, develop understanding, trigger debates and encourage critical perspectives, while simultaneously developing a critical approach to a world saturated in otherwise taken-for-granted visual imagery.

Note:

Appendix A contains a list of the movies mentioned in the article, and the organizational behaviour and management topics to which they relate. Copyright restrictions apply to the use of films and television programmes. In Britain, for example, there are two schemes, the Educational Recording Agency and the Open University Schemes, which follow the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988. Other countries have equivalent legislation. Licences granted under these schemes allow institutions to use recorded programmes, and commercially available feature films, for educational purposes. However, before using such material in your own teaching, please check your national and local regulations, as these differ, and copyright breaches incur expensive fines.

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## Appendix A

Movie	Director and year	Topic addressed
<i>Aliens</i>	James Cameron, 1986	Power bases
<i>American Beauty</i>	Sam Mendes, 1999	Job satisfaction and motivation
<i>Bananas</i>	Woody Allen, 1971	Frames of reference
<i>Bandit Queen</i>	Shekhar Kapur, 1994	Leadership
<i>Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice</i>	Paul Mazursky, 1969	Organization development – sensitivity training
<i>Born on the Fourth of July</i>	Oliver Stone, 1989	Frames of reference
<i>The Breakfast Club</i>	John Hughes, 1984	Stages of group formation
<i>Bringing Out the Dead</i>	Martin Scorsese, 1999	Motivation
<i>Contact</i>	Robert Zemeckis, 1997	Organizational politics
<i>A Clockwork Orange</i>	Stanley Kubrick, 1971	Operant conditioning and reinforcement
<i>Crimson Tide</i>	Tony Scott, 1995	Bureaucracy
<i>eXistenZ</i>	David Cronenberg, 1999	Nature of reality
<i>Dead Poets Society</i>	Peter Weir, 1989	Perception / attitudes
<i>Dirty Rotten Scoundrels</i>	Frank Oz, 1988	Influencing an individual
<i>Disclosure</i>	Barry Levinson, 1994	Sexual harassment
<i>The Efficiency Expert</i>	Mark Mark Joffe, 1991	Work organization
<i>The Firm</i>	Sydney Pollack, 1993	Organizational socialization
<i>Elizabeth</i>	Shekhar Kapur, 1998	Leadership
<i>Full Metal Jacket</i>	Stanley Kubrick, 1987	Organizational socialization
<i>Glengarry Glen Ross</i>	James Foley, 1992	Personality / power / motivation
<i>Gung Ho</i>	Ron Howard, 1986	National cultures / stereotyping
<i>Karate Kid</i>	John G. Avidsen, 1964	Frames of reference
<i>The Magnificent Seven</i>	John Sturges, 1960	Individual work needs
<i>The Matrix</i>	Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999	Perception
<i>One Hour Photo</i>	Mark Romanek, 2002	Organizational misbehaviour
<i>Other People's Money</i>	Norman Jewison, 1991	Organizational strategy
<i>Philadelphia</i>	Jonathan Demme, 1993	Discrimination at work
<i>Rising Sun</i>	Philip Kaufman, 1993	Cross-cultural communication
<i>Rude Awakening</i>	David Greenwalt and Aaron Russo, 1989	Frames of reference
<i>The Sixth Sense</i>	M. Night Shyamalan, 1999	Perception
<i>Thirteen Days</i>	Roger Donaldson, 2001	Decision making
<i>The Truman Show</i>	Peter Weir, 1998	Respondent (Pavlovian) conditioning
<i>Twelve O'clock High</i>	Henry King, 1948	Leadership traits and styles
<i>Twelve Angry Men</i>	Sidney Lumet, 1957	Influencing a group
<i>Wall Street</i>	Oliver Stone, 1987	Organization culture
<i>Working Girl</i>	Mike Nichols, 1988	Career management