

Teaching Leadership Lessons through the Camera Lens in a Global Information Context

Rajesh Singh^a and Gunilla Widén^b

^aSt. John's University, USA

^bÅbo Akademi University, Finland

singhr1@stjohns.edu, gwiden@abo.fi

ABSTRACT

Movies appeal to people globally and can be used as a very valuable intellectual exercise in understanding the diverse workplace settings, stimulating curiosity towards other cultures, and learning the nuances of leading and managing in a global information context. This study demonstrates how a learning experience involving movies can be utilized in complementing existing pedagogical approaches for imparting leadership lessons. The findings from sixty LIS students' reflections reveal that a majority of students' (53 out of 60) perspectives about leadership either "changed" or "reinforced" their existing beliefs by studying leadership concepts portrayed in movies. Overall, the findings revealed students' critical thinking and take-away lessons about leadership regardless of their response about leadership perspectives (changed, reinforced, or unchanged). This study indicates that by utilizing media in leadership education through carefully crafted pedagogy, LIS instructors can provide students with more realistic examples of positive and negative leadership in a global context.

TOPICS

administration; pedagogy; online learning; students

INTRODCUTION

Leadership is typically taught as a part of the required management courses in LIS curriculum (Hicks & Given, 2013; Philips, 2012). While there are multiple approaches for teaching leadership in a face-to-face, blended, and online classroom, this study demonstrates how a learning experience involving movies can be utilized in complementing existing pedagogical approaches for imparting leadership lessons in a global information context. Movies appeal to people globally and can be used as a very valuable intellectual exercise in understanding the diverse workplace settings, stimulating curiosity towards other cultures, and learning the nuances of leading and managing in a global information context (Cardon, 2010).

The idea of using movies in leadership education is making inroads, as it conveys the concepts of leadership within a world where knowledge is visually constructed (Klenke, 2008). Although the topic of leadership has been a component of LIS curriculum, there is no evidence to suggest there is a wide use of curriculum involving movies to help students understand leadership concepts when it comes to imparting leadership education. This proposal presents the findings based on sixty LIS students' reflections of the leadership lessons they learned through movies in five different online courses between fall 2012 through fall 2018. It provides the logistics of using movies in assignment instructions and provides examples of students' reflections about leadership lessons learned through movies.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The use of movie narratives can be a powerful medium to illustrate leadership themes and concepts and to show practical application of leadership theory (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2004). In keeping with this approach, students were provided an opportunity to evaluate and inspect the strengths and weaknesses of various characters and their actions within a contextual framework through watching movies. This memorable and entertaining way of learning through watching movies allowed for the exploration of complex and controversial leadership themes in an engaging manner.

Students were instructed to watch a movie through their "leadership lens" from a predetermined list of movies provided by the instructor. The movies included *12 Angry Men*, *Wall Street*, *Apollo 13*, *Freedom Writers*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Erin Brockovich*, and *Norma Rae*. Students had the option to study one of the movies from the above list. They were advised that the movie they chose would likely be entertaining, but that they should concentrate on watching for the essential management and leadership concepts they had learned, and how they can be manifested in real life (or at least as real life is depicted in the movies). Some of the questions they needed to reflect upon included:

What kinds of leadership behaviors/styles/skills are exhibited in the movie? Do they recognize any of the leadership and management theories that they've studied in action? Did watching this movie change their perspective on any facets of leadership or management? Will they be able to realistically apply their learning in current and future situations?

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study findings indicate that lessons learned through leadership narrative, metaphors and archetypes as shown in movies have a positive effect on students' learning. Students identified various leadership styles including authoritative, democratic, unethical, transactional, and transformational leadership and analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of those leadership styles as portrayed through various characters in the movies they watched. The findings revealed

that a majority of students' perspectives about leadership either "changed" (35 out of 60) or "reinforced" (18 out of 60) their existing beliefs. A small number of students indicated that their perspectives about leadership remained "unchanged" (7 out of 60). Overall, the findings showed that students demonstrated critical thinking skills and take-away lessons about leadership regardless of their response about leadership perspectives (changed, reinforced, or unchanged).

This study indicates that by utilizing media in leadership education through carefully crafted pedagogy, LIS instructors can provide students with more realistic examples of positive and negative leadership in a global context. Moreover, this approach also provides students opportunity to relay their personal reflections, anecdotes, and stories, and relate them with LIS leadership. Finally, this study also demonstrates that movies can be a powerful medium to illustrate concepts of leadership and can have a motivating effect on visual learners who may otherwise be bored or disengaged by more traditional pedagogies.

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