

Teaching soft issues in strategic management with films: Arguments and suggestions

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Abstract

Strategic matters are extraordinarily complex and involve many different and interlinked processes and influences. This makes the subject difficult for students lacking managerial experience as they are unaware of the intricacy of the problems being discussed. Strategy requires not just a theoretical understanding of the subject, but also a practical feel for business and organisation. We argue that films can help the instructor because they offer elaborate multidimensional and multi-layered contexts which mirror the reality of business. Moreover, their powerful narratives aid the retention of ideas and encourage engagement with issues. To illustrate the appropriateness of films in teaching strategic management, we review the strategy curriculum, highlight some of the teaching difficulties and show how using films could help students' learning.

Keywords: films; instructional tool; learning; strategic management; teaching

Introduction

Many authors have discussed the role of films as an educational resource (e.g., Bumpus 2005; Champoux 1999; Huczynski & Buchanan 2004). Their prime use is to illustrate management concepts. Examples of these concepts are risk-taking, leadership, effective communication, recruitment and selection, and ethics (Serey, 1992; Huczynski, 1994; McCambridge, 2003; Bumpus, 2005; Champoux, 2006a; Billsberry & Edwards, 2008; Billsberry & Gilbert, 2008). Champoux (1999, p. 206) advocated the use of film scenes because they "offer a visual portrayal of abstract theories and concepts taught in organisational behaviour and management courses". This quality of films is of particular value when teaching inexperienced students or those students who have little knowledge of the workplace. This is especially relevant when teaching strategic management, not just because of the increasing trend for students to take MBA and related courses straight after their undergraduate studies, but also because strategic management ideas are most often relevant to senior management decisions, of which even fewer students have experience.

Strategic problems are largely complex, idiosyncratic, interrelated, and often have more than one correct answer. Moreover strategy making is, to a large extent, as much based on intuition and tacit knowledge as on rational decision making (White, 2004). Hence when students lack practical work knowledge they may find learning strategic management concepts difficult. It is relatively straightforward to teach students most strategic analysis frameworks or rational theories, but it is less so for concepts and ideas which are procedural, complex or context dependent. Showing film scenes can help students understand and learn these concepts. They help to illustrate concepts 'in action'; they create experience (Stadler, 1990). Moreover, these references to popular culture assist students' access and relate to the concepts being

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illustrated. As a whole, when watching films or reading the literature on using films as a teaching resource, one can find many examples relating to organisational behaviour and general management (e.g., Champoux 2000, 2003, 2004, 2005; Clemens & Wolff, 2000). There is, however, a paucity of guidance on films related to strategic management, especially in non-military and non-sporting contexts.

The purpose of the paper is to address this gap and suggest films that can be used in the strategy classroom. The paper is structured as follows: First we explain why we believe films may be a useful addition to the strategy instructor's arsenal of educational tools. We argue that films can be used to foster experiential learning and hence are invaluable when teaching a topic such as strategy, which is about both practice and analysis. We also reflect on some of the pitfalls of such a tool and address copyright issues. We then describe a typical strategy curriculum and suggest a series of films or film scenes that can facilitate the teaching of strategy concepts, and specifically those principles that are difficult to grasp when one has little organisational experience. We conclude by highlighting the motivational effects on students of using films in class.

Teaching strategic management

In 2005, Lampel wrote: "we need to rethink our approach to teaching strategy" (p. 21). This view is widely shared. Many authors (e.g., Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002) have criticised the current state of strategy teaching, which emphasises economic principles and downplays the role of practice, fails to connect analytical and behavioural skills, and ignores articulation and intuition.

There are two predominant reasons why it is not easy to teach strategy. Firstly, as strategy is about both practice and analysis, it is difficult for students lacking managerial experience to relate to and comprehend strategic management principles (Short & Ketchen, 2005). Hence, to be effective, strategy teaching methods need to somehow make real the organisational contexts that many students are not familiar with (Joshi *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, when students have senior management experience it is difficult for them to conceptualise other situations. Secondly, although the field has become increasingly complex, with multiple perspectives emerging, teaching technology has failed to keep pace. Traditional methods, such as texts and teaching case studies, are no longer thought to be adequate. For example, case studies are likely to be "insufficient in bridging the gap between these students' knowledge, experience, and their preparation for the real world" (Joshi *et al.*, 2005, p. 676). With this in mind, we suggest that teachers should consider films as an instructional tool in combination with other methods. In other words we want to add films to Forrest and Peterson's (2006) list of instructional strategies. Their list includes: labs, role-playing, multiple choice, mentoring, team assignments, group discussion, small group, journals, portfolio, drama, examinations, lecture, scavenger hunts, team tests, service learning, problem-based learning, class presentations, research papers, just-in-time learning, readings and essays.

Films as a strategic management instructional tool

Pfeffer and Fong (2002) argued that management is best taught as a craft: it is about practice, actions and learning from experience. Nadkarni (2003, p. 340) also commented: "management courses are qualitative, applied, and subjective, where student learning is comprised not only of the conceptual understanding of the domain, but also of the application of these concepts in a variety of 'real' situations". This suggests that instructors should be encouraged to use experiential learning methods to teach strategy topics, which need to be related to concrete experience to be fully meaningful. The core principle of experiential learning is that experience is the basis for observation and reflection (Kolb, 1984). Learning is described as a process "whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). Experiential approaches to learning are a way that strategy instructors can bridge the experience gap (Joshi *et al.*, 2005).

Films can be used as a substitute for experience within an experiential design (Stadler, 1990). They can provide a common reference point for students to observe a rich picture of management and thereby reflect and analyse using course ideas in a detailed and realistic fashion. Moreover, films illustrate ideas in a dynamic and evocative manner. They also highlight how non-verbal cues from eye movement, facial expression and body movement can load images with information a viewer interprets (Champoux, 2006a). Some films can also help show uncertainty, and the ambiguous and unknowable nature of organisational life. Films are a means by which one can show that there is no "one right answer" to questions and that dilemmas can be subject to multiple interpretation.

Films can also facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge. For example, films can be chosen to illustrate the role of intuition and show phenomena that texts cannot. They also show that people do not always make decisions as the result of rational analysis and, ironically, that rational decisions are not always wise or the best course of action. In other words, films may "be able to portray more effectively some aspects of organisational experience" (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004, p. 314) than conventional methods, and may be considered as an educational approach that can be applied to workplace and informal learning (Reynolds & Vince, 2004), as well as the classroom.

In addition to being a substitute for concrete experience, films are also effective as a teaching and learning device as they help students remember course ideas. Similar to storytelling, they serve as memory-trigger devices (Short & Ketchen, 2005). Film scenes combine images with sound to create an atmosphere that students may associate with a strategy concept, thereby rendering it alive; creating an experience-like effect and making the memory of it more vivid. This process is enhanced with the narrative thread of a film that binds the audience to characters and makes the retelling of the story simpler. They evoke emotion; encourage discussion; and prompt students to be more imaginative, creative and critical than when using traditional materials.

As explained above, management education emphasises theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) and strategy instructors tend to favour text and cases. In other words, they put an accent on reading and listening teaching methods. However, our argument is that although these methods are needed they are insufficient. This is because they focus on theory rather than practice, and do so in a dry and abstract setting. Their purpose is to add comprehension (Baker *et al.*, 2005): they emphasise abstract learning and focus on the abstract thinking stage of Kolb's (1984) learning cycle model, rather than encourage the development of practical thought processes.

Based on our discussion so far, films can be seen to be about apprehension (Baker *et al.*, 2005), in other words, concrete knowing, and experiential learning:

Some people grasp new information through experiencing the concrete, tangible, felt qualities of the world, relying on their senses and immersing themselves in concrete reality. Others tend to perceive, grasp, or take hold of new information through symbolic representation or abstract conceptualization - thinking about, analysing, or systematically planning, rather than using sensation as a guide. (Baker *et al.*, 2005, p. 412).

The presence of these two learning styles makes us believe that films should be used as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, traditional case studies or other methods. In order to cater for both main learning styles we need a variety of tools. This is important as "the better the fit between the learning style of students and the instructional style, the more favourable the learning outcomes resulting from the activity of learning" (Nadkarni, 2003, p. 337).

To help students with a disposition towards abstract learning, teachers need to provide readings and lectures, and allow them to explore analytical models (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), hence the need for cases, traditional lectures and texts. For those who favour experiential learning, films together with simulations, practical applications (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), role-play (Forrest & Peterson, 2006) or acting (Baruch, 2006) may be better suited. Another point that reinforces the need for this mix is the importance of recognising that learning is not about absolutely one style or another: it is about integrating the two (Baker *et al.*, 2005). Effective teaching and learning is facilitated when one uses a variety of instructional methods (Baruch, 2006).

The practicalities of using films in teaching

Hassard and Holliday (1998) highlighted that some films thrive on stereotypes. For instance, they mention that films such as *Working Girl* (Nichols, 1988) or *Disclosure* (Levinson, 1994) "draw upon rather crass stereotypes of the 'career bitch' or the choice between a career or a man (a woman can't have both)" (Hassard & Holliday, 1998, p. 8), or that films such as *The Man in the White Suit* (MacKendrick, 1951) or *The Hudsucker Proxy* (Coen, 1994) suggest that organisations are boring, mechanical and rife with corruption. If the topic of teaching is such a subject this is not a problem, but one needs to be clear of the message that one wants to convey to ensure that clichés are not engrained.

Similarly, it is important to be aware of the potential problems associated with using war films or sport films. While they may be valuable to illustrate a range of topics, and an example is given in what follows, they may have limitations when used to teach strategic management. Some of these films are a poor analogy of organisational life. For instance, the style of decision making shown is usually top-down and organisations are often portrayed as very hierarchical, with little discussion or search for consensus taking place. In many of these films (and clearly there are exceptions), strategy is represented as being about planning. People also seem to have clear job specifications, organisations have only one measure of performance, one type of leadership dominates ("the great man") and generally male characters dominate. Moreover, individual behaviour is depicted at a time of high risk, crisis or drama. Although these are occasional features of working life, they are not as pervasive as highlighted in war and sports films. In short, war and sport films are often simplistic. They do not ordinarily reflect the complexity of organisational life, giving a black and white view, and hence such films should be used with caution.

Finally, when choosing films, instructors need to make an assessment of what is acceptable and appropriate for their students. Depending on their age, gender, or religion some films or scenes may not be suitable because of their content. For instance, violence, nudity, sexual intercourse, horror, humour, satire or

language, may distract or even disturb some students (Champoux, 2006a). Otherwise the choice is wide open and the setting of the films or scenes is of little relevance because the scenes are used as metaphorical images of the concepts. They help make sense of difficult ideas, and it is the captivating, entertaining and dramatic aspects of the scenes that help the students learn. Scenes provide lasting images and stories, and act both as a concepts memory aid and comprehension tool (Champoux, 2006b).

Copyright

There are copyright issues attached to showing films or film scenes for teaching. *The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* is the principal legislation covering intellectual property rights in the UK. It gives the creators of literary, dramatic, musical, artistic works, sound recordings, broadcasts, films and typographical arrangement of published editions, rights to control the ways in which their material may be used.

Films are protected until 70 years have passed from the director's death or, if the authorship is unknown, 70 years from the date of first performance. Under the legislation it is an offence to screen the film in public. However, under fair use rules, it is possible to use excerpts provided that no more than necessary are used and the source of the material is mentioned along with the name of the author. One problem with the legislation is that judgement is used to assess what constitutes fair use and whilst most university uses of film would appear to fall into this category, many universities register (and pay fees) to various performing rights bodies to ensure they are protected.

In the UK two additional copyright laws also apply. The first of these applies to films that have been screened on a terrestrial television channel. These films are bound by the Educational Recording Agency's licence (www.era.org.uk). Once this licence has been acquired any film scenes or an entire film shown on a terrestrial channel can be recorded and shown in the classroom. The second copyright legislation controls those films which have yet to be screened on terrestrial television. Film Bank (www.filmbank.co.uk) permits copyright licences for the non-theatrical showing of films. A one-off registration fee is charged and then individual films, along with their licence, are purchased. Once this legislation has been met, the film, or scenes from it, can be shown in the classroom.

In the UK (unlike France and Germany), there are many exemptions to the law that allow films to be shown for educational purposes. Unfortunately it is not possible to discuss copyright law in all territories. By discussing the relevant issues in the UK, our hope is to illustrate the typical laws that exist on copyright matters in this location. Educators should contact their copyright department, if there is one, or their university's secretariat to ensure that use of film is approved by their employer. Any institution that offers film or media studies courses is likely to have gained the necessary clearances, so use is almost certain to be acceptable, but it is important to check.

A strategic management curriculum

To gain a better understanding of a "standard strategic management curriculum", the content of six of the seminal teaching texts in the strategy field (De Wit & Meyer, 2004; Dess *et al.*, 2005; Grant, 2005; Hitt *et al.*, 2005; Johnson *et al.*, 2005; Barney & Hesterly, 2006) were reviewed. It was found that introduction to strategic management, external environment, internal environment, competitive strategy and corporate strategy, were the topics most commonly dealt with.

The intention here is to identify scenes from feature films that strategy educators can use for strategic management, both to illustrate and enliven their teaching, and also to promote critical discussion in the classroom. The typical curriculum covers a breadth of subjects and it is beyond the scope of this paper to cover all of these topics in any meaningful depth. Accordingly, a selection of which subjects to cover was made. Review of the text books demonstrated that there are rational (generally economic-based) and interpretive/soft (generally organisational behaviour-based) subjects within the curriculum, and that these approaches receive different emphasis in the textbooks (Burke & Moore, 2003). Echoing Burke and Moore (2003), experience tells us that it is the teaching of the soft subjects that is most challenging. These ideas are less easy to exemplify and, given their innate complexity and subjectivity, lend themselves to illustration through media that relates matters in a complex, ambiguous and differently interpretable manner. Thus, the focus in the remainder of this paper is on some of the soft subjects. These include, among others, the strategy development process, tacit knowledge, organisational culture, and strategic alliances.

If students have the time and inclination outside of the classroom to watch the entire film they should be encouraged to do so. However, for practical reasons (e.g., time; control over the content showed; direct application to the topic under study), mainly short film scenes that can be used to enhance the students' learning of these issues are described. That said, well-known whole film themes are occasionally mentioned as instructors may wish to reference these in their presentations. For example, the reference to "The One Ring" in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Jackson, 2001) is meant to be used in passing during a lecture. On account of this mixed approach, and also because different territories have different versions of the same

films, the specific position of scenes are not precisely identified here. It is also suggested that the instructors give a summary of the films, and some information about the context of the scenes used, to help the students (Champoux, 2006b).

Learning strategy concepts with films

Introduction to strategic management

Many strategy curricula begin with a description of strategy development processes. This subject matter is concerned with the way that strategy is formed and, in particular, whether it is planned or emergent. This is an area of the curriculum that abounds with material. Many crime, heist or prison breakout movies provide material illustrating precise and deliberate planning having to be altered or abandoned in light of changing circumstances. An example would be *The Great Escape* (Sturges, 1963). This film demonstrates the intended versus emergent strategies very well. While students should be encouraged to watch the entire film outside the classroom, once the instructor has explained the context of the film a couple of scenes could be screened in class to illustrate the concept.

The film takes place in 1944 in a newly built prison for Allied Prisoners of War (POWs) who have repeatedly tried to escape from other camps. The prison is meant to be escape-proof, but the prisoners still decide to break-out and develop plans to do so. To show the intended strategy the instructor can screen the scene where “Big X”, the officer responsible for the mass escape, informs others of his intended strategy (i.e., to dig three tunnels leaving the camp in different directions). Then, to show that strategies are emergent, one can show how both Big X and his colleagues develop strategies to solve difficulties as they arise. A good example is the problem of how they deal with the collapse of one tunnel. Another is the response of Big X when one of the tunnels is discovered by the guards. These scenes illustrate that strategies may involve both intended and emergent elements.

A related topic that is often addressed is the planning process. It deals with the formal processes by which a firm develops its strategy, and formally organises its resources and actions in relation to its external environment in order to achieve its objectives. To show this process, *The Great Escape* (Sturges, 1963) could again be used, with attention directed towards the scene where the POWs, under the direction of Big X, work out how to get everything they need for their escape (clothing, digging tools, forged documents etc.) and how tasks are allocated (the surveyor, the mole, the forger etc.).

Although it does not tend to feature as a whole session, the subject of strategic intent is a common theme within the strategy development section of the curriculum. Strategic intent is the idea that there must be a sustained obsession for winning held at all levels of the organisation if it is to be successful. It is about stretching the organisation rather than fitting to the environment (Hamel & Prahalad, 1989). There are two motion picture genres that directly address this subject matter: military films and sporting films. Both commonly feature the importance of a group passionately believing in the strategy. However, bearing in mind the concerns expressed earlier with such films, science fiction is used as an example. *Star Trek* offers a famous example of strategic intent. At the start of the films (and the television programmes), the ambitious mission statement of the Enterprise is read aloud: it has a 5-year mission “to boldly go where no one has gone before... and to seek out new life and new civilizations”. Whilst this mission statement binds the team together, it does not overly constrain: it allows flexibility in how it is achieved. One of the interesting features of using *Star Trek*, especially from *The Next Generation* era (Roddenberry, 1987-1994), is that many of the management and leadership processes are reminiscent of large-company top team decision-making processes, which is particularly helpful for the strategic management educator.

Resource-based view of the firm

Adopting a “fit strategy” approach means studying the external environment, developing the necessary resources, formulating and then implementing a strategy. An example would be the Trojan Horse that the Greeks used to gain entry to the city of *Troy* in the eponymous film (Petersen, 2004). The diametrically opposite strategy is to adopt a “resource-based strategy” which involves identifying your internal resources, finding a relevant industry, and then formulating and implementing the strategy.

A film that illustrates the two strategies is *Chicken Run* (Lord & Park, 2000). This “claymation” film tells the story of a group of chickens trying to escape from their farm before they are turned into chicken pies by the evil farmer’s wife, Mrs. Tweedy. The scene that illustrates the first strategy is the one in which Ginger reasons thus: “We cannot all go underneath the wires... we will go over them”. The next scene to show is when the chickens train and try to learn to fly, but to no avail. They come to realise that having done the calculations, they are not built for flying. It also becomes apparent that Ginger’s initial idea to fly over the wire, in other words a strategy based on an assessment of the environment, was erroneously inspired by Rocky’s “flight” into the compound, as he was actually propelled there by cannon. This clearly shows that the strategy has failed and leads them towards a resource-based view strategy, in other words by an examination of their resources. They now understand that they do not have the capability to fly using their own wings, but realise

that they do have other resources: an aged rooster called Officer Fowler, formerly of the Royal Air Force. He can fly a plane and the chickens have the capabilities and resources to construct one. This is what they do: they build a plane and escape. This shows that identifying resources, and then formulating and implementing an appropriate strategy, can be successful.

Valuable, rare, inimitable and imperfectly substitutable resources are the main sources of competitive advantage. There are many examples to draw upon from films, but one which illustrates the concept well is the ring (“the one ring to rule them all”) in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Jackson, 2001). In the lands of Middle Earth, the Dark Lord, Sauron, forged the “One Ring of Power” so that he could rule all the peoples and creatures of Middle Earth, but the One Ring was taken from him. Eventually it finds its way to Frodo, who has to destroy it in the fires of Mount Doom. Viewing the Ring from a competitive advantage perspective, it is clear that it is valuable, as it gives control over all; it is rare, as it is the One Ring; it cannot be imitated hence the pursuit and attacks on Frodo to take it from him; and finally, it is non-substitutable as nothing else has the same power. The opening scene from *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Jackson, 2001) illustrates this point. Here, Lady Galadriel explains how the Ring was forged and why that makes it special. The scene shows how the rulers of Middle Earth - elves, dwarves and men - were all given rings which they were led to believe were powerful, when in fact they were tricked and the Ring had power and control over them all, which gave Sauron ultimate power. In the scene we also learn that during a great and rebellious war, Sauron lost the Ring and this scene also portrays the hunger that drives him to retrieve it. The scene also shows how the power lures others from Middle Earth, namely men and evil wizards, and hence why Frodo is constantly attacked during his mission to destroy the Ring.

The subject of tacit knowledge, which is similar to non-codified know-how, resides in action and is difficult to communicate. This can be illustrated with excerpts from *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (Kershner, 1980) when Luke Skywalker trains to become a Jedi knight. The scene which describes this point is Luke’s flight to the Dagobah system to be trained by the greatest Jedi Master, Master Yoda. Although Luke tries to use the force, he is largely unsuccessful in his attempts. When asked to move his X-Wing (starship) using “the force”, he gives up, telling Yoda it is impossible. His attitude changes when he sees Yoda, who is very small and old, move the entire X-Wing by the power of the force alone. His belief in his own abilities and the power of the force grows and, by copying Yoda, he learns how to use the force. Although it is not easy, Luke learns the ways of the force and after many lessons he can control its power, even though he cannot explain what it is or how it works.

Causal ambiguity is concerned with uncertainty in understanding the links between actions and results. This is a subject that lends itself to being illustrated with films: any motion picture with complex characters allows the viewer to explore the causal ambiguity of behaviour. A good example comes from *American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999). This film tells the story of Lester Burnham. He is a mild-mannered 42 year-old man who diligently writes copy for an advertising magazine. The film plots Lester’s transition into a nervous breakdown and offers many triggers: his wife’s infidelity, his wife’s complaining, his daughter’s teenage angst, lust for his daughter’s best friend, smoking “weed” at a party, memories of teenage years, freedom, frustration with corporate life, and so forth. The film does not try to explain which of these influences triggered Lester’s crisis, opting instead to portray complex behaviours with ambiguous roots. This is one case where the instructor could ask students to watch the film outside the classroom. By viewing it in its entirety, students can explore how multiple elements are interrelated and how the accumulation of factors creates the crisis. The film shows how it is impossible to isolate one reason for the crisis, in other words the link between the triggers and the outcome is causally ambiguous.

An alternative film that can be used by showing short scenes in the lecture theatre is *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* (Lucas, 1999). The best example is where Anakin Skywalker, a young slave, displays a fantastic gift for both building things and the dangerous sport of pod-racing. When asked why he is so skilled, neither he nor his mother can explain. They just know that he is much more intuitive and has better reflexes than any of the other boys around him. It is only later on that the viewer discovers why he is good (i.e. the link between the actions and the performance): he is the “chosen one” and has “the force” in him. This is revealed, for instance, in the scene where Qui-Gon Jinn dies or where Obi-Wan Kenobi is asked by Yoda to train Anakin.

Path dependency is an isolating mechanism in which the present is the result of history. It simply means that history matters and that for one organisation to arrive at the same point that another has reached requires repeating that organisation’s history. It also means that previous decisions may affect a firm’s present and future. This could be illustrated using a scene from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (Columbus, 2001). This is the story of an 11 year old boy who discovers that he is a wizard and attends Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry. Following his parents’ murder by the evil Lord Voldemort, Harry has a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead: the result of ancient magic protecting him when his mother died. The scar throbs with pain whenever Voldemort is near, thereby reminding him of Voldemort’s evil and his own need for revenge and retribution. Showing scenes where Harry is in pain from his scar shows path dependency: he cannot escape from his past and his past constraints his future. This is an example that could easily be

explained with just the aid of a still image.

Internal environment

Organisational knowledge is the collective and shared experience accumulated across the organisation through routines of sharing. In organisations, it is not just individual knowledge that matters, but also the knowledge of groups of people. People come and go, but the organisation preserves knowledge and behaviours over time. An example in which the development of organisational knowledge is a major theme is in the film *The Dirty Dozen* (Aldrich, 1967). In this film a rebellious Major is “volunteered” to train 12 convicted military criminals for a suicide mission. The instructor can show the scenes where during training, the Major uses a model of the target chateau and a rhyme to ingrain the roles of all the team. The convicts are seen repeating a rhyme which tells the men what everyone has to do and lets them know what they have to do if someone fails to complete his task. An alternative way to depict organisational knowledge is to talk about the opposite situation where it is vitally important that there is no organisational knowledge so that the organisation’s members are protected. Many crime and heist movies illustrate this. In *Reservoir Dogs* (Tarantino, 1991), for example, all the members of the robbery team have fake names and know nothing about each other in case they are caught. This phenomenon may just warrant a mention of this film rather than a showing of any scenes in class, especially as the extremely violent content in this film may be needlessly uncomfortable viewing for many students.

On the surface, the subject of organisational culture - the beliefs and assumptions that are shared in an organisation - would appear to be one of the simplest strategy concepts to illustrate: all one has to do is to show excerpts from films set in workplaces. However, many directors who set films in the workplace do so with the deliberate intention of making a statement about contemporaneous work practices. An early example of this genre is *À Nous la Liberté* (Clair, 1931), in which the degrading, repetitive factory work of the early 1930s is shown in its full dehumanizing form. This theme was repeated in *Modern Times* (Chaplin, 1936), in which the image of the worker as a “cog in the machine” is an abiding memory. Stills of these iconic images could be a useful resource for the instructor. The 1980s was another period when directors clearly had something to say about the workplace. Films such as *The Firm* (Pollack, 1993) or *Wall Street* (Stone, 1987) highlight the “greed is good” mentality of aggressive capitalism. For instance, in *The Firm*, McDeere is hired by “The Firm”, having been offered a huge financial package. We soon learn that no employee of The Firm has ever been divorced and that it encourages employees to produce offspring. It is portrayed as a “big, happy, 41 member family”, and that no one has ever quit and lived to tell the tale. *Wall Street* portrays the actions of an ambitious stockbroker, who would do anything to get to the top, and a ruthless and greedy trader. These portrayals are so powerful and iconic that Denzin (1995) claimed that *Wall Street* helped create the very working culture that it parodied. As a result, it is recommended that if educators are using films to depict organisational culture, they should use contemporaneous films that represent current themes and issues in the workplace and be aware of the issues that the director is attempting to highlight.

One aspect of organisational culture that is commonly taught is taken for granted assumptions, in other words, deeply held values and beliefs that influence behaviour. Obviously there are many examples of these in films, but one humorous exemplar that clearly captures the concept comes from *Chicken Run* (Lord & Park, 2000). There is a scene in which the farmer, Mr. Tweedy, begins to suspect that the chickens are planning to escape and so he confides in his wife. She responds: “They’re chickens, you dolt. Apart from you, they’re the most stupid creatures on this planet. They don’t plot, they don’t scheme, and they are not organised!” Here is a taken for granted assumption that blinds the holder to the reality and averts preventative action. Another humorous example comes from *North by Northwest* (Hitchcock, 1959) and the exchange between Roger Thornhill and Eve Kendall on a train:

Thornhill: “The moment I meet an attractive woman, I have to start pretending I have no desire to make love to her.”

Kendall: “What makes you think you have to conceal it?”

Thornhill: “She might find the idea objectionable.”

Kendall: “Then again, she might not”.

Methods of development

Mergers and acquisitions feature on many strategic management curricula and are easy to illustrate with case studies. However, a criticism commonly levelled at case studies is that they project a world of rationality which promotes choices free from the minutiae of organisational functioning. Films can be helpful in showing students the impact that mergers and acquisitions have on organisational actors and the communities they occupy. *Gung Ho* (Howard, 1986) shows the fictional post-merger integration of an American car factory into a global Japanese car firm. It is particularly strong on integration complexity stemming from nationality, culture, work attitudes, and corporate style differences. Illustrations of this integration complexity are peppered throughout the film. An interesting one is a dinner-time discussion between the Japanese factory manager and his wife when they confront US-Japanese integration directly. Another useful scene is when the American workers’ representative joins a management team meeting and experiences a completely different

approach to management.

A strategic alliance is one where capabilities are shared so that performance is enhanced. To be successful, it is important that there is strategic fit, capabilities fit, cultural fit and organisational fit between the parties. A range of scenes from different films could be used here. For instance, we suggest returning to scenes from *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Jackson, 2001) or *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1990). In *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, Elrond brings together the various peoples of Middle Earth to create a team to destroy the One Ring. The scene to illustrate this point is set in Rivendell, where Elrond, leader of the Elves, has summoned all the different peoples of Middle Earth together to decide who will journey to Mount Doom to destroy the Ring. Initially a series of heated arguments breaks out between the different assembled groups: elves, dwarves and men, arguing over who can be trusted with the Ring, who should destroy it, and whether it should be destroyed at all. The scene captures the underlying dislike and lack of trust between the various factions which has spanned decades. However, when Frodo, an unassuming little Hobbit who, by chance, was charged with looking after the Ring and taking it to Rivendell, volunteers to go to Mount Doom to destroy it, Elrond highlights the Hobbit's bravery and persuades the factions to put aside their differences for the sake of Middle Earth. In this way an alliance, the Fellowship, is created. In *Dances with Wolves*, we see the formation and maturing of a strategic alliance between Lt. John Dunbar and the indigenous Sioux to fight the encroaching "white man". There are a series of scenes when Dunbar first meets the Sioux that illustrate the tentative, cautious and delicate nature of strategic alliance development.

Conclusion

Strategy must surely qualify as the frustrating science. It is not only frustratingly difficult to practice: it is even more frustratingly difficult to teach and to facilitate learning. The problem with the current system is that it forces strategy into the direct and narrow approach to teaching... A deep grasp of strategy, however, resists this approach... The challenge of teaching strategy consists of creating a virtuous cycle in which articulation and intuition form an increasingly powerful combination. (Lampel, 2005, p. 20)

By arguing that films should become part of the strategy instructor's tool set, the intention was to broaden the range of learning styles that are employed in the strategic management classroom. Moreover, we believe that this technique has a lot of value when teaching people with little experience of strategic decision-making and who therefore find it a struggle to comprehend and internalise these practical ideas.

A series of film scenes that could be used to illustrate concepts that students often have difficulty grasping are described above. Many of these concepts are intangible, procedural, and as a whole, not easy to fully comprehend when one has little experience of strategy. We have argued that films can be an effective teaching and learning device and hence they are a useful addition to the strategy instructors' teaching toolbox. They help students remember course ideas and add complexity, richness, depth and reality. The ideas come alive, which increases student interaction and involvement. Moreover, using films in the strategic management classroom captures students' imagination and this helps them study ideas in greater depth. They are intrigued and excited by the method, and this can create a creative climate where learning is fun and memorable.

Finally, because films are still unconventional teaching material, and notably a break from case studies, they allow instructors to keep students' concentration levels high. Students are intrigued and tend to focus. In many respects, the use of films in management classrooms is unequalled in its ability to hold and direct attention (Champoux, 2006a). As films are unusual and fresh they help motivate students (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004). This is important as "the effect of instructional methods on instructional outcomes is partially mediated by learner motivation" (Burke & Moore, 2003, p. 39). This also means that films should not be perceived as "the entertaining sidelines of classroom gimmicks" (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004, p. 312) that some have claimed.

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