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Teaching Leadership Lessons through the Camera Lens

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Movies appeal to people globally and can be used as a very valuable intellectual exercise in understanding diverse workplace settings, stimulating curiosity toward 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 101 LIS students' reflections reveal that a majority of students' (87%) perspectives about leadership either "changed" or "reinforced" their existing beliefs after 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.

Keywords: critical thinking, innovative pedagogy, leadership teaching and training, management, movies

Leadership in information technology (IT) is a growing body of research, emphasizing transformational and flexible leadership styles, dealing with change, and integrating IT management into the management of other organizational activities (Hickman & Akdere 2018; Thite, 2000). The increasing use of technology that continuously changes also affects the library and information science (LIS) field. As a result, information professionals are facing new situations that require the development of alternative skills and competencies. In particular, these professionals are relying more heavily on leadership skills than ever before, even if they are not in management positions. Information leadership is about leading information processes, information resources, and infrastructures (Huvila, 2014), which are heavily connected to leading people, processes, and IT.

Leadership is taught as a part of the required management courses in LIS curriculum (Hicks & Given, 2013; Philips, 2014). However, cultivating leadership skills in students can prove to be difficult in both a traditional classroom setting and an online learning environment. With so many perspectives

and approaches to leadership, teaching students about leadership theories can be overwhelming and difficult to absorb; therefore, educators search for engaging and creative methods of teaching students' leadership skills to ensure that they learn and retain the information.

While there are multiple approaches to teaching leadership, 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 for some time, 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 in LIS programs. This article explores the heightened need for leadership skills in the LIS field and the use of film as a pedagogical tool. The literature review focuses on these ideas to demonstrate how LIS educators can utilize film in their courses to cultivate students' leadership skills and prepare them for new demands in their future careers. Furthermore, this article presents findings based on 101 LIS students' reflections on the leadership lessons they learned through movies in seven different online courses between fall 2012 and spring 2019. It also provides the logistics of using movies in assignment instructions and provides examples of students' reflections about leadership lessons learned through movies.

KEY POINTS:

- Movies appeal to people globally and can be used as a very valuable intellectual exercise in understanding diverse workplace settings, stimulating curiosity toward other cultures, and learning the nuances of leading and managing in a global information context.
- The camera lens approach, which is introduced in this paper, brings an experimental approach to leadership training, one in which the students learn to identify leadership skills, characteristics, and roles.
- This study demonstrates that a careful and thoughtful consideration of movies and instructional scaffolding in providing students opportunities for reviewing, exploring, analyzing, and reflecting upon various leadership concepts in theory and action helped them relay their personal reflections, anecdotes, and stories, and relate them with LIS leadership.

Review of relevant literature

Understanding leadership

Leadership focuses on how to reach organizational success. That is quite clear, but the skills and characteristics needed by leaders to reach that

success is not as straightforward. The topic of leadership has intrigued scholars for centuries. A Google search on the keyword “leadership” provides an astonishing 2.1 billion matches (Foster, 2019). However, in spite of extensive scholarly activity, the topic of leadership remains mystical and confusing. Northouse (2015, p. 2) contends that there are numerous ways to complete the sentence “Leadership is....” This simple statement highlights the underlying and perplexing challenge in defining leadership. Additionally, more confusion arises when people use the terms *leadership* and *management* interchangeably. Therefore, it is important to understand that while the terms are closely related, they are not the same (Kotter, 1990). Management is concerned with performing duties and ensuring that the organizational operations, activities, and processes are completed efficiently. This comprises making plans, staffing, budgeting, assessing performance, and elucidating jobs, as well as problem-solving when outcomes were not as planned (Kotter, 1990). Leadership, on the other hand, entails aligning employees to organizational visions. This denotes influence, guidance, mentoring, communication and buy-in, inspiration, and motivation (Bennis & Goldsmith, 2003; Kotter, 1990). Therefore, it would be reasonable to conclude that the terms *leadership* and *management* are two dissimilar but closely related sides of the same coin, which complement each other. To be effective, organizations need a balanced approach to nourish competent management and skilled leadership to ensure organizational effectiveness (Northouse, 2015).

The ongoing discussions of leadership have evolved quickly over the last century. Early popular conceptions centred on top-down styles, from the “great man” or trait approach (Bass, 1990) to the skills approach (Katz, 1955), the style approach (Blake & Mouton, 1985), the contingency approach (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987), situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988), and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). Later these morphed into more collaborative approaches, such as transformational leadership (Bass, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Burns, 1978), inclusive leadership (Helgesen, 1985), the role of followership (Kelley, 1998), level 5 leadership (Collins, 2005), and other practices that continue to evolve. While a spirited debate about leadership has replaced the traditional mystical notions of the “great man” or “heroic” leader, the leadership landscape remains cluttered with confusing leadership definitions, theories, and conceptualizations pulled from both the academic and pop-culture worlds. In keeping with this, I define leadership for the purposes of this article and the field of LIS as the art of influencing a group of people by mobilizing their efforts to accomplish library goals and objectives in an effective and efficient manner. Desired leadership skills depend on both situation and organizational context. Leaders can undertake different leadership roles and act differently as circumstances change, while certain kinds of leadership behaviors are needed in different situations (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004; Winston, 2005). As leadership becomes increasingly

complex in today's globalized information society, the next section reviews the leadership discourse in the LIS profession.

Leadership in an LIS context

The interest of leadership concepts and theories in the library literature started in the 1980s, and, as in the management literature, leadership was discussed mainly in terms of desired skills, such as training in communications and personnel relations. The same challenges are addressed in the library leadership literature as in the leadership research in general; in other words, there is a lack of clear agreement on what makes a good leader and what specific leadership characteristics and skills are needed in contemporary and future libraries (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004).

The library organization is typically going through constant change, such as organizational restructuring, rapid technological change, digitalization, new information needs and behavior of its users, and financial challenges, to mention a few. New tasks need to be balanced with already existing services. This puts special demands on management and especially leadership in library contexts (Le, 2014; Phillips, 2014; Shoaf, 2004). Leadership skills and characteristics that are related to successful change management—that is, transformational leadership—have been much emphasized in the library literature (Ammons-Stephens, Cole, Jenkins-Gibbs, Riehle, & Weare, 2009; Düren, 2012; Martin, 2016; Phillips, 2014; Riggs 2008; Shoaf, 2004). Although transformational leadership is shown to be strongly correlated to successful change, a study by Martin (2016) shows that there is some lack of transformational leadership among academic libraries, which is a challenge when libraries are in a state of constant change. The perception is that the leaders are more transformational than transactional, but they still need to improve their use of transformational components for efficient leadership of change. This has some implications for leadership training in LIS programs, where transactional leadership skills should be emphasized.

The importance of cultivating leadership skills in LIS education

LIS educators strive to prepare students for their futures in the field by equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful information professionals (Ammons-Stephens et al., 2009). Hicks and Given (2013, p. 18) discuss the need for new leaders within the quickly evolving LIS field because they presume that these individuals would have the “energy and dedication” to adapt to change. LIS educators intend to develop students' skills within the confines of their graduate program rather than force them to develop their skills with the pressures of a professional environment. Callahan, Whitener, and Sandlin (2007, p. 161) state that “one need not learn hard lessons by making the mistakes personally.” In other words, students develop important skills in graduate programs and learn from hearing the mistakes and

experiences of others, instead of being forced into situations for which they are not prepared.

Teaching leadership in LIS education

As shown in the previous section, leadership is hard to define, and defining good leadership is even more difficult. Therefore, it is challenging to design adequate programs to develop the leaders of future libraries (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004). A systematic overview of leadership training within LIS education is lacking since it is dealt with in various ways in different countries. Most leadership programs have been developed by the profession for the profession. Not many library schools offer specific library leadership programs, instead including it as part of a larger curriculum. There is not much research on how efficient the programs have been in fostering good library leaders, so evaluation of leadership programs should be developed to better know the impact of such programs (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004).

In the 2000s, a growing number of library leaders started to take leadership training in areas such as improving their communication skills, conflict resolution, supervision, stress management, creativity, innovation, and cultural competency, and the leadership education focused on future and situational leadership models and team-based leadership. Leadership programs have typically been a series of sessions where participants are expected to have a number of years of supervisory or management experience. This has given the opportunity to build the training on personal experiences, and library leadership has typically been described in terms of stories about individual leaders (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004).

An experimental and open approach is needed in which leadership experiences are communicated in order to develop a better understanding of how different leadership approaches work (Stephens & Russell, 2004). There is a need for a multifaceted approach to ensure the understanding of leadership and decision making. Internship experiences are important, as is mentoring by knowledgeable professionals and managers. Modeling of best practices and ongoing professional development and training are also considered important (Winston, 2005). Leadership skills are not just learned in the classroom, as significant leadership development takes place in the workplace too, and it is important to develop leadership skills in this context as part of lifelong professional development (Mason & Wetherbee 2004; Phillips 2014). However, the basics of library leadership are important to acquire during one's library education so that one can foster those skills further in one's working life.

The camera lens approach, which is introduced in this paper, brings an experimental approach to leadership training, one in which the students learn to identify leadership skills, characteristics, and roles. They also get to evaluate consequences of different leadership styles that would otherwise be difficult to achieve in the classroom.

Teaching leadership lessons through movies

The variety of complex leadership theories can be difficult for students to apply to real-life situations. Callahan et al. (2007, p. 147) argue that the use of “popular culture artifacts,” such as film, allows students to view leadership theories in an everyday context, which will make it easier for them to eventually apply these same theories to future situations in their workplaces. Callahan et al. explain that popular films are stories that encourage students to comprehend situations that they could encounter in their organizations, making them better prepared for realities in their future careers (p. 147). Stories allow people to better understand situations that they have never experienced and “become lenses through which people can learn about leadership” (p. 155). Huczynski and Buchanan (2004) also emphasize how the storytelling element, or narrative, of film can help students develop a more comprehensive understanding of theories through the use of viewpoint, argument, and simply seeing sequences of events unfold. After learning about leadership theories through more traditional teaching methods, students will naturally be able to see leadership theories in action through the visual medium of film.

Educators look for new ways to link leadership theories and practice in a modern world because it is often challenging for students to apply theories to real situations in their future careers (Barbour, 2006). Without gaining experience in a workplace of their future fields, students find difficulty in applying theories learned through coursework. Barbour (2006) explains that asking students to observe and analyze films can effectively help them link leadership theories to practice. In addition to emphasizing exemplary forms of leadership, films can also be used to demonstrate ineffective leadership styles to students and help them think critically about the effects of poor leadership on staff members and on their organizations as a whole (Edwards, Schedlitzki, Ward, & Wood, 2015). By seeing the effects of poor leadership through visual narratives, students can commit these flaws to memory, which might help them avoid similar mistakes in the future.

Traditional teaching methods allow the educator to control the learning process. For example, lectures allow educators to provide explanations of leadership theories. In contrast, students today are more involved in their learning processes through the encouragement of discussion with their educators (Barbour, 2006). Homan (2016, p. 450) claims that students possess different learning styles and that incorporating different approaches to teaching reaches a wider range of students, as opposed to using only one traditional approach. Using film as a pedagogical tool also helps to promote critical thinking, analysis, and discussion of the leadership concepts learned. Barbour (2006, p. 154) explains her reasoning for using film to teach leadership in graduate courses by stating that films “bring organizational theories to life,” and the element of reality in films allow for a more active learning process.

Instructional design in using film as a leadership education tool

Certain factors have an impact upon the effectiveness of film as a pedagogical tool. Callahan et al. (2007, p. 158) argue that popular-culture artifacts should be used in conjunction with careful and specific instructional designs to have the greatest impact on students. For example, choosing the right film is important when attempting to cultivate leadership skills in students. Huczynski and Buchanan (2004, p. 710) explain that although older movies can still relate to course themes and lessons, some students will relate more strongly to characters in more recent movies. Modern movies can be viewed by students as more credible. To most effectively utilize film as a teaching tool, many instructors tailor their lessons around the films used, so that students can accurately make connections between course material and the situations they view in movies.

When using film to teach leadership specifically, students can identify leaders in organizations, analyze their roles using the theories they learned throughout coursework, and discuss their thoughts with peers (Barbour, 2006). In addition to class discussions, some educators require a written reflection assignment based on the leadership-oriented film that the student choose to watch (Barbour, 2006). The written assignment encourages students to cohesively gather evidence from the film, apply leadership theories, and evaluate the role of leaders within organizations.

Expanding on film-based discussions through the incorporation of real-life experience can further develop students' understanding of leadership in the context of future workplaces. During class discussions, educators encourage students to relate their personal experiences working in organizations to the themes and situations relating to leadership in the films (Edwards et al., 2015). In a graduate LIS school setting, a substantial number of students tend to have work experiences from various fields. Class discussions allow students to share their experiences with each other and learn from leadership styles and situations they have encountered in various environments. Sharing past leadership experiences in organizations can help students to critically analyze both effective and ineffective leadership styles. Not only can movies teach students about leadership, but they also can inspire students to take on leadership roles in the future (Buchanan & Hofman, 2000).

The present study

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. The overall goal was to facilitate learning about leadership concepts and their implications in a workplace setting. This study presents the findings from 101 LIS students' reflections

on the leadership lessons they learned through movies in seven different online courses between fall 2012 and spring 2019. In particular, the study focuses on the following research questions:

- What kinds of leadership behaviors or styles are exhibited in the movie?
- Did watching the movie change students' perspective on any facets of leadership or management?
- Can a film-based learning activity promote critical thinking skills?

Methods and materials

This section outlines the methods and instructional approach utilized in order to provide a background to and context for this study in understanding the role of movies in facilitating leadership learning among LIS students.

Background and context

This study is based on the qualitative content analysis of the “leadership lens” papers of 101 LIS students in seven different online management/leadership courses from two LIS institutions. Students were primarily adult learners who were geographically located throughout the United States. A substantial number of students also held also part-time or full-time positions in various LIS organizations while they were pursuing their MLIS. This learning activity asked students to watch one of the movies from a pre-determined list provided by the instructor. The movies were *12 Angry Men* (1957), *Wall Street*, *Apollo 13*, *Freedom Writers*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Erin Brockovich*, and *Norma Rae*. See the Appendix for full details on the movies.

There were many reasons for the selection of these movies. First, they portray many leadership theories and styles (e.g., authoritative, transformational, collaborative, transactional, situational, etc.) in addition to demonstrating various workplace issues such as teamwork, abuse of power, inequality, politics, and problem solving in various workplace contexts. Second, these movies help portray a balanced gender perspective in leading and demonstrate good examples of male and female leadership. Third, they help demonstrate the importance of many “soft skills” such as communication, patience, humility, resilience, and mentoring and their role in succeeding by overcoming challenges. It is also worth mentioning that movies portraying larger-than-life figures like Gandhi or Abraham Lincoln were avoided so that students wouldn't perceive leadership as a mystical quality. Instead, the goal was to select those movies that demonstrate various workplace contexts, organizational issues, and characters that one can easily encounter in one's life.

While the “leadership lens” learning activity fulfilled many learning outcomes of the course, it focused primarily on helping students learn leadership concepts and theories in order both to discuss their own

managerial strengths and weaknesses and identify ways in which their personal managerial and leadership skills might be further developed, and to describe traditional and contemporary leadership and organizational theories and processes as applied to information organizations.

There are a plethora of scholarly activities in the area of leadership. Given the number of leadership concepts in the literature and limited time to teach them, it remains a challenging task for instructors to teach students various leadership concepts and their implications in an engaging manner. In keeping with the learning outcomes described above, and the online nature of the course offerings, the overall goal was to help students understand the role of leadership in helping organizational goals and objectives in addition to recognizing that leadership is highly contextual or situational. The other important goals were to help students develop a deeper understanding of some of the leadership theories and concepts, including authoritative, democratic, authentic, collaborative, transactional, and transformational or styles. Embedded in these goals were also expectations that students should be able to identify and learn from the various leadership traits and behaviors that they saw in the main characters of the assigned movies.

Sample

As stated above, the sample represents the “leadership lens” papers of 101 students in seven different online management/leadership courses from two LIS institutions in the United States. The students were adult learners and mostly females. Most of these students held a full-time or part-time position either in a library or some other organization. All seven online courses were taught by the same instructor at a small Midwestern university (Emporia State University in Emporia, Kansas) and a medium-size university on the east coast (St. John’s University in New York City). The findings present students’ reflections on the leadership lessons they learned through movies between fall 2012 and spring 2019.

Instructional approach

A variety of learning materials and strategies were used to impart leadership lessons throughout the course. These learning materials and strategies included assigned articles, case-study discussions, online presentations, and individual and collaborative assignments.

Step 1: Read/review leadership resources

The “leadership lens” assignment asked students to identify the strengths of the main characters portrayed in the movie that they watched. It is important to note that students were required to read the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* text by Tom Rath (2007). In addition, students were asked to complete the “StrengthsFinder 2.0 Assessment” test at the beginning of the course. This was a required assignment in the course. This test identifies the top five strengths of an individual from a management/leadership perspective. As

a result, students were aware of their individual top five strengths in addition to insights and ideas about improving their additional strengths. The “leadership lens” assignment asked students to revisit the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* text and identify the strengths of the main characters in their chosen movie from a “leadership lens.”

The course required another mandatory text, entitled *Library and Information Center Management*, by Barbara B. Moran & Claudia J. Morner (2018). For the purpose of the leadership assignment, students were asked to read relevant chapters that covered various leadership theories, styles, and conceptualizations in depth.

The rationale for using the above texts was simple. While Moran and Morner (2018) helped provide a good knowledge base in various leadership theories and conceptualizations, Rath (2007) provided a framework for students to analyze many of the “soft skills” and strengths of various characters. As a result, these two texts provided a holistic approach in leadership learning from various angles and perspectives. It is also important to remember that different editions of both the above texts were used in previous courses between fall 2012 and spring 2019. In addition, students were also required to review the instructor’s PowerPoint slides on the topic of leadership. Finally, students were required to cite relevant leadership/management literature from the required texts and other materials as appropriate.

In summary, students were advised to read and review the above course readings/materials and consult any other appropriate resources they had on the topic of leadership before they considered watching movies.

Step 2: Select/watch a movie

Students were instructed to watch a movie through their “leadership lens” from a predetermined list of movies (listed above) provided by the instructor. It was students’ responsibility to obtain and watch one of the assigned movies. A brief overview of the selected movies, the rationale for their selection, and their leadership implications and lessons for workplace settings are available in the Appendix.

Step 3: Reflect on the leadership lens discussion-guide questions

To facilitate their viewing experience and to complete the “leadership lens” assignment, students were asked to focus on the following questions:

- Does one person in particular emerge as a strong leader or manager in this movie? Are there other characters that also exhibit leadership qualities?
- What were some of the most evident leadership themes/theories (as defined/discussed in your *StrengthsFinder 2.0* and *Library and Information Center Management* texts) exhibited by the leaders you identified in this movie?

- What about the followers—how do they behave and do they change as a result of the leadership? How are they treated by the leader(s)?
- Would the leadership and management styles exhibited in this movie work in every type of situation?
- What obstacles and challenges did the leaders in this movie encounter? How did they handle these challenges? What are some alternative ways in which those obstacles and challenges could have been handled?
- Did watching this movie change your perspective on any facets of leadership or management? Will you be able to realistically apply your learning in your current and future situations?

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 advised that the movie they chose would likely be entertaining but that they should concentrate on watching for the essential leadership and management concepts they had learned, and on how they could be manifested in real life (or at least as real life is depicted in the movies). At the time, students were also reminded that simply summarizing the movie would not help them earn good grades.

Findings and analysis

A qualitative content analysis of the “leadership lens” assignment was conducted to understand the role of movies in influencing students’ leadership perspectives. Overall, the study findings indicate that lessons learned through leadership narrative, metaphors, and archetypes as shown in movies have a positive effect on students’ learning. The study findings were analyzed as outlined below.

Movies watched

Figure 1 demonstrates that *Dead Poets Society*, *12 Angry Men*, *Apollo 13*, and *Freedom Writers* turned out to be the favorites, which were watched by 28.7%, 22.7%, 19.8%, and 16.8% students, respectively. In contrast, a relatively small number of students chose to watch *Wall Street* (7.9%) and *Erin Brockovich* (4%). At the same time, it is worth noting that *Norma Rae* did not seem to pique any interest among students and was watched by none of them.

Figure 2 presents a comparative summary of the movie watched in online management/leadership courses across two LIS programs. In Institution A, 20 students participated in two online leadership courses. *Freedom Writers* (30%), *12 Angry Men* (30%), and *Dead Poets Society* (20%) turned out to be the favorites. A relatively small number of students watched *Wall Street* (10%) and *Apollo 13* (10%). In contrast, none of the students chose to watch *Norma Rae* and *Erin Brockovich*.

In Institution B, 81 students participated in five online management courses between 2016 and 2019. The most popular movies turned out to

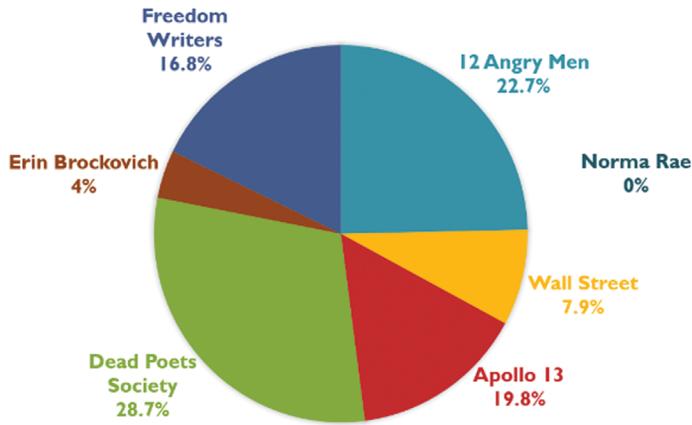


Figure 1: Movies watched
 Number of students: 101 (Institution A = 20; Institution B = 81)

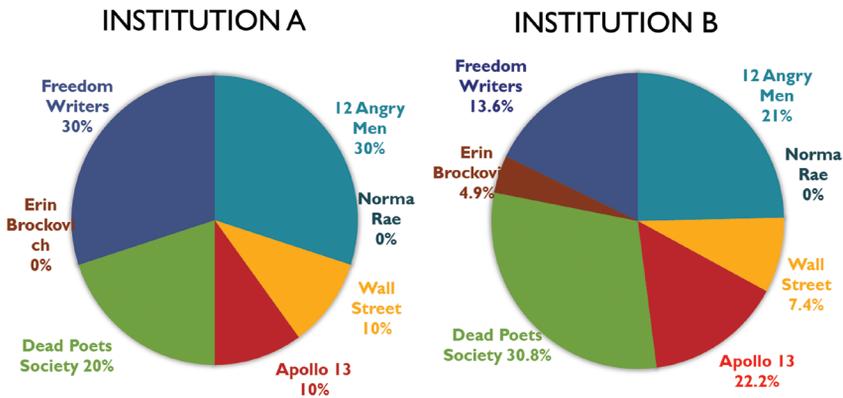


Figure 2: Movies watched (comparative summary)
 number of Students: 101 (Institution A = 20; Institution B = 81)

be *Dead Poets Society* (30.8%), *Apollo 13* (22.2%), and *12 Angry Men* (21%). A substantial number of students preferred watching *Freedom Writers* (13.6%), *Wall Street* (7.4%), and *Erin Brockovich* (4.9%) for the purpose of this assignment. None of the students watched *Norma Rae*.

Leadership Styles

Students identified various leadership styles and behaviors, including authoritative, democratic, ethical/unethical, transactional, collaborative, result-oriented, authentic, and transformational leadership, and analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of those leadership styles as portrayed through various characters in the movies they watched. Table 1 illustrates

Table 1: leadership styles identified by students

Movie	Leadership styles
<i>Dead Poets Society</i>	Authoritative, Transformational, Inspirational
<i>Wall Street</i>	Authoritative, Transactional, Ethical/Unethical
<i>Apollo 13</i>	Collaborative, Persuasive
<i>12 Angry Men</i>	Consensus Building, Collaborative, Respectful
<i>Erin Brockovich</i>	Result-oriented, Goal-oriented
<i>Freedom Writers</i>	Authoritative, Transformational, Supportive, Inspirational

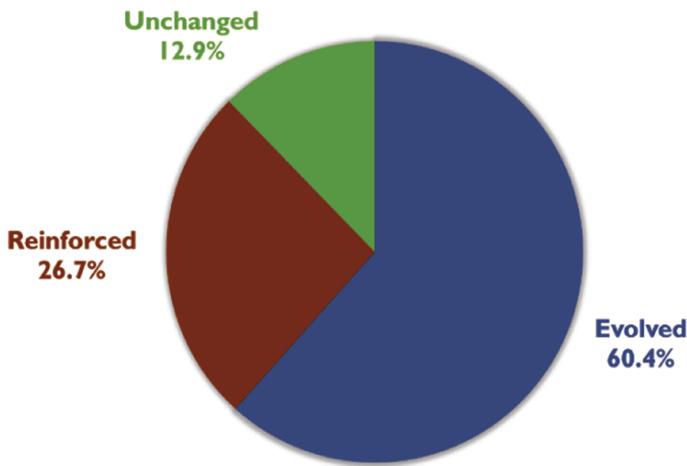


Figure 3: Students’ leadership perspectives
 Number of students: 101 (Institution A = 20; Institution B = 81)

the words and phrases used by students in identifying and labeling some of the studied leadership theories they watched in action.

Influence of movies on students’ leadership perspectives

The findings revealed that a majority of students’ perspectives about leadership either “evolved” (60.4%) or “reinforced” (26.7%) their existing beliefs (Figure 3). A small number of students indicated that their perspectives about leadership remained “unchanged” (12.9%).

Figure 4 gives a further breakdown, by institution, of how students responded to the question of whether the movie they watched helped changed their perspectives on leadership.

The findings from Institution A demonstrate that a majority of students (60.4%) feel that the movie helped “evolve” their leadership perspectives (Figure 3). A further breakdown of the findings illustrates that

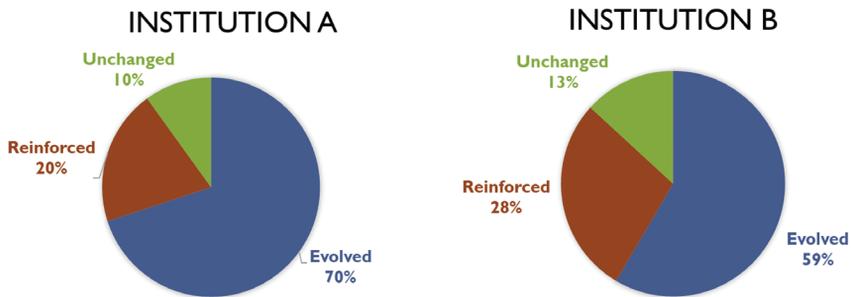


Figure 4: Students' leadership perspectives (comparative summary)
 Number of Students: 101 (Institution A = 20; Institution B = 81)

there were some differences in students' reactions regarding the influence of movies on their leadership perspective (Figure 4). While in Institution A an overwhelming majority of students (70%) felt that their leadership perspective "evolved," just over half of the students in Institution B (59%) reflected that their views on leadership "evolved" after watching one of the assigned movies (Figure 4). Some sample comments reflecting students' "evolved" leadership perspectives are given below:

12 Angry Men: "We know very little about Juror #8, but he is authentic to his core. This film elicits the desire to focus on leadership instead of simply managing. He accomplishes so much without any tools but his conviction and patience. He avoids coercive behaviors in the face of animosity and seems genuinely embody. These are very personal traits that I will strive for in my work and personal life." (**Leadership Perspective – "Evolved" – Institution A**)

Apollo 13: "Apollo 13 presents the challenges and leadership of many individuals, especially Lovell and Kranz. The film changed my perspective on the value of transformational leadership in difficult situations. Transformational leadership, without a real-life example, seemed as though it would not be conducive in a high stress high stakes situation." (**Leadership Perspectives – "Evolved" – Institution B**)

The students' "leadership lens" papers revealed similar reactions regardless of the movie the student chose to watch. Their reflections demonstrate their ability to analyze various leadership situations and behaviors, strengths and weaknesses of main characters illustrated in the movies, and leadership implications for various contexts. Furthermore, their comments also highlight their feelings of how they would like to emulate some personality traits and behavior such as listening, patience, conviction, open-mindedness, communication, and so on.

Figures 3 and 4 also highlight the fact that a substantial number of students (26.7%) from Institution A (20%) and Institution B (28%) felt that watching one of the assigned movies helped “reinforce” their leadership perspective. The students’ comments below illustrate how movies served as a reminder for effective and ineffective leadership and their implications for workplace settings:

Freedom Writers: “It is certain that viewing an example of the theories and concepts we have been reading about was helpful toward the end of eventual practice. The leadership style of Erin Gruwell is inspirational because of her refusal to back down and her determination to fight for the equality of her students. Witnessing the tremendous effect these qualities had on the lives of the people in her class has reinforced the importance of these traits in my mind. Erin truly personifies what Moran et al (2013) call the attributes of the best leaders: “Intelligence, commitment, energy, courage of conviction, [and] integrity” (p. 305). **(Leadership Perspective –“Reinforced” – Institution A)**

Dead Poets Society: “In summation, *The Dead Poets’ Society* is a film that has strong leaders that fall under the categories of autocratic and democratic, exploitative-authoritative and consultative/participative and demonstrate how these leadership styles can affect subordinates positively and negatively, which made this critical viewing of the film with a leadership lens an interesting exercise in leadership and management theory. After analyzing the film in this way this author hopes to be a more democratic and consultative leader and manager in that subordinates are directed yet included in decision-making and this creates a more collaborative and positive work environment for managers and their subordinates.” **(Leadership Perspective –“Reinforced” – Institution B)**

The above comments clearly demonstrate students’ critical thinking skills in their ability to connect various leadership theories and concepts with the characters portrayed in the movies. Moreover, they also demonstrate their desires and aspirations to emulate exemplary leadership in their careers, if and when that defining moment comes in.

Figure 3 also illustrates that a small number of students from both institutions felt that their leadership perspectives remain unchanged (10%). A further breakdown of the findings (Figure 4) indicates a similar trend in students’ reactions from Institution A (10%) and Institution B (13%). The comments given below reflect the sentiments of some students whose leadership perspective did not evolve as a result of watching one of the assigned movies:

Wall Street: “This movie did not really change my views of leadership. I’ve worked for people who cared for the whole company,

and people who cared only for their own success. It is infinitely better to work for the former. Businesses fail because of the latter, and workers are miserable. It's just not a good way to lead." (**Leadership Perspective – “Unchanged” – Institution A**)

Freedom Writers: “Watching the movie did not change my perspective of leadership or management.... Although it did not change my perspective, I will realistically be able to apply what I learned from both the movie and the readings that prepped me for the movie in my current position.” (**Leadership Perspective – “Unchanged” – Institution B**)

Even though the movies did not help evolve some students' beliefs about leadership, their comments demonstrate their analytical thinking and take-away lessons for their organizational contexts.

Overall, the findings highlight that a majority of students (87%) found this to be a learning experience that either helped “evolve” (60.4%) or “reinforce” (26.7%) their beliefs about good leadership. As such, these findings indicate the powerful role of movies in imparting leadership lessons in LIS programs.

Discussion

Although the LIS literature emphasizes the importance of transformational leadership for LIS professionals, the existing LIS scholarly research revealed a void in scholarly exploration studying the connection between films and teaching/training leadership concepts in LIS programs. This research aimed to understand the role of movies in teaching leadership lessons in LIS programs. As discussed in the preceding sections, the study analyzed the “leadership lens” papers of 101 LIS students in seven different online management/leadership courses over a period of seven years. Overall, the following themes emerged from the study findings: leadership lessons learned through the movies, critical thinking skills, film as a leadership education tool, and student engagement.

Leadership lessons learned through the movies

The overall goal of the “leadership lens” assignment was to help students understand that leadership is contextual or situational; that is, it is contingent on the situation. The other important goal was to familiarize them with various aspects of the authoritative, democratic, collaborative transactional, situational, authentic, collaborative, and transformational leadership styles and behavior. This study demonstrates that the film narratives, metaphors, and archetypes helped students identify a number of leadership concepts, styles, and traits in the movies. In particular, students repeatedly identified authoritative and transformational leadership styles and related qualities in the movies *Freedom Writers* and *Dead Poets Society*. *Wall Street* served as a reminder of the transactional nature of leadership and portrayed good examples of ethical and unethical leadership and

their ramifications for the workplace. At the same time, *Apollo 13* and *12 Angry Men* reminded students about the importance of authentic, respectful, collaborative, and persuasive leadership. Furthermore, watching movies helped emphasize the importance of many leadership personality traits and behaviors such as listening, patience, conviction, open-mindedness, communication, trust, transparency, genuine relationships, and humility, and how they can significantly affect the overall health and well-being of fellow workers and organizations as a whole. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that movies could serve as a great learning tool for educating LIS students and professionals about leadership concepts and workplace dynamics if carefully planned.

As stated earlier, the students in this study were primarily adult learners and held either a full-time or part-time position in libraries, archives, museums, and some other types of organization. In response to the question “Will you be able to realistically apply your learning in your current and future situations?,” students’ papers demonstrated in-depth reflections, perspectives, and opinions about the leadership styles they witnessed in the movie, their relevance and applicability in their current and future work situations, and their implications for information organizations in general. However, it is also worth mentioning in this context that information leadership or leadership in a library context requires certain leadership skills, namely leading information processes, information resources, and infrastructures (Huvila, 2014), which in turn influences leading people, processes, and IT. In the future, it would be useful to add an additional question in the assignment asking students to reflect on “information leadership” as well.

It is interesting to note that no students chose to watch *Norma Rae* for the purpose of their “leadership lens” paper. Even though this is an excellent movie inspired by true events, which highlight various HR issues such as inequality, poor workplace conditions, sexism, unions, and so forth, it failed to generate interest among students. They often chose to watch a movie that was on their “bucket list” or one they had not watched in a long time. However, it is worth remembering that due to the iconic nature of the archetypes contained in the characters portrayed in film and their powerful stories, it is possible for LIS students or professionals at all stages of development to learn leadership lessons regardless of the film they watched.

Students’ “leadership lens” papers reveal a greater level of similarities amid some variations in their interpretations of leadership themes and behaviors. Furthermore, these papers indicate how students’ leadership perspective was “evolved” or “reinforced,” or remained “unchanged,” even if they watched the same movie for the purpose of this assignment. For example, there are instances where different students’ leadership perspective either “evolved,” “reinforced,” or remain “unchanged” even if they all chose to watch *12 Angry Men*. Similar observations were noted in

the context of other movies as well, where students' leadership perspective varied. This is possibly due to their prior leadership and management knowledge, work experiences, personality, circumstances, and a host of demographic factors and other unknown reasons. However, in spite of the variations in students' leadership perspectives, it was interesting to note that they provided new insights into the films, highlighted the leadership lessons learned, and outlined their implications for various workplace contexts in LIS organizations.

Critical thinking skills

This research highlights the fact that the learning activity through the camera lens not only helped students identify various leadership themes and styles portrayed in the movies but also helped sharpen their analytical thinking skills about leadership concepts and their implications for various workplace settings. 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"). A majority of students found this to be a learning experience that either helped "evolve" (60.4%) or "reinforce" (26.7%) their beliefs about good leadership. Even those students whose leadership perspective remained "unchanged" (12.9%) often provided seemingly paradoxical statements in their reflections. While they stated that their leadership perspective remained "unchanged," they also reflected on what they learned from the movie and how they could apply it in their life/workplace settings. As a result, students' critical thinking skills and take-away lessons about leadership were clearly evident in their "leadership lens" papers. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that a careful and thoughtful consideration of movies and instructional scaffolding in providing students opportunities for reviewing, exploring, analyzing, and reflecting on various leadership concepts in theory and action helped them relay their personal reflections, anecdotes, and stories and relate them with LIS leadership.

Film as a leadership education tool

This study demonstrates that movies can be used as an effective learning tool in illustrating leadership concepts. This study used movies in facilitating leadership lessons in online courses. However, instructors can also use movies in teaching leadership in conjunction with their own pedagogical styles and learning goals. In face-to-face and blended courses, educators might consider using movies to complement their existing pedagogical approaches (e.g., lectures, case-study discussions, role playing) for imparting leadership lessons. Instructors can utilize movies in teaching leadership concepts in several different ways (Hannay & Venne, 2012; Pandey, 2012):

- by showing selected scenes from a selected movie followed by discussions on relevant and related leadership theories, models, and styles;

- by providing students with a foundation about leadership theories and concepts through their instructional style (e.g., class lectures) followed by a display of selected movie scenes or clips before starting class discussion on the movie and applicable leadership theories and concepts;
- by assigning different movies to groups of students as a project assignment and asking them to present film analysis on the basis of relevant leadership theories and concepts they studied in action.

While there are multiple approaches for teaching leadership in a face-to-face, blended, and online classroom, LIS educators might consider using movies to complement their existing pedagogical approaches for imparting leadership lessons appropriate to their learning contexts.

Student engagement

Although no specific questions were asked about the “leadership lens” assignment at the end of the semester “course wrap-up” reflections, students highlighted their overwhelming appreciation for the leadership lessons they learned through the camera lens. Similar observations were noted in the course evaluations, and unsolicited comments that students share repeatedly. Some examples are given below:

“I particularly liked the Leadership Lens assignment. I’ve never thought of Dead Poet’s Society through a management perspective, and I found much more than I expected in the film. It made me realize that management and leadership are a bigger part of everyday life than I had previously thought.”

“Although there were many valuable assignments and learning experiences throughout the course, one I found particularly useful was the Leadership Lens. Watching leadership in action was an excellent way to reinforce the course readings and discussions.”

“One does not often say that they enjoyed writing a paper, but for this assignment, I did. I enjoyed it because after taking the StrengthsFinder test, and learning about my own strengths, I was able to identify different strengths in the characters of my chosen film. That assignment truly got me thinking about how different management styles work, and work well.”

In conjunction with their pedagogical approaches and learning goals, instructors might consider requiring or encouraging students’ reflections on certain aspects of film and relevant leadership concepts. LIS students’ perspectives on their learning experience will help educators to gain an understanding of the value of using film as a pedagogical tool in teaching leadership. The literature review in the preceding sections demonstrates that movies have remained an underutilized source of leadership examples in teaching leadership lessons in LIS programs. The study findings provide some insights into implications for using movies to impart leadership

education in LIS programs. Movies have enormous potential for engaging learners on cognitive and emotional levels and can serve as a powerful leadership education tool in an engaging and effective manner (Miller, 2009).

Overall, this study indicates that by using 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. 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.

Conclusion

Library and information science educators search for ways to update their teaching methods to better prepare students for their future careers. As leadership skills emerge as an essential competence for information professionals in an ever-changing information world, LIS educators recognize the need to alter teaching methods to cultivate these skills in students. LIS educators can incorporate film into assigned coursework to promote an active learning strategy in their courses. Through this engaging tool, LIS educators can meet the needs of visual learners and encourage interaction with peers as course offerings become increasingly online in LIS programs. This study demonstrates that movies can be helpful not only in developing comprehension but also in cultivating critical thinking, resilience, motivation, autonomous learning, and affective variables, such as anxiety. Furthermore, movies allow students to explore the complexity, nuances, and various shades of organizational dynamics and leadership behavior in an authentic and contextualized way. Moreover, they capture the imagination, curiosity, and interest of students and provide them immense opportunities to witness examples of effective and ineffective leadership in action, which may not be possible in a traditional classroom setting. At the same time, it is important to remember that while movies have immense potential to facilitate leadership learning, the sole responsibility lies with the educators to make thoughtful decisions in determining the type of movies and learning outcomes in teaching leadership lessons so that they do not promote the socially negative conditions occurring in movies, such as violence, sexism, and racism (Gause, 2005).

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Appendix: Rationale behind the selection of movies and their leadership implications

Name of movie	Brief overview	Leadership lessons, paradigms, and implications illustrated
<i>12 Angry Men</i> (1957)	A group of twelve jurors are deciding the fate of a young boy accused of murdering his father. Throughout the jury deliberations, the juror number 8 exhibits several qualities of effective leadership. This character is played by Henry Fonda, who not only exhibits the various qualities of an effective leader but also uses these qualities to lead the entire jury to a vote of not guilty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • authentic leadership • group decision making • empathy • team building • persuasion • consensus building • behavioral analysis of complex human interactions occur during jury deliberations
<i>Wall Street</i> (1987)	Bud Fox (a Wall Street broker in New York) is highly ambitious and determined to get to the top. Taking his boss Gordon Gekko's (a powerful and successful broker) advice of "Greed is Good," Fox soon finds himself in a world of shady business deals, the "good life," fast money, and fast women. Nothing could stop Fox from looking up to Gekko, but how far could this life really go? The movie touches upon a dilemma many people face at some point in their lives or careers. Do we stay true to our values, principles, and ethics? Or do we give in to the wealth and power that we can possibly achieve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leadership influence (push and pull tactics) • transformational and transactional leadership • ethical and unethical leadership behavior • leader-subordinate relationship • tenacity and drive • cognitive ability and subject knowledge • power-centric motives versus socialized motives • charisma and self-confidence
<i>Apollo 13</i> (1995)	Based on the nonfiction book <i>The Lost Moon: The Perilous Voyage of Apollo 13</i> , first published in 1994 by astronaut James Lovell and journalist Jeffrey Kluger. This captivating film portrays the dramatic turn of events when Apollo 13 became known as a successful failure, meaning that it didn't make it to the Moon but the astronauts came home safely.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasizes the importance of: • planning, preparation, and training • clear division of jobs, roles, and responsibilities • team-work and collaboration • prioritizing and communication • problem solving, creativity, and confidence in decision making • professionalism and responsible leadership in a crises • agility • duty, respect, integrity, trust, and positive attitudes • compassion, adaptability, courage, influence, emotional intelligence • risk management

(Continued)

Name of movie	Brief overview	Leadership lessons, paradigms, and implications illustrated
<i>Freedom Writers</i> (2007)	Based on a true story about Erin Gruwell, a first-time teacher who is assigned to a class of underperforming students who have experienced racial and gang violence all their lives. The story is based in Long Beach, California, in 1994.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transformational and inspirational leadership • servant leadership • visioning, inspiring, stimulating, coaching, and team building • emphasizes the importance of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting high expectations • the power of resiliency
<i>Dead Poets Society</i> (1989)	About a group of students at a private prep school where they meet Professor Keating, their new English teacher. The role of Keating is played by Robin Williams. Keating encourages the students to embrace their individualism, think independently, and pursue their passions. This leads them on a path of self-discovery that clashes with the rigid culture of the conservative institution they attend. Keating's methods ultimately cost him his job, but they win him the respect and affection of his students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transformational leadership • the irreversible power of words and ideas • engaging the people in deep learning experiences • individual development • organizational development • emphasizes the importance of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing imagination and creativity • developing free thinkers • developing alternative perspective • instilling a sense of purpose
<i>Erin Brockovich</i> (2000)	Based on a real story of an American legal clerk who is a struggling single mother who becomes connected to Ed Masry's law firm because of an unfortunate car accident, and begins working at the law firm out of desperation for an income. Erin Brockovich demonstrated extraordinary leadership to ensure justice for hundreds of cancer victims whose suffering was the direct result of drinking contaminated water caused by a powerful utility company.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transformational and transactional leadership • the importance of information gathering and subject knowledge • integrity, sociability, determination, charisma, confidence, and intelligence
<i>Norma Rae</i> (1979)	Demonstrates the leadership potential of women and portrays the real life of Crystal Lee Sutton. The true story captures a determined woman's struggle to balance her domestic life while leading efforts to establish an empowered union. The movie highlights many workplace problems such as inequality, harassment, sexism, and intolerable work conditions. Norma Rae portrays a very distinct and extraordinary style of leadership with the help of her mentor Reuben. She achieved the goal of "unionization" and got her people what they actually deserved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leadership is a process and leaders can be created • contingency theory of leadership and situational leadership • transformational leadership • mentor-protégée relationship • authentic leadership • the gender perspective of leadership • social identity theory of leadership