Journeys to the Self: Using Movie Directors in the Classroom
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This article suggests that temporary (project based) filmmaking organizations, and film directors as their leaders, lend themselves to examining a plethora of leadership issues, from social sources of power to competencies in network organizations. It advances for classroom discussion and teaching the cases of Almodóvar and Coppola as examples of idiosyncratic filmmakers in a “subsidy-trapped,” craftlike European cinema versus a gross and agent-driven Hollywood studio system. The article concludes with a discussion of the journey metaphor as a unique opportunity to look at the philosophical problem of the meaning of life and the achievement of consistency and continuity in one’s trajectory.

Keywords: project organizations; film directors; career journey; leadership; power

As you set out for Ithaca,
Hope your road is a long one.

. . .
So you are old by the time you reach the island,
Wealthy with all you have gained on the way.

Konstantinos Petrou Kaváfis, Ithaka
The movie industry provides a rich seam of largely untapped material that readily adapts to classroom discussions on leadership in temporary and networked organizations. However, the use of movies in the classroom is hardly new. Plenty of previous contributors to the *Journal of Management Education* have promoted the idea of substituting movies for cases to illustrate many types of behavioral, organizational, and management situations (e.g., Comer, 2001; Roth, 2001). Films such as *Twelve Angry Men* to *Alien* and *The Magnificent Seven* to *Dead Poets Society* have been used in the classroom (Scherer & Baker, 1999). Even animated film has emerged as an effective teaching source (Champoux, 2001); leadership situations in Disney’s *The Lion King* can be used to illustrate such concepts as sources of power and leaders’ self-concept (Comer, 2001). Authors have pointed out that one reason film works in the classroom is that today’s generation of students are in tune with visual media; they are exposed to television, video, and film on a regular basis (Comer, 2001).

However, behind every movie, behind the actors, and behind the fiction is a real-life leader. Movie directors are the leaders of highly complex temporary organizations with a small core of central players. These leaders are available for analysis: Cases, books, documentaries, obscure material to be found on the Internet, and DVD releases make discussion of the organizations behind the movies a new, innovative, and exciting teaching resource. Having an in-depth understanding of the movie industry is an advantage, but even with limited knowledge and experience of the industry we have not found any difficulty in handling this material.

Temporary (project based) filmmaking organizations lend themselves to examining a plethora of leadership issues ranging from the social sources of power to competencies in a networked organization. They also provide an insightful comparison to the environments in which many students would work. Many of our target audiences have already had experiences in temporary organizations such as project teams at work, at school, or both. In going behind the scenes to study these organizations and their leaders we have created “The Directors Series”—a series of cases, documentaries, and movie clips that initially concentrated on the Spanish Oscar-winning maverick director Pedro Almodóvar (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, *All About My Mother*) and the Hollywood giant Francis Ford Coppola (*The Godfather* series, *Apocalypse Now*). Although these are the directors that we have concentrated on here, we have already expanded the series to include other...
directors, such as Stanley Kubrick and the Coen brothers. The focus has been on male directors thus far, hence the use of male pronouns throughout the article. However, we will be taking the series further to include female directors such as Nora Ephron (Sleepless in Seattle) and Jane Campion (The Piano).

In this article, we have chosen the Almodóvar and Coppola examples because they provide an opportunity to compare two distinct sets of backgrounds and styles. Almodóvar’s work and career hails from the “subsidy-trapped,” craftlike European film, whereas Coppola works within the gross- and agent-driven, mass production Hollywood studio system. Both, however, allow for detailed studies of leadership in unique situations. In the case of Almodóvar, we use an in-depth case on the director and his El Deseo (The Desire) production company and television documentaries, which include interviews with Almodóvar and some of his regular actors. For Coppola, we draw on the documentary Hearts of Darkness—A Filmmaker’s Apocalypse, as well as clips from his movie Apocalypse Now. Figure 1 lists all materials, including our own case studies, teaching notes, and technical notes that instructors might find useful. Interested instructors are encouraged to contact us directly in case of any difficulty in procuring any of this material. We have developed the series for MBA students in leadership, power and influence, and careers courses but have also used the material to good effect on executive education programs and in undergraduate courses on strategy implementation.

The introduction is not complete without a reference to a deeper level to which “The Directors Series” can take the classroom discussion. Life is often seen as a journey, and one’s career is a central part of that journey. Temporary project-based organizations also represent a journey, from the beginning to the end of the project. In the Coppola example, the journey was fraught with difficulties, and the insights into how Coppola dealt with disaster after disaster are fascinating. The careers of the directors, however, can also be viewed as journeys and may promote reflection by students on the meaning and destination of their personal journeys, as well as on the importance of committed fellow travelers for the completion of their successful journey.

Teaching Aims

Most businesses (from large pharmaceutical companies to Internet incubators) seek agility and innovation by establishing network-like, project-based organizations to take on certain tasks. These organizations are temporary systems of multidisciplinary, semiautonomous parties that disband at
the accomplishment of a project. Eccles (1981) advanced the concept of the quasi-firm with the example of the construction industry, whereas Gersick (1988, 1989) refined thinking on transitions in work teams and task groups. Some challenges of such organizations are the building of commitment to the

Material for the instructor

Teaching Note: Journeys to the Self: Using Movie Directors in the Classroom
(IESE, #01970000, February 2002, www.iesep.com)

Handouts before the sessions


Materials for class use

Video (15 min.): Excerpts from TV interviews featuring Pedro Almodóvar and his collaborators (Not for sale: A copy can be requested from the authors)
Video: Documentary Hearts of Darkness—A Filmmaker’s Apocalypse (1992, VHS, NTSC format, director Eleanor Coppola, Fax Bahr)
Video: Movie Apocalypse Now (1979, VHS, director Francis Ford Coppola)

A number of supplementary readings could also be assigned with the case and the video. They are as follows.

FIGURE 1: Material Used in the Almodóvar and Coppola Cases
project within time constraints; the matching of people (and their reputations); the balancing between collaboration and control, between coordination and experimentation, between clear responsibilities and blurred roles (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1998; Faulkner & Anderson, 1987; Goodman & Goodman, 1976; Morley & Silver, 1977). Film projects have a lot in common with consulting and scientific projects (Morley & Silver, 1977), with architectural groups, negotiating teams, and election campaign organizations (Goodman & Goodman, 1976), or with businesses in which specialized individual talents must be assembled into teams (Caves, 2000). The insights into the managerial and organizational challenges that movie projects produce—and that are addressed by “The Directors Series”—are therefore rich with parallels to other sectors.

Student Reactions

The two principal target audiences have been MBA students and participants in executive development programs. We have chosen these two groups because they are the primary audiences of our business school. Both have reacted favorably to this material. The more mature executive development participants tend to identify with the Coppola material in a personal way. Most of them have seen the film before, sometimes several times, and enjoy the opportunity to interpret Coppola’s leadership ability and find parallels with their professional lives. Quite often they have found parallels with their personal lives but have not taken the leap to look at the application of the learning to their in-company existence.

MBA students approach this material differently. Most of them enjoy films and thus take on Almodóvar and Coppola with enthusiasm. Many are knowledgeable of the work of both directors and bring interesting insights to the discussion. They usually make a point on the difference in the relationship and the exchange that Almodóvar and Coppola have with the actors, as well as the need they have to be in control of the film project to make a movie consistent with their vision. Possibly because of a lack of organizational leadership experience, some of the discussion on Coppola is kept at arm’s length. However, when the discussion moves to the issues of the journey and the search for meaning in their own lives, the session gains its own momentum. We have developed a separate self-assessment exercise “Journey Guide” to help students analyze their own journeys and where they want to take them.

We have also used selected parts of this approach and material (i.e. the case on Almodóvar) with a limited group of undergraduate students in Strat-
egy Implementation. With this group, the production company El Deseo is used as an illustration of a successfully aligned business with peculiar organizational strategy. In El Deseo, it is the idiosyncrasy of the creative professional Pedro Almodóvar—and not the impact of the environment—that drives the alignment of the hard and soft S-s of the well-known 7-S framework of McKinsey (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980). In addition, the film projects may also be used to introduce Mintzberg’s (1984) notion of adhocracy as an organization capable of sophisticated innovation by fusing experts drawn from different disciplines into ad hoc project teams. Undergraduate students usually appreciate Mintzberg’s comparison of temporary organizations with tents.

We focused on four foundational areas for classroom discussion and teaching: social sources of power, coleadership, competencies in a network community, and the career as a journey. Although each area can be explored independently in a session due to time constraints or instructor’s preferences and priorities, we believe the experience is most enriching when they are taken together into consideration.

Social Sources of Power

Apart from positional and personal sources, power is also derived from the pattern of social relations that has been established within a community. Goffee and Jones (1996) outlined patterns of social relations along the dimensions of solidarity, as the community’s ability to pursue shared goals regardless of personal ties, and sociability, as the intense friendliness among members of a community. We explore the fact that although a film director may have the formal authority to influence the behavior of the film’s cast and crew, his influence could also reside in a peculiar community pattern he has managed to create. Through a relationship built on trust and affection, his followers are committed to his vision and support it unconditionally. Power and influence in these cases are context specific; participants need to examine the patterns that facilitate the most creative environments, as well as the situations in which social relations have been unsuccessful.

Coleadership

“The movie director is the last remaining dictator in a democratic society,” said Francis Ford Coppola in the documentary Hearts of Darkness. The relationship that many directors have with their closest creative collaborators, however, is more often than not a coleadership rather than a dictatorship.
Cohesion is a concept that acknowledges the power of great partnerships—between leaders and their deputies—where boss and subordinate seem to work more like peers for the success of the organization (Heenan & Bennis, 1999).

Although movie directors are often visionary leaders, they sometimes choose self-imposed isolation from outside interference, the late Stanley Kubrick’s isolation in Britain being a case in point. However, to maintain such isolation they usually collaborate with talented and devoted co-leaders and team members who buffer them from the industry’s uncertainties and provide committed support for their career and for the success of the enterprise (Alvarez & Svejenova, 2002). Cohesions can become involved in a long-term common career trajectory—a symbiotic career (Alvarez & Svejenova, 2002). It can be sustained by an affect- and trust-based pair (e.g., a film director and his or her trustee), with highly differentiated tasks.

This brings up questions about the conditions necessary for sustaining the successful creative coleadership over time, the competencies required of each coleader, and how students should choose potential co-leaders. During this discussion, some directors may be tagged as control freaks (cf. Amabile, 1996, 1997 on creative personality). This is not necessarily a peculiarity of creative people who are led by an inner drive to express themselves. Entrepreneurs often have the same obsession with being in control. Their inability to function in structured situations makes it necessary for them to design organizations where they are in control and at the center of action (Kets de Vries, 1995).

Competencies in a Network Community

Working in project enterprises shapes career paths that are without boundaries. In fact, the concept of career path may be a misnomer in networked organizations. Achieving career objectives in such organizations requires different competencies to those necessary for advancement in traditional organizational settings (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Jones & DeFillippi, 1996). Although the concept of a career jungle gym rather than a career ladder is new to most industries, it has always been common to filmmaking and provides an interesting framework for career analysis. Career ladder competencies require aspects of compliance, long-term organizational loyalty, and clear “silo” management if not functional skills. On the other hand, jungle gym competencies require greater functional dexterity, focused personal loyalties, emphasis on lateral rather than upward mobility, power based on personality, and skills rather than position.
The Career as a Journey

Life as a journey is an oft-used metaphor. From Homer’s *The Odyssey*, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Kerouac’s *On the Road*, the prototypical journey tale has been the subject of much classic literature. Likewise, “The Directors Series” can be organized around the metaphor of the journey to give students the opportunity to plot their personal trajectory. The journey, in which the voyage itself is more important than its final destination, is explored at several levels. At one level, a film project is analyzed as a developmental passage for a director and his collaborators from the germ of an idea toward the final edited film. At another level, for the film director, it is a personal journey toward a higher self-awareness throughout his career and with every film he makes. Third, at a more abstract level for students, it is discerned as a journey toward continuity and consistency in one’s life and career. Finally, we have been able to form a bridge to the personal question “What journey are you really on?” to which students are invited to reflect on their personal values, beliefs, and the path they have chosen to pursue.

Each of these concepts could, of course, be taught independently. Furthermore, although we feel comfortable with the journey metaphor other instructors may not. Instructors should choose those concepts with which they feel most at home. However, tying them together in the context of a creative environment and making comparisons between different creative environments (e.g., those of Almodóvar and Coppola), provides particular value to the discussion. That richness is enhanced further by the extension of the journey concept to the lives of the students themselves.

The Sessions

To bring to life these concepts, we now draw on, in some detail, the examples of Pedro Almodóvar and Francis Ford Coppola. However, this section does not aim to be a step-by-step guide for teaching the Almodóvar/Coppola material. Instructors interested in such a guide should consult the teaching note listed in Figure 1. Rather, it is intended to provide enough detail on those two directors, and our experiences of using them in the classroom, to serve as a practical tool, as well as an inspiration, to carry out similar studies on any other movie director. Our standard teaching session is 75 minutes. When we have been able to run all three sessions together on executive programs it normally takes a half day or approximately 4 hours.
SESSION 1: THE JOURNEY OF PEDRO ALMODOVAR

Pedro Almodóvar is the *enfant terrible* of European film. He stood at the apex of the cultural movement *La Movida* (The Movement) in post-Franco Spain, modernizing and rejuvenating the arts in the newly democratic country. His style in filmmaking is a consequence of joining two worlds: traditional Spanish and American pop. He tends to develop complex female and marginalized characters in his films. His movies are said to project a reality of his personal space, with characters that have a strong sense of belonging to a group, often a family. Dominant figures in Almodóvar’s life are his brother Agustín (executive producer of Pedro’s movies and managing director of their joint production company El Deseo) and his late mother Francisca Caballero.

The case is based on in-depth interviews with Agustín Almodóvar and several core collaborators in the production company. It also includes extensive secondary data. The joint film production pathway of Pedro and Agustín, and the contribution of the core members of their team, is featured in intimate detail. The study describes how Almodóvar, self-taught film director, has managed to develop a coherent message as a filmmaker through being cushioned from the film industry’s volatility by his brother and a committed production team. In doing so, his career has become coherent and successful, reaching international recognition.

Also used in the session are several documentaries showing TV interviews with Pedro, his speech at the Oscars ceremony in which *All About My Mother* won best foreign film, and interviews with some of his key actors and actresses. It also includes Pedro’s reflections on his film style, the peculiarities of moviemaking, and the value of friendship in his life.

The case and documentary facilitate the accomplishment of a number of learning objectives, including:

- exposing students to a distinctive organizing philosophy of a business. El Deseo was founded and is run as a service to the creative needs of a gifted person, in which commitment to his vision is secured by recruiting compatible people. This company is a hub for the temporary project networks that are assembled and managed for the making of the films and retains professional knowledge and relational expertise gained in organizing and managing each of the projects.
- accentuating the importance of coleadership (Heenan & Bennis, 1999), in which a charismatic, talented, visionary person works closely and shares leadership with another to excel professionally and to develop a coherent development path.
- reflecting on the social sources of power, embedded in peculiar relational patterns (tightly coupled, nested in each other, nuclei of trust and affection), which
allows a visionary leader to influence others, beyond the strength of his positional and personal power (Alvarez & Svejenova, 2002).

To identify the career competencies required for success in boundaryless career contexts, in which industry knowledge—the rules of the game, knowing where to gain entrance, advancement, and knowing when to stay or leave employment situation—interplays with self-knowledge—knowing why one is pursuing a particular career, knowing with whom to initiate contacts and relationships, and knowing how to perform the tasks and roles needed for capturing opportunities (Jones & DeFillippi, 1996). Various key questions allow the discussion to develop around these learning objectives. They will also help to focus attention on the central themes of social sources of power, symbiotic leadership, and competencies in a network organization and the career as a journey. These questions are as follows:

**What is the value chain of the industry?** A short discussion on the peculiarities of the film industry and a discussion of the differences between the U.S. and European models will help to set the scene for the forthcoming discussion. Some background readings for the instructors in this regard could be Dale (1997), Goodell (1998), and Mickelthwait (1989).

**Should Pedro go to Hollywood?** By building a scenario in which Pedro may go to work in Hollywood, students focus on the nature of Pedro’s style and analyze whether it would work in a different setting. Through talking about the threats to the El Deseo way that would come about by a move to Hollywood, students focus in on the unique nature of Pedro’s work. The scenario also provides parallels with mainstream career decisions in which students will have to decide whether to move on to a new, untested work environment when sometime in the future that opportunity presents itself. The discussion may lead to several support questions, such as: What obstacles could Pedro find filming in Hollywood? How would you characterize Pedro’s movies? It may be accompanied by an analysis of the differences between the Spanish and the Hollywood film industries.

**Is Pedro a leader?** And if so, what type of leader is he? Is Agustín a leader? How do they share and/or separate tasks and responsibilities? These questions open the way for a look at a pertinent example of coleadership. The discussion shows that when a visionary leader works together with a committed coleader, they create the adequate context for the execution of the leader’s vision. Hence, the leadership is embedded in their symbiosis.
The discussion is likely to result in some contrasting views on the brothers’ respective leadership roles. Pedro is often identified as a visionary character, possibly detached from the stereotypical image of a leader. Some students may question whether he is a leader at all. However, students perceive his role, it remains that Pedro, as the scriptwriter and film director, also drives the project network on the journey of the film from the idea to its entry into the cutting room. He may then be classified as a control freak whose inner drive expresses his talent and looks for freedom and control over all aspects of his artwork. Students will often identify Agustín as the leader of the two, because he is creating and managing the perfect environment, in which Pedro’s vision can flourish and become a reality. Thus, one of the learning points of this case could be that the strength of a visionary leader is expressed precisely in his close relationship with a trusted and committed coleader (see Figure 2 on Coen brothers as another example of creative tandems).

What are the sources of Pedro Almodóvar’s power? The discussion that results from this question provides an excellent example of the differences between personal sources of power and positional sources of power. Almodóvar’s personal sources of power include his self-taught expertise in scriptwriting and film directing; his reputation in the industry as an idiosyncratic, maverick film director; and his personal charisma. These should be differentiated from positional sources of power, such as the authority he has as a film director. It transpires that he works with a structure high on solidarity and sociability, that is, a communal pattern (Goffee & Jones, 1996).

The analysis may go a step further when it becomes clear that Almodóvar’s peculiarly patterned own world of collaborators, which he has managed to create and maintain (no doubt, with the help of his brother), also serve as a vital source of power. Alvarez and Svejenova (2002) carried out a detailed study of Almodóvar’s expanding sequence of nested nuclei of trust and affection. The implications of such persistence on the development of a coherent and distinctive trajectory may be analyzed, and the potential dangers of conformity could also be stressed.

What capabilities are necessary for a successful career journey in such an uncertain and volatile industry? In this section, industry knowledge and self-knowledge can be discussed as two important but separate coordinates in the identification of core capabilities for career success. Jones and DeFillippi (1996) can be used as a source of a comprehensive typology of six core capabilities along these two dimensions, all of which can be found in the case of Almodóvar. Students could be asked to think about which of these capabilities they already have, those that they need, and how to acquire them.
The Almodóvar brothers are not the only moviemaking duo that serves to illustrate strong characteristics of symbiotic leadership. Creative binomials are ubiquitous in film since its creators—the brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière. Another contemporary film tandem of renown, along with the brothers Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, Aki and Mika Kaurismäki, and the Wachowsky Bros, are Joel and Ethan Coen (Felipe, 1999). The Coen brothers (Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?, Fargo, The Big Lebowski, Miller’s Crossing) are defined by the cinematographer of their first three movies, Barry Sonnenfeld, as “a perfect and self-contained ecosystem of two people,” that splits nominal directing (Joel) and production (Ethan), while sharing the screenplay writing (Felipe, 1999, p. 31). They are said to enjoy an almost telepathic relationship during the writing and filming stage of a movie project, which gives them a great deal of control.

Joel is the prominent brother on the set while Ethan hangs back and smokes. Sometimes whispering a suggestion in Joel’s ear and sometimes offering editorial direction but always in complete sync with one another. For the actors there are moments like this that capture the uncannily close relationship: “Hey, Joe,” Ethan said to his brother, Joel replied “Yeah, Eth, I know” and then proceeded to tell Nicolas Cage what they had both understood without having to say it aloud. They are always in one another’s presence, circling about and meeting to share words. To the cast it was as if they could read each other’s minds. (Levine, 2000, p. 53).

Some actors enjoy the culture created by the brothers, whereas others reject it. Some find it too restricting. One of the most unhappy was Nicholas Cage, (during the filming of Raising Arizona): An actor who liked to talk about his “gift” as “something sacred.” He had many ideas, for example, he wanted to glance at his watch during a lull in the supermarket chase scene, that were quietly nullified by Joel and Ethan. The script, which had sold him on doing the movie, now seemed to him something like a straitjacket.

“Joel and Ethan have a very strong vision,” said Cage, “and I’ve learned how difficult it is for them to accept another’s artistic vision. They have an autocratic nature.” (Levine, 2000, p. 54)

Similarly to the Almodóvar brothers, they cushion their strong vision in a committed and stable, almost invariant over time crew, and often-repeated cast (Felipe, 1999).

Figure 2: The Coen Brothers

Finishing with the question of self-awareness opens the way to some of the more reflective elements of the Coppola film, and in particular to a detailed look at Coppola’s competencies on his personal and professional journey in the making of Apocalypse Now.
SESSION 2: THE JOURNEY OF FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA

In moviemaking circles, and among true film buffs, Francis Ford Coppola is a director held in awe. He led a group of “film brat” directors, including George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, to storm Hollywood in the 1970s with a collective realization that filmmaking tradition was ready to be reformed and revitalized from within. Coppola’s *Godfather* series was considered a modern masterpiece. However, as countless commentaries on Coppola suggest, his trajectory has been stormy, with experiences of glory and near bankruptcy. Yet he never renounced his artistic drive and always kept—despite the early death of one of his sons—his family intact, unlike many other Hollywood personalities. His family members give support and are fellow travelers in his professional and personal journey.

Our session on Coppola uses two main resources: a television documentary directed by his wife Eleanor Coppola titled *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker’s Apocalypse*, an intensely personal insight into Coppola and his making of *Apocalypse Now*; and the movie itself. The movie tells the story of the journey made by Willard, an American special forces lieutenant in Vietnam, whose mission it is to travel by river deep into the Indochina jungle to terminate the rogue command of Colonel Kurtz. The film is, in fact, based on the classic 1902 Joseph Conrad novel, *Heart of Darkness*, which tells of a journey up the River Congo to collect a company employee, the enigmatic Kurtz, who has gained power and influence over a local tribe. The source of the river, where Kurtz resides, is depicted as a heart of darkness. In this story, Conrad explores the dark side of human nature, the evilness to which man can sink, and the Faustian temptation to enter into that evilness. Coppola moves the scene to Vietnam to give the film relevance to a modern U.S. audience.

A further relevance to our theme of the career journey is given by the fact that much of the story is based on Willard’s own journey up the river. Willard is facing all sorts of personal issues, and so his journey extends well beyond his physical movements. As he travels up the river, he gains in strength and
stature and so is able, at the end of the journey, to differentiate good from evil. Viewing the story as a much lighter analogy for real life may inspire students to focus on their own personal and professional journeys.

The making of the film was fraught with difficulty and disaster, all of which was captured by Eleanor Coppola in her documentary. As such, the film project can be seen as a journey—a long and difficult one—and one that was an important part of Coppola’s career journey as a whole. The film crew developed a strange slogan during the project—“Don’t get off the boat”—which seemed to be a call to rely on momentum when it was unclear if the movie would ever be finished at all. In the opening scene in the documentary, featuring Coppola’s speech at the 1979 Cannes Film Festival Coppola said: “My film is not a movie; it’s not about Vietnam. It is Vietnam. It’s what it was really like; it was crazy. We were in the jungle, there were too many of us, we had access to too much money, too much equipment; and little by little, we went insane.”

The material provides an excellent resource for not only looking at the challenges of a particular project-based organization but also at the characteristics of Coppola the obsessive leader. The learning objectives are as follows:

- to expose students to the challenges of the design, assembly, and management of a project organization (a costly film production), in which the behavior of a multi-party, multi-talented group of professionals has to be driven from the germ of the idea throughout a whole bunch of contingencies, to the project’s completion
- to emphasize the importance of a leader with a vision, who understands the early foundations for establishing success in this temporary venture, and who counts on his family and a dedicated team of collaborators in the time- and budget-constrained project transformation
- to expose students to a situation in which the leader could easily have quit the project and, considering the circumstances, could have felt perfectly justified to do so
- to make students reflect on their personal and professional journey, in terms of meaning, guiding values, destination, fellow travelers, and other important elements

As in the Almodóvar case, the questions or topics for discussion are designed to focus students on some of the main themes of “The Directors Series,” such as social sources of power, symbiotic leadership, and competencies in a network community. Some questions may be as follows.

What are the challenges in running a temporary, creativity-based organization? Even though this question could equally apply to the Almodóvar
example, or to any other movie project, it works particularly well in the
Coppola case because the documentary provides such a profound insight into
the temporary organization and because the project experienced so many
highly threatening problems, including the heart attack of Martin Sheen, the
lead actor, and the complete destruction of the set by a tropical storm.

The question should direct students’ attention to important aspects in the
governance of project networks, from issues of vision to those of handling
unforeseen circumstances, choosing and managing collaborators, and man-
aging the media and the industry’s own grapevine. It leads on conveniently to
the next question about Coppola as a director.

What are the peculiarities of Coppola’s style as a film director? The docu-
mentary also allows for a rich discussion of Coppola’s own directing style.
Although some students who are familiar with other Coppola movies may be
inclined to comment on the style of his films in general, all will be able to con-
tribute based on what they see of Coppola in the documentary. Discussion
may range from the scale and cost of his movies and the role of his family and
friends, to more specific issues such as how he reacts to Sheen’s heart attack.
Furthermore, the opportunity now exists to make comparisons between
Coppola and Almodóvar.

Is Coppola a leader? And is he the dictator he claims to be? Coppola is
quoted in the documentary as saying that the director’s role is the last remain-
ing dictatorial role in democratic society. However, subsequent clips from the
documentary show him working with actors Marlon Brando and Dennis
Hopper, both of whom require considerable hand-holding. As he uses humor
to gently coax these big-name stars to eventual dominance of the scenes,
Coppola in action is a compelling contrast to Coppola in theory. He certainly
does not appear to behave like a dictator when he nudges the actors along a
fairly broad path, from which they regularly stray.

Coppola demonstrates the transformation leadership style suggested by
Burns (1978), and further refined by Bass (1985), and later by O’Toole
(1996). His style also clearly falls within the definition of mission critical
leadership (Miller, 2001), in that he focuses his project organization on get-
ing up to speed to deal with intense market pressure. The mission critical
leaders face time and financial constraints. As directors, they form a dedi-
cated team (in Coppola’s case this is predominantly Italian as opposed to the
actors who are all American) and understand the early foundations for estab-
lishing success in this venture.
What additional insights on sources of power do you gain from the Coppola case? Similar to Almodóvar, Coppola enjoys strong support from his family, and particularly in this case from his wife. Unlike the Spanish example, however, money and politics are very much part of the fray for Coppola and his Hollywood contemporaries. This naturally allows for some useful comparisons to the modern business environment. Coppola was distraught that the news of Sheen’s heart attack leaked to the outside world, as it would do no good to either Coppola or the film’s reputation. He was, therefore, obsessive about controlling information. There is no doubt that Coppola also gained power from the amount of money available to him, even though much was his own. As quoted earlier, he even commented that “we had access to too much money.”

Using the movie in class. Watching a scene from the movie in class and then going behind the scenes, via the documentary, to view how the scene was made, provides us with compelling insights into Coppola’s style. In an early scene, for example, Willard (Martin Sheen) is in a hotel room. He has been off-duty for some weeks, which he has largely spent in a drunken haze of self-reflection and debauchery. He is alone and is showing signs of severe mental distress: destroying furniture, cutting his hand to pieces when he punches himself in the mirror, and shouting and muttering indecipherable comments. It is an intense and disturbing scene.

The documentary shows how Coppola created this scene. The usually teetotaler Sheen got drunk for the occasion, which was thought to have caused his coronary attack. When he smashed his hand in the mirror, he really did cut it to shreds. Coppola set up this environment in which the line between fact and fiction was extremely slim. His leadership of Sheen was such that the actor drank alcohol when he was a teetotaler and he cut his hand when he was only acting—he was not acting Willard, he was living Willard. In the movie, Willard almost dies. In real life, Sheen almost dies. Having viewed all of this, students’ discussion of how—and why—Coppola went to such extremes in creating this scene are not only rich but also appropriate to comparisons with some of the more obsessive and dominating leaders in mainstream business.

Again, these highlights of the Coppola case are designed to whet the instructor’s appetite for this approach to teaching and the unique content provided by looking at movie directors. The use of a documentary, rather than a case, provides variation and originality, whereas the comparisons that can be made with Almodóvar, or other directors that may be used, illustrate differences between organizations as well as between individuals.
SESSION 3: JOURNEYS TO THE SELF

The concluding session draws on the richness of the first two sessions and presents an opportunity for a great deal of varied discussion and learning, with possible themes including the following:

- comparisons between the respective styles of Almodóvar and Coppola
- discussions on other movie directors
- comparisons between movie directors and leaders in mainstream business
- the nature of power
- the journey metaphor in relation to students’ personal and professional journeys

Rather than detail a structured process for this particular session, we largely leave its content to the instructor’s discretion. The following comments on the Almodóvar/Coppola comparison and on the journey metaphor, however, may serve as inducements to the discussions of this concluding session.

Almodóvar vs. Coppola. Comparing the two directors serves to cement the understanding of each individual’s leadership style and of each organization’s peculiarities. It also illustrates the fact—commonly seen in mainstream business—that there is more than one way to arrive at an ostensibly similar product.

Comparisons can be made in various areas, for example: the Spanish film industry versus Hollywood; the style of Almodóvar versus that of Coppola; and the role of Agustín Almodóvar versus that of Eleanor Coppola. In fact, the differences in organization behind the two men—the Spanish independent system and the Hollywood studio system—may be reflected in their respective styles and artistic worlds.

The Spaniard is a self-trained man who enjoys working repeatedly with particular actors and actresses, and most important, controls the whole process of moviemaking, intervening even in the posters of his films. Coppola is trained in the classics and the tradition of cinematography, whose film Apocalypse Now features only men. Unlike Almodóvar who shows his actors how to perform, Coppola is extremely laid back about what actors should be doing in a scene, allowing them at times even to write their own dialog. He seems to give his actors sufficient space to develop themselves into the characters they are portraying. Almodóvar prefers to work with modest budgets of $4 to 5 million and few actors. Coppola, on the contrary, is grandiose in budget and people.
Similarly, the way the two directors deal with information suggests stark contrasts between their respective approaches. Coppola berates a colleague for daring to pass on the news that Sheen was not well. He is obsessed with controlling information, probably because he knows that eventually he will have to deliver a product to the studio and distributors that cannot be tainted with a bad image. Almodóvar has no such preoccupation; he is cocooned in his artist world and leaves information handling to his organization. Because Agustín provides no-strings financing, Almodóvar has complete freedom. In contrast, Coppola is mounting a large project, with his own money, resulting in a product that he knows he will eventually have to sell.

Coppola is determined to continue filming through thick and thin, but the destruction of sets leaves him having to concede a 2-month break. Eleanor talks about her support for him as an artist. He has a personal vision, which she respects and supports. In fact, she finds it exciting living on the edge, recording a situation in which they may lose everything to achieve that vision. She admits that she does not know exactly why Coppola has given her this job, but she sticks to it doggedly. Coppola had been quoted as saying that his wife has never been his muse, mainly because she has never had confidence in him. Almodóvar’s brother, Agustín, has no such reservations and serves him unconditionally.

The journey metaphor. Even though we are dealing with the intricacies of the journey metaphor in this latter part of the article, it should be present—at least implicitly—from the beginning so that discussion (or at least students’ thoughts) can always come back to their own personal journeys. Conveying a lively and memorable image, metaphors are insightful ways of cognitively grasping the world. The metaphor of the journey is widely used in literature and the theme of the quest has its roots in many old cultures. In some tribal rituals, a young man becomes a fully fledged member of the tribe only after he has made a solitary journey into the wilderness. In its modified, contemporary version, young Australians, for example, go on a journey around the world, as a kind of initiation and part of growing up. Other important themes are those of the pilgrimage (the journeying to a sacred place as an act of devotion) or the Renaissance-embedded exploration (and the mapping activities of the expeditions to the Americas, North Africa, and elsewhere). Travel often involves crossing cultural boundaries, and learning about others and oneself. The more extreme the experience, the greater the possibilities to learn about oneself. The quest could be also a metaphysical one—for truth, beauty, or some important cause.

Journey metaphors are also ubiquitous in personal narratives of careers and management texts, taking the notions of sea journeys, knowledge expe-
ditions, trajectories, and whitewater rafting, among others (cf. Inkson, 2002, on the use of metaphors in thinking creatively about careers).

On a nonabstract level, the temporary (project-based) organization in its own way signifies a journey from the beginning of a project to the end. Unlike the context of the traditional organization, in which activity is ongoing in its nature, the temporary organization sees a project through from its germ to its completion. The trend toward this type of work is relevant to students who will be reentering the workplace as the abilities needed in this environment—including social skills and political skills—may well be distinct to those attributes that are useful in the traditional organization.

Looking at how the leader of the temporary organization tackles his or her journey can also be great educational material for inspiring effective leadership skills among students. Viewing leadership as a journey, for which one has ultimate control and responsibility, could be akin to teaching determination in leadership. The Coppola example provides all the ammunition needed; his reluctance to quit a risky disaster-ridden project may be indicative of some of the characteristics of truly successful leaders.

Then there is the metaphor on the abstract level. The journey narrated by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, and later by Coppola in *Apocalypse Now*, takes the reader/viewer through various stages of a physical and metaphysical journey, as the travelers continue up the river toward the source of evil. For the narrator, it is a trip of self-discovery, and even though we know he will return, the experience will change him completely. The “Don’t get off the boat” slogan adopted by Coppola could have translated as “I am going to persist with this metaphysical journey, whatever happens, for better or for worse. And I am going to be a stronger person as a result.”

These concepts provide a basis for students to reflect on and address concerns about their own journey. Although it may be a sensitive topic for some that they may not be willing to share with a class, all students can at least reflect personally on the meaning of the journeys, what their guiding values are, what their destination should be, and who their fellow travelers are.

**Conclusion**

“The Directors Series” provides plenty of subject areas for exploration, on practical and abstract levels. Leadership concepts, such as coleadership and sources of power, can be illustrated with real-life, accessible examples. The context of the project-based organization provides useful relevance to many modern businesses in which efficiency is sought after via the deployment of temporary teams and projects. Within this context the career web, rather than
the career ladder, dominates; this is a situation that may apply to more and more students in their future careers.

The series also provides a unique opportunity to look at the philosophical problem of the meaning of life and the achievement of consistency and continuity in one’s trajectory. The nature of power is an often overintellectualized topic that is brought to life by studying, for example, Coppola. The journey metaphor is one that, if handled in an appropriate way, can lead to enlightened conclusions on behalf of all students, whether they choose to share those thoughts or not. It can, incidentally, work in a similar and just as important way for instructors.

References


