

# JOURNAL OF BUSINESS MODELS

## Teaching the Alignment of Business Model Components: The Use of the Movie *La La Land*

Florence Krémer<sup>1</sup> et Thierry Verstraete<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

Using cinema in the pedagogy of entrepreneurship can be useful to illustrate the process and dynamics of the Business Model in a limited time. Here, the movie *La La Land* is used as a case study to analyze the links and the alignment between the value proposition and the other components of the BM, particularly the stakeholders.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education, movie, Business Model, Customer Value Proposition

Please cite this paper as: Krémer, F. and Verstraete, T. (2022), Teaching the Alignment of Business Model Components: The Use of the Movie *La La Land*, Online First

<sup>1</sup>Professor, University of Bordeaux (IAE Bordeaux, University School of Management), University of Bordeaux Entrepreneurship Research Team – IRGO (Institut de Recherche en Gestion des Organisations) – GRP Lab, Corresponding author : [florence.kremer@u-bordeaux.fr](mailto:florence.kremer@u-bordeaux.fr)

<sup>2</sup>Full Professor, University of Bordeaux (IAE Bordeaux, University School of Management), University of Bordeaux Entrepreneurship Research Team – IRGO (Institut de Recherche en Gestion des Organisations) – Holder of the Entrepreneurship Chair of the University of Bordeaux Foundation – Head of GRP Lab (Social Innovation Center) : <http://grp-lab.com>, [thierry.verstraete@u-bordeaux.fr](mailto:thierry.verstraete@u-bordeaux.fr)

ISSN: 2246-2465

DOI: 10.5278/jbm.v10i2.6663

## Introduction

The Business Model (BM) has become a dedicated tool for designing entrepreneurial projects and supporting entrepreneurs and an integral part of entrepreneurship pedagogy (Massa et al., 2017; Szopinski, 2019). The issue of *Journal of Business Models* dedicated to BM pedagogy (*Journal of Business Models*, 2019) testifies to the diversity of angles taken and practices used to teach the BM, whether it is to examine the tool itself (the artifact) or to study BMs (content framed by the artifact). One of the main difficulties of teaching the BM is thus to combine these two approaches: the container (the artifact with its components) and the content (the concrete cases studied), as the BM should not be presented as a mere juxtaposition of these components.

One way to overcome this difficulty is to work on the dynamic links between the components of the BM, since its relevance lies essentially in its systemic and evolving nature (Massa et al., 2018). In reality, entrepreneurs are confronted with these dynamic links from the outset in the implementation of their projects. This brings us back to Szopinski's (2019, p. 90) statement: *"Teaching BMI should therefore not only convey the business model concept itself, but also how to think and act as an entrepreneur »*.

However, the links between the components of a BM are not easy to grasp. Holm et al. (2019, p.2) highlighted this difficulty when they pointed to one of the key problems in teaching the BM: *"Business-model design often starts with a feasible customer value proposition (CVP) that addresses essential customer problems. Similarly, a firm's resources and value-chain partners need to be aligned in such a way as to create and deliver the CVP as economically as possible"*. This alignment questions the evolution of the components and the links between them. Teachers should therefore show their students the dynamic underpinnings of the BM as early as possible (Yrjölä, 2019), before they are fully engaged in setting up their own projects.

To this end, we tried to find a pedagogical form that would shed light on this aspect. Our goal is to evaluate the use of a film in the examination of these connections. Following Verstraete, Krémer and Néraudeau

(2018), who conducted a pedagogical action research using a film to help students understand why conventions matter when designing a BM, our aim is to use cinema to immerse learners in fiction. By watching films, learners may live an experience within a circumscribed time frame, which compensates for the long periods of time often needed to learn by doing. In learning by doing, project leaders need to combine theoretical knowledge learnt from models and empirical knowledge derived from social situations, thus learning the process by experiencing it (Cope and Watts, 2000; Neck, Greene and Brush, 2014; Hyams-Ssekasi and Caldwell, 2018). Although it is a very interesting process, one of the drawbacks of this method lies in the time it requires, as it follows the speed of real-life projects. Of course, simulations on fictitious projects can be limited to a few days or even a few hours (with formulas such as "24H to undertake"), but it may be difficult to make people understand the scope of the interaction with the stakeholders and their role in the construction of the project. Our aim was to raise awareness of the role played by stakeholders at an earlier stage, going beyond the mere provision of resources which students often settle for. The use of movies seen through the lens of the BM contributes to this insight.

It is also a way of combining theory and practice, as the chosen film shows the entrepreneurial experience of the protagonists. The film we chose to work with as a case study is *La La Land* (2017). It features entrepreneurs acting in the entertainment industry and tells the story of the two main protagonists as well as the evolving relationship between their professional motivations/ambitions and the realization/evolution of their entrepreneurial project. In doing so, it tackles the dynamics of the BM as the itinerary of the two characters may be used as a springboard for thinking about the components of a BM and their links. In particular, the viewer sees the value proposition of the project carried by the hero evolving according to his interactions with the various stakeholders. The movie was thus presented to reveal the links between this central component of the productive project and the other components of the BM, particularly the stakeholders and the essential place of the entrepreneur.

## Methodological Approach

### How can cinema be used in the pedagogy of entrepreneurship?

The value of using cinema in management courses (Champoux 1999; Huczinsky and Buchanan, 2004; Mathews, Fornaciari and Rubens, 2012; Rajendran and Andrew, 2014; Ayikoru and Park, 2019) and entrepreneurship courses (Van Gelderen and Verduyn, 2003; Verstraete, Krémer and Néraudau, 2018) has

received considerable attention. Table 1 summarizes the main benefits that entrepreneurship teachers can derive from using movies in an educational context. Among the arguments promoting their use, there is the ability to show students the “accelerated” construction of a BM (the movie lasts two hours, whereas the action spreads over several years), in a context full of emotions and interactions with the stakeholders.

Table 1.

Expected benefits	Authors
Cinema appeals to young people, who are familiar with images. Watching a movie is perceived as entertaining and increases their motivation to learn.	Fontenot and Fontenot (2008), Proserpio and Giaioia (2006), Verstraete et al. (2018)
Watching a film allows for better retention of information. Through its techniques (visual effects, sound effects, special effects, close-ups), cinema is a lively and emotional experience that captures attention in a powerful way. By combining verbal and non-verbal elements, cinema offers learning opportunities while accommodating various learning styles (visual and auditory/verbal).	Mathews et al. (2012), Rajendran and Andrew (2014), Ambrosini et al. (2009), Van Gelderen and Verduyn (2003), Ayikoru and Park (2019)
Cinema makes theories understandable by portraying them in real life. Movies thus encourage students to make connections between theory and practice (even if this practice is fiction). This is particularly interesting for complex or processual theories.	Rajendran and Andrew (2014), Ambrosini et al. (2009), Huczinsky et Buchanan (2004), Verstraete et al. (2018)
A movie contextualizes actions and decisions. Using cinema and fiction thus opens young people up to a world that is potentially different from their own and exposes them to an experience they do not yet have.	Champoux (1999), Rajendran and Andrew (2014), Verstraete et al. (2018)
Movies can trigger debate in the classroom, especially when the main characters face moral dilemmas and experience strong emotions, accentuated by many social interactions. Critical thinking is thus promoted.	Macy and Terry (2008), Champoux, (1999), Huczinsky and Buchanan (2004), Ayikoru and Park (2019), Van Gelderen and Verduyn (2003), Neck et al. (2007)

Table 1: Impact of using movies in pedagogy (management and entrepreneurship education)

## About the film and the choice of the *La La Land* case

*La La Land* was the subject of an instrumental case study. We used it as a medium for discussing a theoretical perspective, although it has its own intrinsic interest and may be studied for its own sake (Stake, 1994). *La La Land* is a movie that has been acclaimed by critics and viewers alike. It received six Oscars, including Best Director for Damien Chazelle. The movie is presented as a romantic musical comedy, paying tribute to the golden age of Hollywood studios and mythical musicals such as *Singin' In The Rain*. It stars a young woman, Mia (Emma Stone), and a young man, Sebastian (Ryan Gosling), both at the dawn of their artistic careers and in search of professional recognition. Mia is a waitress in a Hollywood restaurant but she dreams of becoming an actress. One night, she falls for Sebastian, a pianist with a passion for jazz, in the piano bar where he reluctantly performs, frustrated at not being able to fully express his talent. While the screenplay tells the love story between these two characters against a backdrop of retro melodies and choreography, the film also contains very interesting material on entrepreneurship. Indeed, the two characters share the particularity of fulfilling their dream and living their

profession as artists by becoming entrepreneurs: Mia, by creating a one-woman show and Sebastian, by opening his own jazz club. It is on this backdrop that *La La Land* reveals its pedagogical potential in the light it sheds on the contingencies to the value proposition of a BM. In particular, it demonstrates that the value proposition is under the contingency of the other components of the BM, sometimes in an unusual way by taking into account the emotions, motivations and aspirations of the project leaders. Here, our aim was to focus on the role of the entrepreneur and that of the stakeholders in the design of the value proposition. To this end, the case study comprised the following phases:

- concerted choice of a recent film, whose main character(s) has/have entrepreneurial projects, recognized both by the public and the critics;
- choice of the BM as an artifact, or a reading grid for analyzing the entrepreneurial projects undertaken by each of the two characters in the movie. Among the various representations of the BM in terms of components, we chose the GRP BM, which includes a wide range of components such as: the entrepreneur, the ecosystem and the conventions (see Figure 1).



Source: Verstraete and Jouison-Laffitte (2009, 2011a, 2011b)

Figure 1: The GRP BM components as a reading grid for coding

- viewing of the movie by the two researchers separately, with manual coding and breakdown of the sequences according to the components of the GRP BM. This coding is theoretical as the categories are based on a pre-existing theory (Miles and Huberman, 1994). For each BM component, the researchers let the movie speak for itself, thus allowing new sub-categories and links to emerge;
- comparison of the results between the two researchers and highlighting the richness of the movie in order to understand the value proposition and its links with the other components, particularly the entrepreneur and the stakeholders.

## Key Insights

The component-based analysis of the GRP BM reveals the importance of the alignment between the value proposition, the expectations of the entrepreneurs and those of the stakeholders. Although the analysis remains focused on this alignment, it inevitably touches on other components, particularly the “ecosystem” component and the “conventions” component.

The film shows several situations that question the adequacy between the value proposition as conceived by the entrepreneur and the expectations of the stakeholders. It warns entrepreneurs against neglecting the expectations of the consumers or, on the contrary, totally complying with them at the risk of forgetting their own desires. However, the final scenes of the movie show that it is possible to align the value proposition with the consumers’ demands if the entrepreneur pays attention to the market and to himself. Fundamentally, the trajectory of each character/entrepreneur shows how integrating stakeholders’ expectations into the value proposition and into their own evolution regarding their projects ultimately leads to a saving dynamic.

### Stakeholders’ expectations: a constraint for the value proposition?

Market law seems to be merciless for artists who want to make it in the Hollywood show-business ecosystem. Without an audience, there is no artistic entrepreneurial project. The loneliness of the

misunderstood artist who is cut off from his audience (or his target as an entrepreneur) is highlighted by a scene featuring Sebastian. In a piano bar, Sebastian plays his own compositions instead of the Christmas songs that his boss and customers expect him to play. In a dream, he pictures himself on stage in the spotlight. However, no one in the room seems to see or hear him, except Mia. Sebastian is fired for breaking the conventions: those of his contract and of the musical atmosphere in the piano bar at Christmas time. Here, the entrepreneur-artist refuses to understand the context that may or may not be receptive to his creations. In this scene, the rejection by the stakeholders (customers and employer) is total (see Table 2, Time 1). Sebastian has a purist side, by which he excludes the uninitiated. He may even appear contemptuous of the public by making no effort whatsoever to reach out to them. This translates into his intention to call his future jazz club “Chicken On A Stick”. This is an allusion to Charlie Parker whose nickname was Bird, a musical reference only the initiated would understand. The protagonist yearns for artistic recognition but he does not want to make concessions on his art by taking into account the public’s point of view and expectations, thus neglecting the market orientation (Narver and Slater, 1990). This scene thus illustrates the notion of supply marketing, as the character starts with his or her own needs and only opens up to the market in a second phase, without any iteration with the market or consideration of its needs. The movie shows that this approach can easily seduce entrepreneurs in the creative sector, while also being very risky.

On the other hand, being entirely guided by demand to define one’s offer can also lead to entrepreneurial failure, as the market leads the entrepreneur to deny his/her own values. By making extreme concessions to fashionable musical trends, Sebastian abandons jazz for pop-rock music and becomes successful. His new band is served by the intuition of its leader who complies with the expectations of the public and the rules of the ecosystem with a certain level of opportunism: choice of a production company, electro music, revisiting jazz for the general public, winks to his young hysterical fans. The band fills concert halls, goes on tour and knows how to play

Time 1: Lack of alignment between the CVP and the stakeholders

Entrepreneur	Customer Value proposition	Stakeholders (Customers)	Stakeholders (Employer)	Conventions in the sector
X	Christmas carols	Want to hear Christmas carols	Pays a pianist to play Christmas carols	Bars play Christmas carols at Christmas time The employment contract stipulates Christmas carols
Wants to play his own jazz music because to him, jazz overrules any style of music	Unknown jazz music	X	X	X

At first, Sebastian plays Christmas carols but he gets bored. He takes it upon himself to play jazz to align the CVP with his own beliefs, thereby losing alignment with stakeholders' expectations and conventions. As a result, he gets fired.

Time 2: Lack of alignment between the CVP and the entrepreneur's needs and beliefs

Entrepreneur	Customer Value proposition	Stakeholders (Partners)	Stakeholders (Customers)	Stakeholders (Producers)	Conventions in the sector	Ecosystem
Wants to concentrate on good music (elitist jazz), remains discreet	A jazz band	X	X	X	X	X
X	A pop-rock group for teenagers	Want to be successful, famous and rich	Listen to pop music, act like fans	Singers must show up to sell more records	Singers must be fashionable, and imitate successful bands	A lot of competition between bands

Sebastian does not manage to convince the other members of the band to opt for a jazz style. He bends to the codes of teenage bands to satisfy the expectations of all the stakeholders (partners, record company, consumers). The CVP is aligned with the market but by doing so, the entrepreneur denies himself.

Time 3: Alignment between CVP and BM components leads to success

Entrepreneur	Customer Value proposition	Stakeholders (Customers)	Conventions in the sector	Ecosystem
Wants to play his own jazz music Evolution: jazz can be shared with non-experts	A trendy jazz club on a busy street with a name that doesn't exclude the uninitiated	Want to listen to good music in a nice place, and discover jazz	Bars have a cosy and warm atmosphere	Bars are concentrated in busy and trendy streets

Table 2: Aligning the Customer Value Proposition with others BM components

with the sometimes vulgar codes of show business. The photo shoot scene is a good example. In order to please his fans and be a “fashionable singer”, Sebastian agrees to pose like a rapper with a ridiculous cap and fake smiles that make him feel totally ill-at-ease. On the surface, he seems to have achieved his goal of being listened to and making a living from his music, but he is recognized neither for what he likes nor for what he is. Here, the movie tackles the issue of inadequacy between the project leader, the value proposition and the balance in value exchanges. The project no longer brings enough value to the leader. Although the pop-rock band brings material comfort and fame, it affects his personal life and contradicts his values. The fact of marketing one’s product is represented as a compulsory step to comply with demand, however far off it may be from the personality of the entrepreneur, who sells his soul to the devil (see Table 2, Time 2).

### Finding an alignment between the value proposition and the other BM components

The links between the entrepreneur, the value proposition and the target are more optimistic in the second part of the movie. The end of *La La Land* offers a constructive vision of the conciliation between the entrepreneur’s value proposition and his encounter with the public.

Five years after his break-up with Mia, Sebastian has opened his dream jazz club on a busy Los Angeles street. The public is there, the club is packed and it is a huge success. Sebastian has made a concession: he has given up the name he originally wanted, “*Chicken On A Stick*”, to call his club “*Seb’s*” like Mia, a jazz neophyte representative of the majority of potential consumers, had suggested to him. He has also used the logo she had created: a sober and efficient design, which combines his first name and a musical note, expressing his identity and passion in an accessible way for the customers (see Table 2, Time 3).

With an educational aim, this scene echoes the interest of a qualitative study task given to young student-entrepreneurs in training: to think about a logo and a brand name and test its acceptability by a target public, while remaining faithful to its original

values. The scene shows that the initial idea needs to be worked on and that it has been improved by submitting it to the opinion of others, in a context of listening, dialogue and iteration with the market. Sebastian has finally found a balance between his passion and the public’s expectations. The concessions he previously accepted or had to put up with in the past (playing in a fashionable band in contradiction with his values, losing his girlfriend because of touring) have helped him raise the capital to open his club and learn how to communicate with the public. They were therefore not in vain. This observation underlines the temporal dimension of conciliation between the entrepreneur’s value proposition and those for whom it is intended. This conciliation may require a learning phase or sufficient time to gather the appropriate resources.

## Conclusion

In order to teach the BM and show the links and alignment between its various components, we suggest using cinema as a teaching medium. A movie is a narrative that tells a story with events that lead to others (Huczynski and Buchanan, 2004). In entrepreneurial pedagogy, movies seem particularly relevant to us to show how the BM (project artifact) is constructed temporally, i.e. the ways in which the project leader learns over time how to gain collective support around him. Cinema thus allows learners to see a fast-paced, process-based experience in a context that includes emotions and social interactions and a time frame that is compatible with the volume of a student course. Indeed, a film offers the advantage of contracting both time and space.

In our opinion, *La La Land* was a relevant choice to teach the dynamic character of the BM, notably through the definition of the value proposition and how it is interwoven with stakeholders’ expectations (Holm et al., 2019; Yrjölä, 2019): those of the clients and those of other parties encountered in the film (the production company, the other members of the rock band, the owners of bars and theaters), as well as those of the entrepreneur himself and the ecosystem, while dealing with the conventions of the social environments concerned.

One of the limitations of this article is that we do

not present the results of a pedagogical action research that would show how students react to this case. This analysis could be pursued by discussing the many other aspects of entrepreneurship theory present in *La La Land*, whether they are related to stakeholders (support of the love partner, Pygmalion effect), the entrepreneurial process (career incidents and learning) or to female entrepreneurship. These dimensions are an opportunity for a rich pedagogical case that could be empirically tested with a group trained in entrepreneurship.

This research also contributes to revealing cinematographic works as a pedagogical medium that can be used to facilitate the BM's learning/teaching process. Future research using cinema in BM pedagogy could also lead to practical and pedagogical evolutions, such as the creation of a platform hosting related resources: films or scenes with entrepreneurs acting. It would then be a matter of adding to the database the media identified as relevant or tested pedagogical cases combining entrepreneurship, pedagogy and cinema.

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