

## Hyper-efficiency is bad business

**Level:** Advanced (C1–C2)

**Time:** approximately 90 minutes

**Business topics:** management styles, efficiency, cost-cutting, customer experience

**Business language:** useful vocabulary, business phrases, cost-cutting strategies

**Activities:** key words, understanding the text, business language, case study discussion, presenting a cost-cutting strategy

**Groups:** whole class, one-to-one, small groups

**Overview:** This article discusses how hyper-efficiency is ultimately bad for business in the way it affects customers and employees. The example of Southwest Airlines is the main thread, but other businesses are also mentioned.

### 1. Warmer

- a. With a partner, students answer the three questions, which lead into the article. After they have talked to a partner for a few minutes, get students to share their thoughts and ideas with the rest of the group. Find out how many of the students have flown with a budget airline and elicit other examples of cost-cutting.
- b. Ask students to skim the article. Remind them that this means reading the article very quickly only to identify the main idea. They can opt to read the first and last sentences of each paragraph only.

**Key:**

b

### 2. Key words

- a. Now ask students to scan the article to complete the activity. Remind them that this means moving their eyes over the text to locate a specific word. Have them first read the definition and identify the part of speech that they need to look for in the paragraph.

**Key:**

1. *stranded*
2. *chalk up, chalked up*
3. *meltdown*
4. *circumvent*
5. *financialised*
6. *downsize*
7. *bailout*
8. *incentivise*
9. *bolster*
10. *drag*
11. *gouging*
12. *anecdotal*

### 3. Understanding the article

Ask students to read the questions and then read the article in more detail to complete the statements. Have them compare their answers in pairs before checking answers with the whole class. Answers below are suggested answers only. Other answers are possible.

**Key (suggested answers):**

1. *the efficiency management model*
2. *company to work for and fly with*
3. *investors*
4. *paying dividends to investors, share buybacks and staff lay-offs*
5. *fears*
6. *lean and mean / hyper-efficient*
7. *introduction of low-cost competitors, bringing down prices*
8. *cannot possibly*
9. *get their money back*
10. *lack of a work–life balance*

### 4. Business language – word pairs and phrases

- a. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to match the phrases and their definitions. Encourage them to refer back to the text.

**Key:**

1. *be at the sharp end of something*
2. *no frills*
3. *hub and spoke*
4. *poster child*
5. *take the helm*
6. *lean and mean*
7. *push to the brink*

- b. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups and write questions to ask each other using the phrases. Encourage them to look at the text or consult more examples of the phrases in use online. Provide corrections to students' questions and then regroup students so they work in new pairs or groups to ask and answer their questions.

**Customer complaints:** *Products are great, but many times not all menu options are available; service is sometimes slow; customers wish it were open earlier and later.*

## 5. Discussion

- a. Put the students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all of the questions, bring the whole class back together so that they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions.

## 6. Wider business theme – the human impact of cost-cutting

- a–b. Put students into pairs or small groups of three and ask them to follow the task instructions, culminating in short presentations to the rest of the group. Encourage them to use some of the phrases provided.

If students struggle to choose a company to complete the profile with, you can provide this example:

**Name:** *Blueberry Café*

**Sector:** *Food and beverage*

**Products/Services:** *offers a range of coffee and tea and bread (supplied by local bakery) from Tuesday to Sunday, 9:00 to 18:00*

**Operations/Processes:** *Coffee and tea are ordered from supplier twice a month. Orders sometimes arrive late and not all options are available to customers. Bakery is reliable, but the same selection of bread is ordered every day and many times there is waste.*

**Employees:** *one full-time manager who also serves customers; two baristas (They work different shifts, but sometimes neither of them is available); one person who is hired on a temporary basis to help with serving, cleaning, and preparing drinks.*