

## Hyper-efficiency is bad business

**Level:** Intermediate (B1–B2)

**Time:** Approximately 90 minutes

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

**Business language:** useful vocabulary, financial vocabulary, 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 businesses 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

- With a partner, students answer the three questions which lead into the article. After they have talked with 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.
- Ask students to skim the article individually. 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

- Now ask students to scan the article individually 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:**

- budget*
- meltdown*
- disrupters*
- innovation*
- downsizing*
- pension*
- ban, banned*
- resilience*
- workload*
- infrastructure*
- gouging*
- anecdotal*

### 3. Understanding the article

- Ask students to read the questions and then read the article in more detail to choose the best answer. Have them compare their answers in pairs before checking answers with the whole class.

**Key:**

- |             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1. <i>a</i> | 6. <i>a</i> |
| 2. <i>a</i> | 7. <i>b</i> |
| 3. <i>b</i> | 8. <i>b</i> |
| 4. <i>a</i> | 9. <i>a</i> |
| 5. <i>b</i> |             |

### 4. Business language – finance

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

**Key:**

- |             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1. <i>d</i> | 4. <i>e</i> |
| 2. <i>b</i> | 5. <i>a</i> |
| 3. <i>f</i> | 6. <i>c</i> |

- Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to complete the activity. Encourage them to first read the sentence with the gap and to try to guess what the missing word could mean.

**Key:**

- |                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. <i>capital</i>  | 4. <i>profit</i>   |
| 2. <i>return</i>   | 5. <i>buybacks</i> |
| 3. <i>invested</i> | 6. <i>dividend</i> |

## 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 impact of cost-cutting

- a. and b. Put students into pairs or small groups and ask them to follow the task instructions.

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 ordered from supplier twice a month; sometimes orders arrive late and not all options are available to customers. Bakery is reliable, but same selection of bread is ordered every day and there is often waste.*

**Employees:** *one full-time manager who also serves customers; two baristas (They different shifts, but sometimes neither of them is available.), one waiter/busboy on a temporary contract in charge of serving customers, cleaning, and preparing drinks.*

**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.*