

What Is Company Culture?

SUBMITTED BY: Nina Hoe, University of Pennsylvania

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

In this lesson, students read two articles from the Knowledge@Wharton business journal about company culture and creating a successful company through employee culture. Students are asked to reflect on the companies' strategies and reflect on their own classroom culture. Finally, students create a fictitious company and strategize an appropriate company culture.

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“Working for the Family Business: Are You Ready?”](#)
- [“Educator Toolkit: Diversity and Inclusion in Life and Work”](#)
- [“Behind the Scenes at Urban Outfitters”](#)

Standards:

Leadership – Building Team and Culture

Common Core Standard(s):

RI.9-10.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

SL.9-10.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Objectives/Purposes: Students will identify and understand some important elements to creating a company culture designed for success. Students think critically about which elements they would utilize in creating their own culture.

Knowledge@Wharton Articles:

- “Urban Outfitters’ Glen Senk: Look for the Right Culture, Diverse Opinions and ‘Bad News’”
- “What Makes Southwest Airlines Fly”

Whole Class Discussion (5 mins)

Student Worksheet

1. What is “culture?”
2. What is “classroom culture?”
3. What is a “company culture?”
4. Who determines a culture?
5. Why is it important?
6. How can culture be developed?

Small Group/Pair Activity.

Have students read the K@W Articles: “Urban Outfitters’ Glen Senk: Look for the Right Culture, Diverse Opinions and ‘Bad News’” and “What Makes Southwest Airlines Fly.” In small groups, have them answer the following questions. (5 – 10 mins)

As they read, have them identify:

- The core elements of Southwest Airlines’ company culture as presented in the article.
- The core elements of Urban Outfitters’ company culture as presented in the article.
- The respective goals of each company.

(20 mins) – Students can be arranged in a variety of ways to complete this exercise. There can be a SW group and a UO group (and a classroom group). Groups can present to the class about their particular company.

1. Make lists of the core elements of both Southwest Airlines' and Urban Outfitter's company cultures. Define and elaborate more on what these elements are and entail.
2. What are the similarities/overlaps?
3. Which elements are unique?
4. What are some of the "keys" that Kelleher and Senk describe for a successful business?
5. What are the goals of each company? (What service(s) are they trying to provide? What is their bottom line?)
6. How do their company cultures match up to these goals (or not)?
7. What is **competitive advantage** and how do the companies talk about this in the article?
8. What challenges do you think either of these companies might have faced in trying to create these specific cultures?

9. What are the goals of your class/classroom? (Think academic, social, personal, etc.)
10. What kind of "culture" would best support these goals? What are elements of this culture?
11. What could your class and teacher do to create a desirable culture?
12. What might be some barriers to instilling this?

(10 mins)

Pick a fictitious company that your group can agree upon.

13. What are this company's goals?
14. What is your product?
15. What are you ultimately trying to do?
16. What type of culture would you like to create? What are the key elements of this culture? (Be specific.)
17. How will you go about implementing/instilling this culture? (Be specific.)
18. What might be some barriers to instilling this?
19. Did you use any of the elements suggested by Kelleher and Senk? Why or why not?

Tying It All Together:

1. Have student groups share their answers to questions 1 – 12.
2. Have students present companies and company culture strategies.

3. How do a company's goals relate to their culture?
4. What are barriers to creating a desired company culture?

Practice Outside of the Classroom: Talk to any of your friends or family members who are employed. Ask them about their company culture.

What Worked and What I Would Do Differently:

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