

# **The Scranton Summit: Dunder Mifflin's Demise**

*Thomas Jefferson Model United Nations Conference*

TechMUN XXXII

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High School Specialized Agency

Co-Chairs: Chinmayee Yerraguntla & Tanmayee Maddineni

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology

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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to TechMUN XXXI, but more importantly, to the Scranton Summit committee! We are your chairs, and we're excited to hear what you guys have to say about one of the most iconic TV shows of all time. This committee doesn't necessarily take place in a canon timeline, but in an alternate universe where all the beloved characters coexist! Each and every person on this committee is related to the show in some capacity, and although some may be more well-known than others, they are all equally important in the grand scheme of the events that will occur. It is of the utmost importance that you represent yourself from the first committee session to the last. The first topic addresses PR disasters and their implications within Dunder Mifflin while the second topic discusses Sabre's acquisition of Dunder Mifflin.

We are looking for well-researched delegates with content-filled speeches who are able to effectively present their solutions in a diplomatic manner. We believe that the most important attribute of a delegate is to be a leader who is given leadership, rather than one who takes it. Make sure to try to give as many speeches as possible and as delegates ourselves, we understand that a few mistakes in some of your speeches shouldn't dictate your experience for the rest of the committee. No matter how many conferences you have done, speeches you have given, or unnecessary WhatsApp group chats you have been a part of, we are striving to make sure TechMUN this year will be a conference for each and every one of you to remember. Most importantly, have fun with this committee! Feel free to dress in character. Please do not hesitate to email us at [scrantonsummittechmun25@gmail.com](mailto:scrantonsummittechmun25@gmail.com) if you have any questions or concerns.

**Chinmayee Yerraguntla & Tanmayee Maddineni**

Co-Chairs, The Scranton Summit: Dunder Mifflin's Demise

## **Introduction to Dunder Mifflin and The Office**

Welcome to Dunder Mifflin! For those who don't know, Dunder Mifflin is a mid-sized paper supply company that serves as the central setting for the hit television series *The Office* (U.S.), which aired from 2005 to 2013. The company has its headquarters in New York City, with the Scranton, Pennsylvania, branch serving as the show's primary focus. Dunder Mifflin is best known for its eccentric employees, with Michael Scott, Scranton's regional manager, serving as the most egregious example of workplace misconduct.

Dunder Mifflin is a mid-sized paper supplier that specializes in selling paper, office supplies, and printing services to businesses. Unlike major competitors such as Staples or Office Depot, Dunder Mifflin prides itself on offering personalized customer service and direct relationships with clients. However, the company struggles to compete with larger retailers and online services due to its outdated business model and limited resources. Dunder Mifflin has faced multiple financial difficulties, including economic downturns leading to branch closures, bankruptcy, later acquired by Sabre, a tech-focused printer company, and internal inefficiencies.

During its ownership under Sabre, the company faced major shifts, including a shift toward selling printers and an attempt to modernize its structure. However, Sabre's leadership ultimately failed, leading to David Wallace, former CFO, repurchasing Dunder Mifflin and restoring it as an independent company. Dunder Mifflin also has a highly unorthodox and chaotic work environment, largely influenced by its regional manager, Michael Scott. Despite HR policies and Toby Flenderson's best efforts, the Scranton branch often ignores corporate guidelines, resulting in workplace antics, ethical dilemmas, and questionable leadership decisions.

In this committee, delegates will have the opportunity to both re-navigate the Sabre acquisition to turn it into a more fruitful endeavor as well as tackle some of the PR disasters that helped lead to the company's demise in the first place.

## **Topic 1: PR Disasters: Reviewing Ethical and Legal Implications**

### ***Introduction:***

Overtime, there have been a few corporate collapses that have been as drastic and mismanaged as the downfall of Dunder Mifflin. Once a successful regional paper supplier, the company's public image faced many struggles after internal scandals, questionable decisions regarding management, and poorly handled crises. There was no limit to the chaos; from inappropriate office behavior going viral to financial instability, and customer service failures, the demise of Dunder Mifflin serves as a prime case in corporate PR disasters.

Delegates must evaluate the role of corporate leadership, media mismanagement, and legal violations in shaping public perception.

One of the biggest reasons that led to Dunder Mifflin's demise was how toxic the work environment, specifically at the Scranton Branch. It was known for an unprofessional workplace because of inappropriate behavior from management, since any misconduct toward any employee was ignored or not regarded by any means. Many problematic workplace romances between coworkers led to internal scandals. In addition, there was offensive conduct such as insensitivity comments and jokes, and even discriminatory behavior that led to public backlash and potential legal action. These issues became known publicly, through leaked emails, employee whistleblowers, and social media posts.

Financial instability was prevalent amongst Dunder Mifflin as well. The company attempted to hide their financial struggles and declining profits, causing bankruptcy rumors to spread. There were many questionable spending practices including excessive bonuses given to executives, unnecessary office renovations, and misallocated resources which immensely reduced the company's funds. Dunder Mifflin struggled to adapt to digital alternatives as the

demand for paper sharply declined, so they lacked customer interest as well. All of this led to inconsistencies in their financial reports, which caused investors to withdraw their support, wholly weakening the company's financial position.

Lastly, there was poor media marketing. Dunder Mifflin launched several marketing campaigns that were criticized for being blatantly offensive because they touched on trivial social issues. Even attempts to rebrand backfired, putting the image of the company in a tenuous position because they lacked an innovative touch. Customer complaints were mishandled or ignored, rather than properly addressed, further damaging the company's reputation. All of these factors ultimately made it difficult to have a thriving and continuing business.

***Relevant Issues:***

In Dunder Mifflin's ultimate downfall, the Scranton Branch became a prime symbol of corporate mismanagement, workplace misconduct, and financial instability. One of the most prominent issues is unethical workplace culture and employee misconduct, because of the frequent legal actions that took place because employees were always engaging in problematic interactions. There were several public incidents, not just limited to workplace harassment and ignoring all HR policies. Even with all this mayhem within the company, leadership took no responsibility. Rather, management took questionable decisions such as responding to scandals with blatant silence or immensely contradictory statements, which lost public trust and potential legal liabilities.

With the severely tarnished reputation of the company, Dunder Mifflin launched marketing campaigns to revamp their image, but only made things worse due to the use of offensive language, and not being welcoming to the consumer population, since customer concerns were rarely ever addressed. Dunder Mifflin's failed attempts to rebrand left it unable to

compete with larger corporations, because they could not keep up with the trends or transition toward digital alternatives. Additionally, there was reckless spending which led to financial instability of the company overall.

***Possible Solutions:***

In hopes of repairing the reputation of Dunder Mifflin, steps should be taken to have an ethical framework that establishes strict regulations and workplace policies to rebuild trust among employees. Training sessions could be implemented to improve management and employee culture with one another. A new management team should be hired, tasked with dealing with PR and crises, so the publicity of Dunder Mifflin can slowly improve. This also consists of restructuring current leadership, so that those who are more experienced with ethical practice can steer the company in the right direction. By finally releasing public statements and interacting with customers, public trust can be regained because of this newfound transparency.

This new approach also consists of being open concerning finances, so that investor trust can be rebuilt, and unnecessary expenses won't be executed, but rather focused on using the budget to switch to digital alternatives so that the company can climb its way back to the competitive standpoint. Dunder Mifflin can win back customers if they use their management team in the right way, including reshaping their policies towards customer service, so no consumer would be neglected, and if PR campaigns targeting customer care play out successfully.

***Questions to consider:***

1. What were the main causes of Dunder Mifflin's PR disasters?
2. What legal and ethical violations did Dunder Mifflin commit, and what actions could have been taken to prevent them?
3. What was the role of HR and corporate policies in either causing or preventing PR disasters?
4. How did financial instability contribute to the company's failures?
5. How can the company's public image and trust with its customers and investors be rebuilt?

***Helpful Links:***

- <https://prowlpr.com/2018/11/07/9932/>
- <https://www.insightful.io/blog/workplace-dysfunction-office>
- <https://www.reuters.com/legal/legalindustry/best-practices-crisis-management-preparation-2023-06-13/>
- <https://www.contactmonkey.com/blog/crisis-communication-case-studies>



## **Topic 2: Dunder Mifflin vs. Sabre: Acquisition Crisis**

### ***Introduction:***

In 2009, Dunder Mifflin Paper Company faced severe financial problems, leading to bankruptcy due to an outdated business model, mismanagement, and increasing competition from large retailers and online suppliers. After multiple branches closed and with stock values plummeting, the company was forced to seek external buyers, which is where Sabre comes into play.

Sabre Corporation, a Florida-based technology company specializing in printers and office technology, acquired Dunder Mifflin. Sabre sought to modernize Dunder Mifflin by shifting focus from paper sales to printer technology. While Sabre introduced new policies, their approach was met with resistance from Dunder Mifflin employees. The cultural clash between Sabre's rigid corporate culture and Dunder Mifflin's chaos became a major source of tension. Eventually, Sabre itself collapsed due to financial scandals and internal mismanagement, leading to David Wallace, former CFO of Dunder Mifflin, repurchasing Dunder Mifflin, restoring it as an independent entity.

Some of the key players in the acquisition are Jo Bennet and Gabe Lewis. Jo Bennet is the CEO of Sabre and purchased Dunder Mifflin as part of Sabre's expansion into the office supply industry. She was known as an extremely aggressive leader and was a strong believer in survival of the fittest. She prioritized corporate efficiency over employee comfort, which went against Scranton's sacred values. Gabe Lewis is Sabre's corporate liaison for Dunder Mifflin and served as Sabre's primary enforcer at the Scranton branch. He acted as a corporate watchdog, but struggled to gain the respect of Dunder Mifflin employees due to his lack of authority. He

became a physical symbol of Sabre's cultural disconnect with Dunder Mifflin, often becoming the butt of many jokes.

***Relevant Issues:***

When Sabre Corporation acquired Dunder Mifflin, it introduced a series of corporate policies aimed at modernizing the company and its practices. These changes were met with dissatisfaction and resistance. One of the most significant changes was Sabre's emphasis on selling printers over paper. Employees were required to push Sabre-brand printers alongside office supplies, which was new to Dunder Mifflin's sales team since they had no experience in selling printers.. The situation worsened when it was discovered that Sabre's printers had a serious design flaw, causing them to overheat and catch fire during extended use. This scandal let to further damage to Sabre's reputation as well as increased friction between Dunder Mifflin's employees and Sabre's executives.

In addition to changes in sales strategy, Sabre implemented a strict corporate hierarchy, reducing Dunder Mifflin's power to make its own changes on a regional level. Under Dunder Mifflin's original business plan, managers like Michael Scott were able to make decisions that best suited their employees and customers, which is what made Scranton the most successful branch. Under Sabre's rule, all major decisions required corporate approval, leading to inefficiency and frustration among employees. When Jo Bennet first arrived at Scranton, she forced Michael Scott and Jim Halpert to get rid of their two-manager partnership, which actually helped the workplace environment. Long-time staff, accustomed to a personalized, flexible workplace, found themselves subject to rigid oversight, which greatly reduced productivity. Gabe Lewis, Sabre's corporate liaison to Dunder Mifflin, became a laughingstock in the office and garnered neither respect nor camaraderie from the Scranton employees of Dunder Mifflin.

Another major source of tension was Sabre's reduction of employee benefits. Previously, Dunder Mifflin had provided a comprehensive health plan (which Dwight Schrute previously tried to undermine), but under Sabre, employees were forced to find their insurance. Additionally, bonuses and commissions were cut, particularly affecting the sales team. Longtime employees like Stanley Hudson and Phyllis Vance found themselves less motivated to perform. This policy, aimed at cutting costs, instead weakened employee loyalty and reduced overall sales performance.

Sabre also tried to introduce a relocation program, which encouraged or required employees to transfer to the company's headquarters in Tallahassee, Florida. This effort was largely unpopular among Dunder Mifflin's staff. Jim Halpert, Dwight Schrute, and Stanley Hudson participated reluctantly, while others resisted entirely. The program ultimately collapsed when Sabre itself disintegrated.

Ultimately, there were many controversial and unpopular policies that Sabre tried to force upon Dunder Mifflin, ultimately leading to its downfall. In committee, delegates will explore these tensions and their effects on the workplace.

### ***Possible Solutions:***

To reimagine the Sabre-Dunder Mifflin acquisition, delegates must focus on what made it fail in the first place. The key to any successful acquisition is ensuring that there is a balance between authority from the new company as well as the maintenance of old practices and traditions from the old companies. The primary issue with Sabre's leadership was its failure to reconcile with Dunder Mifflin's work culture, forcing changes that alienated employees and customers. Dunder Mifflin's quirky culture was its charm and cause for success, and Sabre introduced policies that aimed to get rid of what made the Scranton branch so productive.

Delegates should think about reframing Sabre's policies or coming up with new ones entirely to fit better with Dunder Mifflin. Moreover, delegates should think about their complaints and priorities as employees of Dunder Mifflin or Sabre. For those who aren't directly employed by either company, think about ways you can externally influence policies executed in the acquisition in a way that will benefit you.

### ***Questions to Consider:***

1. What was the main cause of the acquisition failing in the first place?
2. Which policies were valid but badly framed, and which policies need a complete overhaul?
3. If you were Jo Bennet or Gabe Lewis, how would you better integrate the two companies and maintain Dunder Mifflin's integrity?
4. What's more important: profit or employee satisfaction?
5. What would an ideal work environment look like in the Sabre-Dunder Mifflin office?
6. How can you incorporate Sabre's technology-first perspective into Dunder Mifflin's traditional paper-selling business culture?

### ***Helpful Links***

- [Office Ladies - Podcast by Jenna Fischer \(Pam Halpert/Beesly\) and Angela Kinsey \(Angela Martin\)](#)
- Look at character deep dives! (ex: [Character Deep Dive: Michael Scott - Marvelous Geeks Media](#))
- <https://www.nbc.com/nbc-insider/what-is-everyones-job-at-dunder-mifflin-on-the-office>
- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Office-American-television-program>

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## **The Scranton Summit - Dossier**

Michael Scott, Regional Manager  
Dwight Schrute, Assistant (to the) Regional Manager  
Jim Halpert, Sales Associate  
Pam Beesly, Office Manager  
Angela Martin, Head of Accounting  
Oscar Martinez, Accountant  
Kevin Malone, Accountant  
Stanley Hudson, Sales Associate  
Phyllis Vance, Sales Associate  
Meredith Palmer, Supplier Relations Representative  
Creed Bratton, Quality Assurance Manager  
Ryan Howard, Temp  
Kelly Kapoor, Customer Service  
Toby Flenderson, Human Resources  
Darryl Philbin, Warehouse Manager  
Gabe Lewis, Scranton Sabre Representative  
Andy Bernard, Sales Associate  
Erin Hannon, Receptionist  
Robert California, CEO of Dunder Mifflin-Sabre  
David Wallace, CFO of Dunder Mifflin  
Jan Levinson, former Vice President of Northeast Sales  
Karen Filippelli, former Stamford Sales Representative/Utica Branch Regional Manager  
Holly Flax, Human Resources  
Jo Bennett, CEO of Sabre  
Nellie Bertram, Special Projects Manager  
Clark Green, Sales Associate  
Pete Miller, Sales Associate  
Mose Schrute, Schrute Farms Employee (Dwight Schrute's cousin)  
Bob Vance, Owner of Vance Refrigeration (married to Phyllis Vance)  
Todd Packer, Traveling Salesman  
Lonny Collins, Warehouse Worker  
Madge Madsen, Warehouse Worker  
Nate Nickerson, Warehouse Worker  
Hank Tate, Security Guard  
Billy Merchant, Property Manager  
Nick, IT Specialist  
Cathy Simms, Temporary Receptionist  
Val Johnson, Warehouse Worker / Warehouse Supervisor

Hunter, Assistant to Jan Levinson (and musician)  
DeAngelo Vickers, Brief Regional Manager