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IN SEMESTER ASSESSMENT
PROJECT REPORT
ON

Southwest Airlines - A Fortune 500 Company

SUBMITTED TO

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Southwest Airlines, founded in 1971, has grown from a small Texas-based carrier to one of the largest and most admired airlines in the world. Headquartered in Dallas, Texas, Southwest is renowned for its exceptional customer service, low-cost fares, and a unique corporate culture that emphasises friendliness and reliability. The airline's goal is to use affordable, dependable, and amiable air travel to help people connect with the things that really matter in their life.



1.1 Achievements

1. 47 Years of Profitability: Southwest Airlines has achieved an extraordinary milestone of 47 consecutive years of profitability. This remarkable achievement underscores the airline's robust business model and its ability to navigate through various economic cycles while maintaining financial stability.

2. Largest 737 Fleet: Southwest is the airline with the world's largest fleet of Boeing 737s. This strategic choice allows the airline to streamline maintenance and training processes, contributing to operational efficiency and cost savings. The uniformity of the fleet also enhances scheduling flexibility and reliability.

3. Customer Satisfaction: Southwest consistently ranks high in customer satisfaction surveys. The airline's commitment to providing a positive travel experience, including no hidden fees, free checked bags, and a generous frequent flyer program, has earned it a loyal customer base.

1.2 An overview of the strategies used by Southwest

1. Low-Cost Carrier Model: As a pioneer of the low-cost carrier concept, Southwest Airlines prioritised point-to-point travel above the conventional hub-and-spoke network. This approach reduces travel time and operational costs, allowing the airline to offer competitive fares.

2. Operational Efficiency: The airline operates more efficiently since it only uses one kind of aircraft, the Boeing 737. This strategy simplifies maintenance, training, and scheduling, leading to lower operational costs and increased reliability.

3. Employee-Centric Culture: Southwest's corporate culture is centred around its employees. The airline thinks that contented workers translate into contented



passengers. This philosophy is reflected in its policies and practices, which promote a positive work environment and encourage employee engagement.

4. Technological Innovation: Southwest invests in technology to improve operational efficiency and customer experience. From advanced booking systems to mobile apps that streamline the travel process, the airline leverages technology to stay ahead of the competition.

5. Environmental Responsibility: Southwest is committed to reducing its environmental impact. The airline has put in place a number of programs to encourage sustainable practices, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and increase fuel efficiency.

2.1 Planning: Blueprint for Organisational Success

Planning is a crucial aspect that ensures the profitability and sustainability of a company. A few key features adopted by SouthWest led to its success and helped it attain profits for 47 consecutive years.

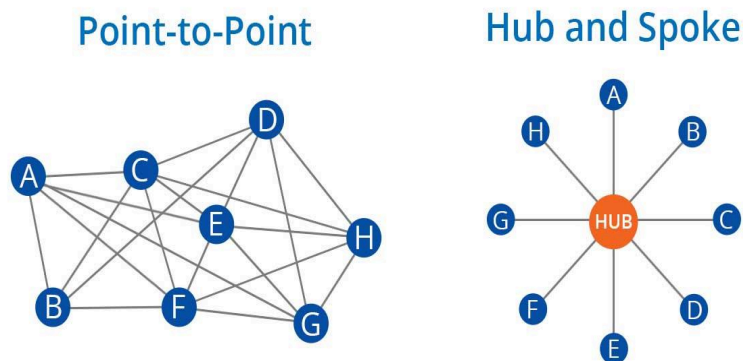
2.2 Point-to-Point Planning: Southwest's Strategy for Success

In the 1960s, the "Hub and Spoke" model of airline operations was the most widely used.

Hub and Spoke model — As the name implies, there is a specified hub from whence the flights originate, and the destinations are the spokes. The main disadvantage of a hub-and-spoke model is its rigidity; even a slight alteration in airline routing due to weather or other factors can have a domino effect on other scheduled flights. The hub-and-spoke model's main advantage is its reduced route count.

Point-to-point approach — Southwest concentrated on this model as a low-cost carrier, bringing about significant process improvements and perfecting it to attain excellent operational efficiency.

Every flight in the point-to-point paradigm is a single trip. One nonstop flight connects the origin with the destination. The point-to-point concept provides greater flexibility and travel possibilities than the hub and spoke architecture.



2.3 Only one type of aircraft

The fleets of the majority of airline firms comprise a variety of aircraft carriers. Southwest, on the other hand, only uses Boeing 737 aircraft for their operations. This has shown to be a benefit for Southwest Airlines strategically.

This leads to benefits like more accessible training for the support staff and the pilots due to only one kind of aircraft. This leads to easier maintenance and inventory of spare parts, and in case of a delay, an alternate aircraft can be arranged immediately.

2.4 Marketing and Branding Planning

“Bags Fly Free” was a very successful planning strategy. This marketing move was designed to appeal to budget-conscious travellers by not charging any fees for the checked bags. This was in stark contrast to other competitors who charged high rates for cabin luggage. This helped Southwest to emphasise its low-cost and customer-friendly approach and helped reinforce brand loyalty.

2.5 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Planning

Southwest introduced many environmental and social responsibilities into its long-term planning. It has invested in modernising its fleet such that it would reduce fuel consumption and also lower its carbon emissions.

Southwest also incorporates workplace diversity and promotes an inclusive culture. This ensures it attracts and retains talent from varied backgrounds, which improves employee satisfaction and enhances innovation.

2.6 Technology and Innovation Planning

Southwest made long-term plans to modernise its IT infrastructure. It was quick to recognize that ageing IT could hamper operational efficiency, which could, in turn, ruin performance. These lead to streamlined customer booking and check-in processes, enabling better data analysis and operational decision-making.

Automation and efficiency practices helped reduce time-consuming tasks like baggage handling. Self-check-in kiosks and mobile onboarding processes have allowed the airline to improve its customer experience.

2.7 Growth and Expansion Planning

Southwest's growth target involves careful planning when entering new markets; they used incremental planning rather than expanding too quickly. This pace allowed them to assess the condition and then adapt, ensuring they use their resources effectively. The acquisition of AirTran Airways allowed it to expand its services to more cities, particularly in the eastern U.S. The move was aligned with the strategic objective of growing market share without compromising on the cost-focused business model.

2.8 Management by Objectives

By establishing clear objectives linked to customer satisfaction, Southwest incorporates Management by Objectives into its planning process. One of their main goals is to make flying enjoyable and hassle-free, encouraging positive employee behaviour.

Southwest Airlines also prioritises maintaining a high level of on-time performance. Efficiency is achieved by minimising delays and providing rapid response times.

CHAPTER 3: Organising

(Areen Chakraborty)

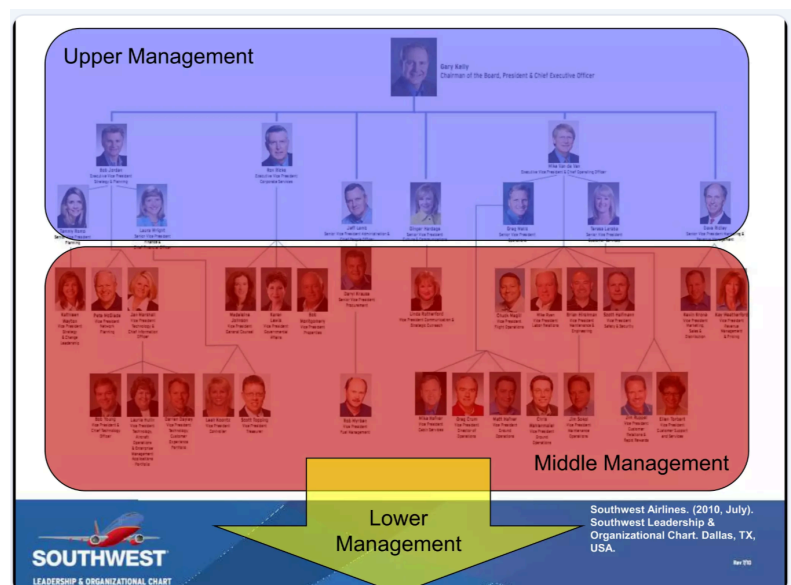
Southwest Airlines operates under a unitary (U-form) organisational structure, which consists of **centralised decision making** and a **functional departmentation style**. This structure, commonly found in businesses aiming for central solid control, enables the airline to maintain tight control across all operational facets. The following are key characteristics and impacts of this organisational design.

3.1 Functional Departmentation Based on Business Needs

Southwest Airlines organises its activities into departments according to business functions such as finance, operations, and marketing. For example, the Senior Vice President for Operations and Hospitality oversees the company's Ground Operations and Cargo Operations divisions. This functional arrangement allows the company to efficiently manage its commercial aviation operations while maintaining a strategic alignment with overall business goals. As the company expands, this structure permits the creation of new functional groups to accommodate growth for new flight routes and service offerings.

3.2 Centralised Hierarchy

Southwest Airlines follows a top-down hierarchy where decisions are made by senior executives at the corporate headquarters and cascaded down through middle management to frontline employees. This centralised hierarchy ensures consistency and alignment with the company's mission and strategic objectives. Even though it helps in maintaining strong control over operations, this structure also limits the flexibility of lower-level employees to adapt quickly when operational demands change.



Advantages

This U-form structure offers several advantages, such as strong managerial control and less operational redundancies. By grouping similar activities and resources, the company reduces unnecessary costs, which helps its low-cost competitive strategy. Centralised control also allows executives to steer the company towards achieving

strategic objectives, improving operational efficiency and ensuring alignment with corporate goals.

Disadvantages

The rigid hierarchy restricts organisational flexibility, making it harder for various departments to adjust their strategies to dynamic industry challenges. Furthermore, even though the company promotes a friendly and teamwork-oriented culture, this is not strongly reflected in the hierarchical structure, which can impact its ability to foster an inclusive and collaborative work environment.

3.3 Application of Urwick's Principles of Organising

Southwest Airlines' organisational structure reflects several of Lyndall Urwick's principles of organising:

1. **Principle of Unity of Objectives:** Urwick emphasised that every organisation should have a clear objective and common goal. Southwest Airlines has a well-defined mission to provide low-cost, reliable air travel with a focus on customer service. This objective guides all strategic and operational decisions.
2. **Principle of Specialisation:** This principle involves dividing among employees on the basis of skills and qualifications. Southwest Airlines organises its activities into functional groups such as finance, supply-chain operations, marketing, human resources, cybersecurity, and more. Each group focuses on specific tasks, improving efficiency.
3. **Principle of Parity of Authority and Responsibility:** According to Urwick, authority must match responsibility. At Southwest, senior executives make strategic decisions but remain accountable for the actions of their subordinates. This balance ensures effective decision-making and accountability throughout the organisation.
4. **Principle of Span of Control:** Urwick suggested that there should be a manageable number of subordinates reporting to a manager. Southwest maintains a balanced span of control, with senior vice presidents overseeing functional groups and ensuring that managers have a manageable number of direct reportees.
5. **Principle of Scalar Chain:** This principle refers to a clear line of authority from the top to the bottom of the organisation. Southwest's centralised hierarchy, with the CEO at the top, ensures that there is a clear chain of command, facilitating effective communication and decision-making.

By incorporating these principles, Southwest Airlines has created a robust organisational structure that supports its strategic goals and operational efficiency. This alignment with Urwick's principles helps the airline maintain its competitive edge in the aviation industry.

CHAPTER 4: Staffing

(Ranjith G Rao)

Southwest Airlines is known for its unique approach to staffing. They focus on cultural fit, employee empowerment, and continuous development. In this chapter we'll look at the various aspects of staffing at Southwest Airlines, including recruitment, training, benefits, diversity, and employee empowerment.

4.1 Recruitment Methods and Sources

Southwest Airlines recruitment strategy focuses on hiring people who align with their core values which are: warrior spirit, servant's heart, and fun-loving attitude. Southwest emphasises on the customer experience. So they must hire the right kind of people. They focus on hiring people who have an attitude for serving customers. The recruitment methods followed in Southwest are:

Internal Recruitment: They promote existing employees to higher positions.

External Recruitment: They post job openings on career portals, job boards and social media.

Campus Recruitment: Southwest partners with educational institutions to hire fresh graduates.

Summer 2025 Technology and Revenue Management Internship Applications Now Open!

Wanna land an internship with Heart? Technology and revenue management internship applications for next summer are open now thru October 1st! There are incredible internship opportunities to join the Southwest® Family next year where you can have fun, fly for free, and do much more than fetch coffee. Not interested in Tech or Revenue Management? No worries! The rest of our summer internship applications open in early January!

From your campus to ours.

We love our interns.

College Interns not only gain business experience in their particular field, but also experience the famous Culture that makes our Company home to some of the country's most sought-after internships year after year.

Wanna know one of our favorite perks? College Interns and Full-time Employees are eligible for free, unlimited space-available travel to any domestic location where Southwest flies. All travel is subject to seat availability, so flexibility is important.

You'll have fun and enjoy your work while also getting paid! The payment amount depends on the particular internship or position and its requirements. When applicable, interns receive an internet and housing stipend too!

Take a Closer Look at the Campus Reach College Internship Program

Campus Reach

Southwest Airlines' Internship Program

Watch on YouTube

Apply for a Summer 2025 Internship!

4.2 Selection Process

Apply: Submitting the application.

Application screening: Creating a short list of candidates by going over resumes and cover letters.

Interviews: Using both in-person and virtual methods, interviews are used to evaluate candidates' abilities and cultural fit.



4.3 Induction and Orientation

New hires receive a welcome kit, filled with gifts and information about Southwest's culture and values. On the first day, they literally roll out the red carpet for their new hires and are welcomed by current employees. In addition, they also get 30 SWAG points which is part of Southwest Airlines Gratitude Program.

4.4 Manager Development:

The Emerging Leader Development Program (ELDP), offered by Southwest, is an 18-month program designed to cultivate and train exceptional leaders. In the

Southwest system, participants are assigned to any position to get on-the-job training in a leadership capacity.

4.5 Employee Benefits and Retention

Profit-Sharing Plan: Southwest was the pioneer airline to provide its workers with a profit-sharing plan that matched their goals with the company's bottom line. This gives the staff members a sense of accountability and ownership.

Retirement Savings Plan: Employees can save for retirement through a 401(k) plan with pre-tax or Roth contributions. Southwest matches employee contributions dollar for dollar up to 9.3% of their eligible earnings.

Health and Wellness Programs: The company provides several medical coverage options, including health and wellness programs to support employees' physical, mental, and financial well-being.

Travel Privileges: Employees and their eligible dependents enjoy unlimited non-revenue, space-available travel, a highly valued perk.

4.6 Employee Empowerment

Decentralised Decision-Making: Employees at Southwest are encouraged to solve problems and make decisions on their own. Employee autonomy promotes efficient operations and rapid turnaround times by facilitating speedier decision-making and problem-solving.

Servant Leadership: Leaders in Southwest serve the best interests of their employees which promotes a supportive environment.

Recognition Programs: Southwest acknowledges and celebrates the employee achievements to boost their morale and motivation.

Open Communication: They promote transparency and encourage feedback from employees.

4.7 Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity Initiatives: Southwest recognizes, respects and values differences. Their diversity initiatives can be seen in their hiring and development practices, senior leadership diversity and their engagement with community partners.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs): They support diverse communities within the company through ERGs like B.E.A.T.@SWA (Black Excellence Advancing Together).

Southwest Airlines approach to staffing is one of the important factors in its success. The company has created a motivated and engaged workforce by focusing on cultural fit, continuous development, employee benefits, diversity and empowerment. These practices ensure high employee satisfaction and help in the company's overall performance and customer satisfaction.

CHAPTER 5: Leading

(Pranamy G Kulal)

5.1 Defining Leadership

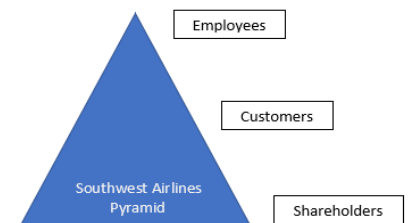
Leadership involves encouraging people to not only work but to work with zeal and confidence. Leaders focus on uplifting, inspiring and motivating people to their full potential. The key elements of leadership are vision, inspiration, communication, decision making, delegation, integrity, adaptability and empowerment.

5.2 Servant Leadership - “Southwest Way”

Southwest Airlines follows servant leadership which is the practice of serving others. Managers who follow this philosophy serve the best interests of their employees. Happy employees are deeply connected to the company. They treat their customers well which develops customer loyalty and happy shareholders.

Characteristics of servant leadership include:

1. Employee empowerment - rests the decision making and responsibility powers on the employees based on a sense of trust to boost their sense of pride.
2. Customer focus - focus on providing the best customer service.
3. Teamwork and collaboration - fostering a collaborative environment that values every voice.
4. Fun and lighthearted culture - inculcates a positive work environment.



5.3 Herb Kelleher - Remarkably successful, rare to find leader



An attorney by trade, Herb Kelleher fought for four years to keep Southwest Airlines flying amidst lawsuits from competitors. He was a notable servant leader who helped his employees achieve self-actualization, the highest level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. He created a “culture of commitment” devoted to the happiness of employees by not seeing

them as a “rung on the ladder”, leading to happy customers. Known for his personal touch, he attended company parties dressed as Elvis, hosted cookouts, helped with baggage during Thanksgiving, and brought doughnuts to mechanics at 4 a.m. He even arm-wrestled a rival to settle a legal dispute, all while embracing his fondness for cigarettes and bourbon. His determination to deliver economical and reliable air travel services placed the company as a benchmark for the aviation sector. He established the organisation's high ethical standards and advocated strong moral principles. Despite his passing, Herb Keller's legacy lives on.

5.4 Gary Kelly - Transformational leader as well as a servant leader

You don't often hear the word "love" in corporate boardrooms, says Gary Kelly, Southwest's CEO, but love is built into Southwest. Like Kelleher, Kelly has the servant leadership style in him along with transformational leadership. Characteristics of transformational leadership include visionary, inspirational, empowering, supportive and innovative traits. Under Kelly's guidance,



Southwest Airlines continued to expand, rising to the top of the U.S. airline market for domestic passenger originations and consistently earning a spot on Fortune's list of the most admired corporations in the world (it was placed 14th in 2021). He used a technique called oil hedging - pay a premium today and get a predetermined price tomorrow. This turned out to be an amazing move as Southwest airlines ended up saving 3.5 billion dollars between 1998 to 2008.

5.5 Herzberg two factor theory

Southwest airlines showcase high hygiene and high motivation. Employees have low complaints and are motivated.

5.6 McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y

Southwest airlines successfully uses theory Y and eliminates the need for theory X. Workers are self-directed and self-motivated. They accept and seek responsibility. Authority is largely decentralised. Leadership style is democratic. Focuses on social needs, esteem needs and self actualization needs.

5.7 Leadership Styles

Leadership based on the use of authority - Southwest airlines follows a democratic participative leadership where decisions are taken after consulting the subordinates.

Likert's 4 Systems of Managing - System 4 Management - PARTICIPATIVE - managers have complete confidence and trust in subordinates. They engage in downwards and upwards communication.

The Managerial Grid - 9.9 Management referred to as Team Management deals with managers displaying in their actions the highest possible dedication both to people and to production.

CHAPTER 6: Controlling

(Medhaj Dubey)

6.1 Defining Controlling

Controlling is a crucial function of management, focusing on monitoring performance, measuring progress and ensuring that goals and objectives are met. Plans are essentially the yardsticks with which managers device control. Since plans are intricate and complex, they cannot be tracked through and through by managers and so we set criteria for performance, referred to as standards. At Southwest Airlines, controlling plays a vital role in maintaining operational efficiency, ensuring customer satisfaction, and upholding financial health.

6.2 Performance Monitoring and Metrics

Southwest Airlines has established various performance metrics that are carefully monitored at different levels of the organisation to ensure smooth functioning of the organisation.

On-time performance: Southwest airlines is known for its punctuality and it measures this by tracking the percentage of flights that arrive on time. By consistently monitoring this metric, they are able to identify and address potential issues such as inefficient ground-handling or air traffic delays.

Load factor: This tracks how well the passengers are filling up the planes. It is calculated by taking a ratio of the number of passengers and the total number of seats in a plane. This allows the airline to optimise its flight schedules, adjust fares, or reduce flight frequencies to maximise revenue.

Customer satisfaction scores: Feedback from customers is crucial in controlling service quality. Southwest actively gathers customer feedback through surveys, social media, and direct interactions. Negative trends are swiftly followed by corrective actions such as training, adjustments to customer service policies, or enhancements to the onboard experience.

Safety audits: Southwest Airlines has to comply with the stringent safety regulations from government authorities like the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration). Internal audits and external inspections ensure compliance with safety protocols, aircraft maintenance standards, and crew readiness.



6.3 Financial Control

Southwest is one of the few airlines known for its long standing profitability. In fact, from its founding in 1971 until 2019, it had 47 years of consecutive profitability, which

is an industry record in the U.S. commercial airline sector. It was able to achieve this in the following ways:

Cost control: One of Southwest's USP is its low cost business model. Southwest has been regarded as one of the best practitioners of fuel hedging - a concept utilised throughout the airline industry. Being very aggressive and strategic on fuel hedging has given them a significant competitive advantage, especially during periods of rise of fuel prices.

Budget control: Each department in Southwest is assigned a fixed budget. Finance controllers working closely with the departments to ensure responsible expenditure and adherence to the budget. When a deviation is noticed, corrective action is taken to remedy the situation.

Revenue management: To optimise profitability, the airline dynamically adjusts ticket prices based on demand. This system allows for better control of pricing strategies, maximising revenue by availing of peak travel times and ensuring maximum seat occupation during low-demand periods.

6.4 Quality Control

Southwest Airlines is renowned for its corporate culture, which emphasises warmth, friendliness, and a fun-loving attitude. Herb Kelleher was an epitome of this mantra. Some of their quality control protocols include.

Training and development: Southwest ensures that all employees from the flight attendants to the ground staff are trained to provide the best customer service. Furthermore, regular assessments and feedback from supervisors help maintain the service quality.

Operational efficiency: Southwest Airlines is well-known for using a single aircraft type, the Boeing 737, across its entire fleet. This allows them to simplify operations and reduce maintenance costs, since its mechanics are specialised in maintaining just one aircraft type. Similarly, pilot and flight crew training can be streamlined since they only need to train on one aircraft type.

Vendor management: Southwest employs external vendors for services such as in-flight catering, airport services, and maintenance. The company uses performance metrics and quality audits to ensure that vendors meet the airline's standards, thus maintaining overall service quality.

6.5 Risk Management and Compliance

Southwest Airlines has a strong risk management and compliance framework. The controlling function includes the identification, assessment, and mitigation of risks across the organisation. This involves:

Compliance with regulations: Southwest Airlines has a dedicated team ensuring that the airline adheres to local and international aviation regulations. Regular audits,

both internal and external, keep the airline in compliance with safety, environmental, and labour laws.

Crisis management: The airline also has control mechanisms in place for managing unexpected crises, such as operational disruptions due to weather, labour strikes, or technical failures. Southwest has developed contingency plans and regularly conducts simulations to prepare its employees for handling such situations efficiently.

6.6 Feedback Loops and Continuous Improvement

Southwest Airlines emphasises continuous feedback loops and performance monitoring, which allows the company to maintain high standards of operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and profitability. This involves:

Customer feedback: The company uses social media and surveys to gather feedback on every flight. This feedback is analysed to identify areas for improvement such as seeking comfort, customer service or onboard amenities.

Employee feedback: Southwest follows an open door policy which allows employees to share their experience, give feedback and provide suggestions. This enables the management to regulate the workplace environment and improve overall customer satisfaction, directly contributing to better performance.

Regular performance reviews: Management conducts quarterly performance reviews of departmental performance, comparing outcomes with established goals. Based on these reviews, adjustments in strategy, resource allocation or operational methods may be made to address gaps and capitalise on new opportunities.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

Southwest Airlines is a Fortune 500 company with a unique approach to planning, organising, staffing, leading and controlling. Compared to other large airlines, Southwest is unique. The majority of the things they do differently are intended to either directly or indirectly draw in clients by lowering expenses or by saving money. They have been able to develop into a consistently profitable industry leader thanks to it.

Even though most of the players in the aviation industry chose the hub and spoke model it was the bold decision of Southwest to choose the point to point model. The strategic adoption of a single aircraft fleet and creative marketing initiatives shows how meticulous planning directly contributes to operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, and long-term profitability. The organisational structure of Southwest which is functional departmentation and centralised control has enabled it to have a streamlined operation with a strong managerial oversight.

Southwest's employee recruitment practices and empowerment has helped them to build a workforce which follows their core values. The leadership exhibited by Herb Kelleher and Gary Kelly differentiates them from their competitors.

In conclusion, Southwest Airlines has achieved sustainable growth and market leadership by balancing cost-efficiency with a people-centric approach. The innovative strategies adopted by them and their dedicated workforce is helping them to be a leader in the aviation industry.

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