

6.9.00

Lean Information and the Role of the Internet in Food Retailing in the United Kingdom

Jennifer Frances and Elizabeth Garnsey
University of Cambridge

Paper prepared for the Conference on E-Business Transformation: Sector Developments and Policy

BRIE_IGCC,

Brookings-IPI

US Department of Commerce

OECD

Washington DC 26-27 September 2000

Centre for Technology Management,

University of Cambridge

Cambridge

Mill Lane, CB2 1RX

-----01223 338190

ewg@eng.cam.ac.uk

jmf42@eng.cam.ac.uk

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Introduction

The progress of information and communication technologies (ICT) is known to impact on productivity, jobs and economic growth. It is less clear what constitutes the precise nature of the mechanisms transmitting this impact. In this paper we attempt to identify the dynamics of this transmission process in a key sector in an advanced economy: the food retailing sector in the UK. However we find that rather than a linear transmission of impact, from technology to business structure, there was an interaction between the two sets of factors, so that the system as a whole can be viewed as enacted by participating agents. Here changes in the inter-organisational structure and dynamics of an industry can be related to such factors as information processing, costs of production and interaction with supply chain, and returns to scale. These in turn influenced both the efficiency and productivity of the food retail sector and the autonomy of consumer relations. We begin by examining the earlier impact of ICT on this sector. We go on to use this analysis as a basis for examining the specific impact that the Internet and the advent of e-commerce have had in recent years on the food retailing system.

The authors are willing to send the paper in its entirety to anyone who requests it. Please email the authors for further information.