

Spring 2006 Retail Interviews Insights

November 2006, Nick Bloom

The Centre for Economic Performance ran a total of 21 retail interviews during March and April 2006. This retail pilot was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, and was designed to evaluate the feasibility of running a larger retail survey wave.

Our tentative conclusions from the 21 retail interviews were:

1. The survey interview technique works in retail. This means retail firms could be meaningfully scored on all questions with the following caveats:
 - a. The initial 2 Lean questions from manufacturing were dropped
 - b. The appropriate terms were used – i.e. “Shop” replacing “Factory” etc
2. Obtaining interviews in Retail appeared moderately harder than in manufacturing for two reasons:
 - a. The staff seemed busier so that obtaining a 30 minute slot was more challenging.
 - b. Contacting regional managers (the retail equivalent to the “Plant Manager”) was hard because they are always traveling. Shop managers were typically too busy to take the call (and often too junior to meaningfully respond). Contacting HQ management was not that successful due to low HQ staffing levels.

Our view, however, is that these initial difficulties could probably be worked round with more experimentation to uncover a better approach – for example scheduling interviews with regional managers on their carphones etc....
3. The average management scores for retail and manufacturing (on the common performance and talent management questions) were very similar, at 3.03 and 3.06 respectively. Including any common controls did not appear to significantly change this similar scoring.
4. Retail was relatively poor versus manufacturing on performance management – monitoring, tracking and continuous improvement - with an average of 2.99 versus 3.17 respectively.
5. Retail was relatively good versus manufacturing on talent management – hiring, firing, incentives and retaining key employees – with an average of 3.10 versus 2.86.