

1998-1 Text 2

1- Well, no gain without pain, they say.

But what about pain without gain?

Everywhere you go in America, you hear tales of corporate revival.

What is harder to establish is whether the productivity revolution that businessmen assume they are presiding over is for real.

2- The official statistics are mildly discouraging.

They show that, if you lump manufacturing and services together, productivity has grown on average by 1.2% since 1987.

That is somewhat faster than the average during the previous decade.

And since 1991, productivity has increased by about 2% a year, which is more than twice the 1978-1987 average.

The trouble is that part of the recent acceleration is due to the usual rebound that occurs at this point in a business cycle, and so is not conclusive evidence of a revival in the underlying trend.

There is, as Robert Rubin, the treasury secretary, says, a “disjunction” between the mass of business anecdote that points to a leap in productivity and the picture reflected by the statistics.

3- Some of this can be easily explained.

New ways of organizing the workplace - all that re-engineering and downsizing - are only one contribution to the overall productivity of an economy, which is driven by many other factors such as joint investment in equipment and machinery, new technology, and investment in education and training.

Moreover, most of the changes that companies make are intended to keep them profitable, and this need not always mean increasing productivity: switching to new markets or improving quality can matter just as much.

4- Two other explanations are more speculative.

First, some of the business restructuring of recent years may have been ineptly done.

Second, even if it was well done, it may have spread much less widely than people suppose.

5- Leonard Schlesinger, a Harvard academic and former chief executive of Au Bong Pain, a rapidly growing chain of bakery cafes, says that much “re-engineering” has been crude.

In many cases, he believes, the loss of revenue has been greater than the reductions in cost.

His colleague, Michael Beer, says that far too many companies have applied re-engineering in a mechanistic fashion, chopping out costs without giving sufficient thought to long-term profitability.

BBDO’s Al Rosenshine is blunter.

He dismisses a lot of the work of re-engineering consultants as mere rubbish - “the worst sort of ambulance chasing.”

15. According to the author, the American economic situation is _____.

[A] not as good as it seems

[B] at its turning point

[C] much better than it seems

[D] near to complete recovery

16. The official statistics on productivity growth _____.

[A] exclude the usual rebound in a business cycle

[B] fall short of businessmen's anticipation

[C] meet the expectation of business people

[D] fail to reflect the true state of economy

17. The author raises the question "what about pain without gain?" because _____.

[A] he questions the truth of "no gain without pain"

[B] he does not think the productivity revolution works

[C] he wonders if the official statistics are misleading

[D] he has conclusive evidence for the revival of businesses

18. Which of the following statements is NOT mentioned in the passage?

[A] Radical reforms are essential for the increase of productivity.

[B] New ways of organizing workplaces may help to increase productivity.

[C] The reduction of costs is not a sure way to gain long-term profitability.

[D] The consultants are a bunch of good-for-nothings.