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## *Labor Demand, Labor Supply, and Employment Volatility\**

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### *1. Introduction*

Figure 1 shows the basics of a theory of recessions. Labor supply and labor demand are nearly flat. A small downward movement of either schedule generates a recession with a substantial decline in employment. Is the story of Figure 1 plausible in the light of all of the evidence about the labor market in recession? In particular, is Figure 1 consistent with the fact that recessions bring a large increase in the number of people interested in working, looking for work, but not at work? My purpose in this paper is to investigate the factual support for an interpretation of a recession as a leftward shift in the intersection of flat labor supply and labor demand.

It will avoid confusion to state my definitions of labor demand and labor supply at the outset. The labor demand schedule is the locus of employment–real wage points traced out by economic changes that shift labor supply but not labor demand. These could originate in shifts in preferences, changes in wealth, or changes in the real interest rate. The basic determinants of the slope of labor demand are the diminishing marginal product of labor, changes in the elasticity of product demand as output varies, and complementarities across firms and industries. Similarly, the labor supply schedule is the locus of employment–real wage combinations traced out by economic changes that shift labor demand but not labor supply. These could originate in shifts in technology or changes in the elasticity of product demand. The basic determinant of the slope of labor supply is the diminishing marginal value of time spent

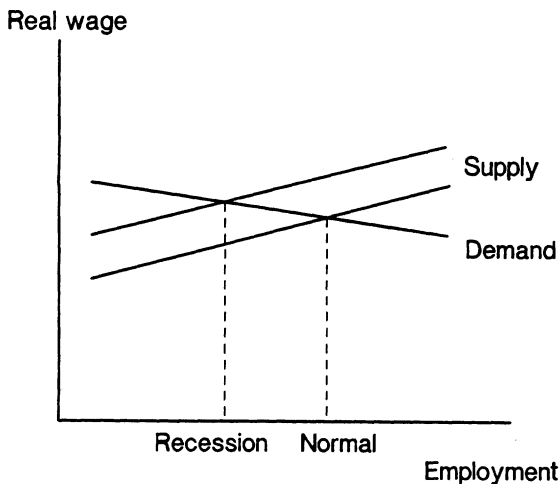
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in activities other than work. In the usual development of labor supply, the alternative activity is time spent at home in leisure activities, but this paper will focus on job search as the alternative activity. I should note as well that in the presence of wage rigidity, the definition of labor supply I have adopted would result in a perfectly elastic, horizontal labor supply schedule.

Much of this paper is about the flatness of labor demand. The principle of diminishing returns teaches us that the schedule slopes downward. But the extent of diminishing returns is an empirical issue even under standard assumptions about the technology. Under nonstandard conditions—complementarities or increasing returns—the labor demand schedule is more likely to be flat, and can even slope upward in the case of complementarities.

With respect to the evidence on the slope of labor demand, I start with empirical work on the relation between employment and the product wage. I derive an estimating equation suited to conditions of market power and increasing returns; it is a generalization of a standard approach to estimating the elasticity of substitution. The labor demand schedule of a particular industry is traced out as shifts that occur in the product demand and labor supply to that industry. Estimation with two-digit data for the United States shows that the labor demand schedule is quite flat—there is little variation in product wages as employment responds to shifts in labor supply. I go on to cite other evidence that supports the flatness of labor demand. In particular, the behavior of

Figure 1 NORMAL AND RECESSION EMPLOYMENT



inventories is inconsistent with diminishing marginal product of labor—firms do not generally take advantage of periods of low output to build up stocks of inventories.

On the labor supply side, unemployment has an important role in the view developed in this paper. Two bodies of research on unemployment have been influential in the evolution of this view. First, Davis and Haltiwanger (1990) have shown that the employment declines that occur in recessions are concentrated among a small number of firms making large cutbacks. For the majority of firms, employment growth occurs at normal rates. To put it differently, the cross-sectional distribution of employment growth across firms looks much the same in recessions as in normal years, except that its lower tail, measuring large employment declines, is much larger in recessions. Davis and Haltiwanger's results suggest that recessions are times when there is a large increase in the number of job-seekers who have been released into the labor market because of major upheavals at their previous employers.

The second important body of research is Blanchard and Diamond's (1990) investigation of flows in the labor market. Their central finding for the issues in this paper is that job-finding rates for unemployed workers are only slightly lower in recessions than in normal times. Essentially all of the increase in unemployment during a recession is the result of a greater flow of workers out of jobs; very little comes from increasing duration of job search. Although these findings need further validation with respect to their sensitivity to aggregation and measurement problems, they do seem to point in the following direction: In recession, the labor market carries out a much increased volume of worker–job matching, without suffering a decline in the efficiency in the process. Congestion in the matching process is apparently offset by agglomeration efficiencies.

The general view I advance in this paper, in support of the supply-and-demand analysis of Figure 1, is that the economy faces a choice at the margin between producing goods and reorganizing. The demand curve in Figure 1 is the marginal product of labor and the supply curve is the marginal product of job matching and other reorganizational uses of time. Neither activity has significant diminishing marginal product of labor. Hence small perturbations in either schedule bring large movements in the allocation of labor between the two activities. This view is related to the idea proposed by Cooper and Haltiwanger (1990) that times of lower productivity are the best times to replace the capital stock. I take a more general view about the source of the perturbation and about the nature of the alternative activity to production of goods.

A comparison with the real business cycle (RBC) model seems appro-

priate at this point. The model in this paper shares the RBC model's perspective that employment fluctuations are results of shifts of an economic equilibrium, not departures from equilibrium. Neither model suggests that there are unexploited gains from trade during recessions. The first key difference between the two models is in the alternative activity whose value determines the supply curve of labor to goods production. In the RBC model, the alternative activity is leisure (Kydland and Prescott, 1982; Prescott, 1986; Rogerson, 1988) or work at home (Benhabib, Rogerson, and Wright, 1991). Here, the alternative activity is job seeking, either active (visiting employers, responding to help-wanted ads, and the like), or passive (waiting for a job to open up). In my model, there is no substitution at all between time spent at home and time devoted to work or job seeking.

The second critical difference between the model of this paper and the RBC model is in the driving force of employment fluctuations. In the RBC model, the labor demand schedule is the marginal product of labor from a neoclassical production function (generally Cobb–Douglas). In that framework, only shifts of labor demand generate realistic employment fluctuations. Other perturbations, such as changes in government purchases (Barro, 1980) or in the timing of consumption (Baxter and King, 1990) cause countercyclical movements in the real wage as the level of employment moves up and down a relatively steep labor demand schedule. But the real wage is not countercyclical. Hence the RBC view is inextricably committed to vibrations of technology as the driving force of employment fluctuations. The notion that recessions are times of technical regress has not appealed to most practical economists (Summers, 1986). By contrast, the view advanced in this paper is that labor demand is flatter than suggested by a neoclassical production function. I present direct evidence on the slope of labor demand. I also review evidence from the behavior of inventories and from productivity measures that provide indirect support for the flat labor demand hypothesis.

A comparison with views of employment volatility based on price and wage rigidity is also in order. First, a simple model portrays the level of employment as being at the intersection of a downward-sloping labor demand schedule and a prescribed rigid real wage. Though I am not aware of any recent attempts to apply this setup to the issue of employment fluctuations, precisely this model was used extensively to explain persistent high unemployment in Europe in the early 1980s. The flat line depicting the rigid real wage becomes the labor supply schedule in Figure 1. Absent a theory of the flat line based on rational economic behavior, the real wage rigidity model has not achieved much acceptance. As Barro (1977) pointed out, the central issue is not whether compensation

is rigid—it is whether rational economic actors would absorb the dead-weight losses associated with the employment fluctuations that a flat labor supply schedule causes, if the schedule does not properly reflect the marginal value of time.

The view of price–wage rigidity in the IS-LM model turns out to be more subtle and closer to the view advocated in this paper. As Barro and Grossman (1971) pointed out, the labor market is wholly irrelevant in a macro model where the price level is predetermined and sellers stand ready to meet all demand at that price level. Alternative values of the real or nominal wage have no effect on the level of employment. Modern expositions of the IS-LM model do not invoke price rigidity directly. Instead, they start from a predetermined nominal wage and derive price rigidity from a markup theory of pricing; a good exposition is Dornbusch and Fischer (1990, Chapter 13, Sections 3 and 4). The implicit labor demand schedule in that version of IS-LM is precisely flat—the flat marginal cost schedule needed for a markup theory corresponds to a constant marginal product of labor. The modern IS-LM model makes the assumption of a temporarily rigid nominal wage. Labor stands ready to supply whatever volume of effort is requested by employers. The overall view of the labor market implicit in the modern IS-LM model is an extreme version of Figure 1 in which labor demand and labor supply are both perfectly flat and lie atop one another. The level of employment is indeterminate as far as demand and supply in the labor market is concerned. The indeterminacy is resolved by the principle of short-run nominal wage rigidity. With respect to the modern IS-LM model, it would be appropriate to think of this paper as providing some additional foundations for the model’s implicit hypotheses about labor demand and supply. The model developed here is not a rival for IS-LM.

When labor demand and labor supply are both quite flat, any shock that shifts either schedule will have a large effect on employment. I will not dwell on the sources of shocks. However, the example I will pursue will be a product demand shock. When one claimant on output—for example, the government—decides to increase its demand for output, the result is a shift in labor supply that brings an increase in employment. In the example worked out in Section 10, a higher real interest rate releases labor time from reorganizational activities to make it available for goods production. The result is similar to models with high intertemporal substitution in labor supply arising from substitution between work and time out of the labor market, but in this model, all of the substitution is between the two labor market activities. I do not give examples of other types of shocks, but they would have similar effects. Lawrence Summers has suggested calling this type of equilibrium—

defined by the intersection of two schedules with nearly equal slope—a “fragile” equilibrium. Although it is not part of the view taken in this paper, one could pursue this idea one step further to consider supply and demand curves that intersect more than once, and view fluctuations as movements from one of the equilibria to the other.

## 2. Theoretical Framework for Measuring the Elasticity of Labor Demand

In this section I will derive a method for estimating the elasticity,  $\beta$ , of the labor demand schedule. The method rests on the idea that shifts in labor supply (and product demand, when the economy produces more than one product) trace out the labor demand schedule. In competition, only variables that affect the firm’s technology can shift the labor demand schedule. Any other variable that affects employment must operate through the supply of labor to the firm. For a firm with market power, labor demand also depends on the elasticity of demand. Then the supply shift variables must be ones that affect neither the technology nor the elasticity of product demand.

Consider a firm with constant-returns production function  $\Theta F(N,K)$  whose ratio of price to marginal cost is  $\mu$ . The firm faces a product wage  $w$ . Its first-order condition for employment is

$$\mu w = \Theta \frac{\partial F}{\partial N}. \quad (2.1)$$

Suppose that the markup ratio evolves according to

$$\Delta \log \mu = -\nu. \quad (2.2)$$

The random variable  $\nu$  is a white-noise decrement.

The change from one period to the next in the first-order condition is, approximately,

$$\Delta \log w = \nu + \theta + \frac{\partial^2 F}{\partial N^2} \frac{\Delta N}{\partial F / \partial N} + \frac{\partial^2 F}{\partial N \partial K} \frac{\Delta K}{\partial F / \partial N} \quad (2.3)$$

where  $\theta$  is the growth rate in  $\Theta$ . Under constant returns,

$$N \frac{\partial^2 F}{\partial N^2} + K \frac{\partial^2 F}{\partial N \partial K} = 0. \quad (2.4)$$

Consequently,

$$\Delta \log w = \frac{N}{\partial F / \partial N} \frac{\partial^2 F}{\partial N^2} (\Delta n - \Delta k) + \theta + \nu. \quad (2.5)$$

Here  $\Delta n$  and  $\Delta k$  are proportional or log changes. Let  $\beta$  be the elasticity of labor demand,

$$\frac{1}{\beta} = - \frac{N}{\partial F / \partial N} \frac{\partial^2 F}{\partial N^2}. \quad (2.6)$$

Then a compact form for decomposing the various influences on the product wage is

$$\Delta \log w = - \frac{1}{\beta} (\Delta n - \Delta k) + \nu + \theta. \quad (2.7)$$

Equation (2.7) decomposes the actual movements of the product wage into three components:

1. Changes associated with changes in the labor/capital ratio,  $-(1/\beta)(\Delta n - \Delta k)$ .
2. Changes in productivity,  $\theta$ .
3. An unexplained residual,  $\nu$ .

With convex technology, the elasticity of labor demand,  $\beta$ , must be nonnegative. The firm's labor demand schedule slopes downward under all conditions, including nonconvex technology—it would always be paradoxical for a firm to hire more labor if the wage rose.

### 3. *Econometric Method*

The basic method I use to measure the elasticity of labor demand is instrumental variables. The instruments measure exogenous changes in product demand and labor supply that affect a particular industry. These changes move the industry along its labor demand schedule. The use of data for individual industries gives additional sources of changes that



cause movements along labor demand. The variable on the vertical axis of the labor supply-and-demand diagram for a particular industry is the product wage for that industry—the ratio of the industry wage to the product price for the industry. Thus changes in product demand for the industry shift the labor supply schedule in terms of the product wage and trace out the labor demand schedule.

Provided the instruments are uncorrelated with shifts of the industry's technology and with shifts in the elasticity of demand, the observed movements of the product wage and employment in response to changes in the instruments are purely movements along the labor demand schedule and not shifts of the schedule. For instruments that stimulate product demand, there are three effects at work. First, employment rises. Second, the price of the product rises. Third, the wage rises. The locus traced out by employment on the horizontal axis and the product wage (ratio of industry wage to product price) on the vertical axis is the labor demand schedule. For instruments that stimulate labor supply, on the other hand, the effects are an increase in employment, a decrease in price, and a decrease in the wage. Again, the employment-product wage locus traces out the labor demand schedule.

My assumption that the change in the markup ratio,  $\nu$ , is uncorrelated with the instruments is just the opposite of the assumption made by Julio Rotemberg and Michael Woodford (this volume). In effect, Rotemberg and Woodford reverse the procedure. They take the elasticity of labor demand as known a priori and measure the correlation of the markup change with exogenous shifts in demand. By contrast, I take the correlation as known (to be zero) and measure the elasticity. To put it differently, I assume that markups are noncyclical and show that, under that assumption, labor demand and marginal cost are flat. Rotemberg and Woodford assume that marginal cost is upward sloping (and labor demand is downward sloping) and show that markups must be countercyclical. Both findings are completely consistent with the available evidence. One cannot choose between these research strategies on the basis of any of the evidence we consider.

The basic estimation Equation (2.7) contains the productivity shock  $\theta$ . Estimation efficiency can be improved by one of two methods based on the fact that there is information about  $\theta$  in observed variables other than the variables in the equation. One approach is to estimate the labor demand equation jointly with a productivity growth equation. Bivariate estimation takes advantage of the high correlation of the disturbance in the labor demand equation and the disturbance in the productivity growth equation. An alternative approach that yields essentially the same efficiency gain is to exploit the high correlation of the productivity

shock across industries by estimating a multivariate system consisting of Equation (2.7) for each of a group of industries. Experimentation suggested that both methods yielded about the same efficiency gain. Combining the two methods had little incremental value. I have chosen to use the multivariate approach in the work presented in this paper, to avoid involvement in controversies about productivity measurement.

The data are sufficiently noisy that estimation of the labor demand elasticity  $\beta$  separately for each industry results in huge sampling variation. To reduce the sampling variation, I impose the constraint that the elasticity is the same for all of the industries within groups of six or fewer two-digit industries.

The estimation method embodying these various principles is three-stage least squares applied to all two-digit industries simultaneously, with constraints on the labor demand elasticity across groups of industries.

I normalize the estimating equation as in Equation (2.7)—with the log-change of the product wage on the left and the log-change in the employment/capital ratio on the right. The estimated coefficient is the reciprocal of the demand elasticity. It is an interesting econometric question whether useful results could be obtained with the reverse normalization—employment change on the left and product wage change on the right. That procedure would give direct estimates of the elasticity. With a single equation and a single instrument, the two normalizations would give identical results. In the multivariate setup used here and with three instruments, the results still come close to agreement when each industry has its own elasticity. But imposition of the constraint of equal elasticities within industry groups has a very different effect in the two normalizations because of sign effects. Quite a few industries have small negative estimated values of  $1/\beta$ . These industries support the general thrust of this paper that the labor demand schedule is flat or even upward sloping. But with the reverse normalization, these industries have large negative estimated values of  $\beta$ . The effect of imposing the constraint of equal coefficients within industry groups is not terribly different from estimating the coefficient as the average of the estimates for the individual industries. In the normalization I use, the average of  $1/\beta$  is lowered a little by the inclusion of the negative- $1/\beta$  industries. These industries strengthen the evidence that labor demand is flat. On the other hand, with the reverse normalization, the average of  $\beta$  is dramatically lowered by the inclusion of the negative- $1/\beta$  industries, because they contribute huge negative values of  $\beta$ . The effect is to *weaken* the evidence for flat or negative slopes.

This paper will restrict its attention to results based on the normalization with the product wage on the left. The use of this normalization

amounts to a rough application of Bayesian principles, with the prior belief that it is highly unlikely that there are industries that have large negative values of  $\beta$ . I note, however, that the opposing view is not ruled out by the evidence—that there are some industries with high positive labor demand elasticities and others with high negative elasticities, and that the average elasticity is small.

#### *4. Data and Results on the Elasticity of Labor Demand*

An instrumental variable is a variable that is uncorrelated with the random productivity shift,  $\theta$ , and the change in product demand elasticity,  $\nu$ , but is correlated with changes in the labor/capital ratio,  $\Delta n - \Delta k$ . Variables measuring exogenous shifts in product demand or in factor supply would be eligible as instruments. In my empirical work, I use the instruments proposed by Valerie Ramey in related work: changes in military spending, changes in the world oil price, and the political party of the president.

The data for two-digit U.S. industries are taken from the same sources as my earlier work on productivity growth (Hall, 1990) updated through 1986. Labor input is carefully measured by combining information from the household and establishment surveys on annual hours of work. The wage is the ratio of nominal compensation to annual hours. Output is value added and the product price is the corresponding NIPA deflator.

Table 1 presents the results. Five of the six groups have positive elasticities. The elasticities range from a little over two to about eight. The last column of the table gives the corresponding elasticities for the Cobb–Douglas technology—if  $\alpha$  is labor's share, the elasticity of labor demand with a given capital stock is  $1/(1 - \alpha)$ . For all industries except food-fiber (SIC 20 to 26) and transportation equipment, labor demand is more elastic than it would be in the Cobb–Douglas case (the negative estimate of  $1/\beta$  for communications–utilities–transportation should be thought of as an extreme form of flatness—the product wage rises slightly when an exogenous force raises employment). And Cobb–Douglas is a stringent standard. The Cobb–Douglas elasticities range from 2.1 for the capital-intensive communication–utilities–transportation industry to 5.3 for the labor-intensive transportation equipment industry.

In summary, the empirical results on labor demand indicate the following: When an exogenous event—a decline in oil prices, increase in military spending, or election of a Democrat as president—stimulates demand for the output of an industry, or stimulates labor supply by affecting labor demand in other industries, the resulting increase in

Table 1 ESTIMATES OF THE ELASTICITY OF LABOR DEMAND

<i>SIC: Industry</i>	<i>Estimated reciprocal elasticity, <math>1/\beta</math> (standard error)</i>	<i>Implied elasticity, <math>\beta</math></i>	<i>Elasticity implied by Cobb-Douglas</i>
20: Food and kindred products	0.288	3.472	4.115
22: Textile mill products	(0.071)		
23: Apparel and other textile products			
24: Lumber and wood products			
25: Furniture and fixtures			
26: Paper and allied products			
27: Printing and publishing	0.186	5.376	3.891
28: Chemicals and allied products	(0.072)		
30: Rubber and miscellaneous plastic products			
31: Leather and leather products			
32: Stone, clay, and glass products			
33: Primary metal industries			
34: Fabricated metal products	0.142	7.042	4.444
35: Machinery, except electrical	(0.108)		
36: Electric and electronic equipment			
38: Instruments and related products			
39: Miscellaneous manufacturing industries			
371: Motor vehicles and equipment	0.436	2.294	5.263
372: Other transportation equipment	(0.078)		
48: Communication	-0.420	-2.381	2.146
49: Electric, gas, and sanitary services	(0.220)		
Transportation			
Wholesale trade	0.124	8.065	3.344
Retail trade	(0.064)		

Notes: Instruments: Political dummy, percent change in oil prices, and growth of real military expenditures. Sample: 1953 to 1986. Estimation method: Three-stage least squares with the elasticity constrained within industry groups.

employment is large in relation to the resulting decrease in the product wage. The ratio of the two—the elasticity of labor demand—is in the range from two to eight.

### *5. Explanations of Flat Labor Demand*

Economists think, as a rule, that the diminishing marginal product of labor means that marginal cost rises with output. Higher demand means higher prices, or at least no lower prices. Practical experience is hardly conclusive on this point. It is more expensive to vacation in Hawaii at Christmas than in October. But VCRs and many other Christmas goods are no more expensive during December than they are during the rest of the year (Warner and Barsky, 1990). Federal Express charges more for Saturday delivery, for which there is much less demand, than they do for weekday delivery.

Congestion and agglomeration are opposing forces. Standard neoclassical economic models emphasize congestion. Firms face diminishing marginal product of labor because the addition of workers crowds more of them onto the same machines, and the resulting congestion lowers productivity. But when coordination is an important part of production, the favorable side of crowding may dominate. Cameras are cheaper on 47th Street in New York because the crowded stores filled with customers and salesmen make transactions at rates an order of magnitude greater than suburban camera stores.

Crowding more workers on the existing stock of machines lowers the marginal product of each worker. For the induced change in marginal product to be positive rather than negative, the congestion effect must be outweighed by thick-market effects or complementarities. Peter Diamond (1982) introduced thick-market effects. The basic idea is that the costs of one productive activity fall when related or neighboring activities are at higher levels. Transaction and search costs are lower in denser markets. Congestion is good for productivity. The analogy to the geographic distribution of productivity is helpful—productivity is highest in dense, congested cities such as New York.

When thick-market effects are dominant, the marginal product of labor is an upward-sloping function of total employment. This schedule serves as the demand schedule for labor. It is important to consider it a relation between aggregate employment and marginal product, however. It would be a paradoxical violation of second-order conditions for the level of employment chosen by a single firm to be a positive function of the wage the firm faced. Each firm perceives a negative relation between its own employment and its own marginal product of labor. But

the positive dependence of its production function on aggregate activity makes its marginal product a positive function of total employment.

A very simple example will explain most of what this section has to say. Consider first the neoclassical technology where production takes place in  $N$  separate units:

$$y = x_1^\alpha + x_2^\alpha + \dots + x_N^\alpha \tag{5.1}$$

with  $\alpha < 1$ . Suppose the total endowment of the input,  $x$ , is 1. Then output will be maximized by allocating the endowment evenly over all  $N$  of the productive units. With  $x_i=1/N$ , total output is  $N^{1-\alpha}$ . Any other allocation, such as giving the entire endowment to the first unit, will produce less output. With  $N > 1$  and  $\alpha < 1$ ,  $N^{1-\alpha}$  exceeds 1. The neoclassical conclusion that it is better to avoid congestion applies to this example because of the concavity of the technologies of the units.

Now consider a related technology, where

$$y = x_1^\alpha x_2^\beta + x_2^\alpha x_1^\beta + x_3^\alpha x_4^\beta + x_4^\alpha x_3^\beta + \dots + x_{N-1}^\alpha x_N^\beta + x_N^\alpha x_{N-1}^\beta. \tag{5.2}$$

Here the productive units are related to one another in pairs. Each unit has diminishing marginal product of its own input,  $x_i(\alpha < 1)$ , but the input used by its counterpart,  $x_{i+1}$ , makes a positive contribution, measured by the elasticity,  $\beta$ , which is positive. Moreover, the externality measured by  $\beta$  is strong enough to yield overall increasing returns:  $\alpha + \beta > 1$ . With this technology, congestion or agglomeration is desirable. The contribution that an increase in the input to one firm makes to the output of the other firm in its pair is more than enough to offset the diminishing marginal product in the first firm. With uniform allocation of the input across firms, total output is  $N^{-(\alpha+\beta-1)}$ . On the other hand, it turns out that the optimal allocation is to give all of the inputs to a single pair of producers, to take full advantage of increasing returns. Then total output is  $2^{-(\alpha+\beta-1)}$ , which is larger for  $N > 2$ . The lesson is that agglomeration of activity pays off when there are complementarities.

Now suppose that the firms can purchase the input for a real wage  $w$  and that each firm takes the level of activity of its counterpart as given; there is no coordination between the two firms in the pair. Profit maximization results in the two factor demands,

$$\alpha x_1^{\alpha-1} x_2^\beta = w \tag{5.3}$$

$$\alpha x_2^{\alpha-1} x_1^\beta = w. \tag{5.4}$$

The unique solution where each firm is basing its factor demand on the actual choice of the other firm is

$$x_1 = x_2 = \left[ \frac{w}{a} \right]^{1/(a+\beta-1)}. \quad (5.5)$$

The crucial point is that this factor demand slopes *upward*. At a higher level of employment, the marginal product is higher. This conclusion depends fundamentally on the lack of coordination between the two firms with the complementarity. If the two firms merge or write an efficient contract to deal with the complementarity, they will behave as a firm with increasing returns, whose factor demand function cannot possibly slope upward.

Complementarities in economic activity seem a highly promising way to explain a flat or upward-sloping demand schedule for labor. The complementarities hypothesis seems to have strong support in the data in a number of ways. On the other hand, its acceptance is likely to be held back by the lack of a convincing story about the source of complementarities. Just what makes the production function of the auto industry shift upward in favorable times? Where is the externality linking auto-making with chemical production and hotel-keeping? Research has not yet answered these difficult questions.

The most direct form of evidence on complementarities comes from the measurement of productivity. According to the complementarity hypothesis, productivity should rise in times of high overall activity. Procyclical productivity is a well-documented characteristic of the overall economy and most industries. It is essential to sort through some important productivity measurement issues in order to determine if the evidence supports the complementarity hypothesis uniquely, whether it supports the hypothesis along with some alternatives, or if procyclical productivity is plainly just an artifact of incorrect measurement. Not surprisingly, the conclusion is ambiguous. After correcting the standard Solow productivity measure for problems caused by market power, I find that it remains strongly procyclical in many industries. When the economy in general surges, or when demand for the output of the industry itself rises, productivity rises.

A second important piece of evidence has to do with inventories. A firm with a neoclassical technology and no external complementarities will use inventories to offset the increase in cost that occurs when output rises. Inventories will rise when firms expect future output to exceed current output, as firms hedge against the increase in cost. With complementarities and other thick-market effects, marginal cost will be lower

when output is higher, and inventory hedging will go in the opposite direction. Firms will shed inventories in times of low output and accumulate in times of high output. Work by Valerie Ramey (1991), Kenneth West (1986), and others has shown decisively that inventory accumulation follows the thick-market, not the neoclassical pattern.

## 6. Cyclical Productivity

Robert Solow (1957) established the general framework within which productivity has been measured ever since. Consider a firm that produces output  $Q$  with a production function  $\Theta F(K, N)$  using capital  $K$  and labor  $N$  as inputs.  $\Theta$  is an index of Hicks-neutral technical progress. The firm faces a stochastic demand for its output, possibly perfectly elastic. It faces a labor market where the firm can engage any amount of labor at the same wage,  $w$ . The firm chooses its labor input so as to maximize profit. This choice is made after the realization of demand. Some time in advance of the realization of demand, the firm chooses a capital stock, to maximize expected profit. Again, the firm is a price-taker in the market for the rental of capital services at price  $c$ . Solow derived a relationship involving output growth, product price, capital and labor input, and the wage rate, under the assumptions of competition and constant returns to scale. The relationship is

$$\theta_t = \Delta q_t - \alpha_t \Delta n_t - (1 - \alpha_t) \Delta k_t, \quad (6.1)$$

where  $\theta$  is the rate of Hicks-neutral technical progress ( $\Delta \log \Theta$ ),  $\Delta q$  is the rate of growth of output ( $\Delta \log Q$ ),  $\alpha$  is the elasticity of the production function with respect to labor input,  $\Delta n$  is the rate of growth of labor ( $\Delta \log N$ ), and  $\Delta k$  is the rate of growth of capital ( $\Delta \log K$ ). This measure has come to be known as total factor productivity because, unlike measures that consider only output and labor input, it accounts for capital input and, in a more general form, for all other types of inputs. In the version I will consider here, the elasticity  $\alpha$  is measured as labor's share of total cost. For a further discussion of analytical issues surrounding the Solow residual, see Hall (1990).

Empirical results reveal statistically unambiguous and economically important correlations between the instruments and measured productivity growth in many industries. Table 5.2 in Hall (1990) shows the results of regressing the Solow residual on the instruments for a number of industries. Contrary to hypothesis, when military spending or an oil price drop stimulates output and employment, measured productivity rises. A second important feature of the results is the high correlation of the productiv-



ity residuals with each other and with aggregate output. Table 2 shows the correlation of the productivity residual of the industry with the sum of the productivity residuals for all industries. The second column shows the correlation of the industry residual with the rate of growth of real GNP.

One important interpretation of the findings about the behavior of the productivity residual in the short run stresses the role of complementarities across industries. A statistical model that interprets the positive correlation of each industry with aggregate activity finds an elasticity of industry output with the aggregate of about 0.45, a very powerful complementarity (Caballero and Lyons, 1989). Working with

Table 2. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN INDUSTRY PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH AND AGGREGATE VARIABLES

<i>SIC: Industry</i>	<i>Correlation of industry productivity growth with aggregate productivity growth</i>	<i>Correlation of industry productivity growth with aggregate real GNP</i>
20: Food and kindred products	0.245	0.147
22: Textile mill products	0.219	0.083
23: Apparel and other textile products	-0.005	0.033
24: Lumber and wood products	0.152	0.065
25: Furniture and fixtures	0.542	0.498
26: Paper and allied products	0.562	0.512
27: Printing and publishing	0.509	0.395
28: Chemicals and allied products	0.684	0.527
30: Rubber and miscellaneous plastic products	0.411	0.270
31: Leather and leather products	0.310	0.285
32: Stone, clay, and glass products	0.757	0.597
33: Primary metal industries	0.632	0.738
34: Fabricated metal products	0.365	0.394
35: Machinery, except electrical	0.417	0.389
36: Electric and electronic equipment	0.533	0.487
38: Instruments and related products	0.262	0.219
39: Miscellaneous manufacturing industries	0.387	0.263
371: Motor vehicles and equipment	0.772	0.665
372: Other transportation equipment	0.021	-0.118
48: Communication	0.247	0.117
49: Electric, gas, and sanitary services	0.325	0.251
Transportation	0.762	0.605
Wholesale Trade	0.643	0.433
Retail Trade	0.657	0.738

Note: Sample: 1953 to 1986.

very detailed four-digit data, Bartelsman, Caballero, and Lyons (1991) find that the most powerful complementarities in the short run are with downstream customer industries, whereas those operating in the longer run are with upstream supplier industries.

In earlier work (Hall, 1990), I suggested that increasing returns could explain some of the findings about the correlation of productivity growth with exogenous instruments and correlation across industries. Caballero and Lyons argue that their empirical work shows that complementarities are superior to increasing returns as an explanation of procyclical productivity. A potent argument holds that we should never observe increasing returns in easily variable factors when output can be stored. Instead, production should take place episodically. In the case of a storable output, increasing returns can make the marginal product of labor schedule flat, but not upward sloping. Only complementarities can make the schedule slope upward.

#### 6.1 QUALIFICATIONS TO THE FINDINGS ON CYCLICAL PRODUCTIVITY

The evidence on measured productivity is not definitive. The principal alternative explanations of cyclical fluctuations in productivity invoke measurement errors in labor and capital input. If each contraction of output involves an unmeasured contraction in labor and capital, then the apparent flatness of labor demand may be an artifact of those measurement errors. A detailed discussion of measurement errors appears in Hall (1990).

Hours of work are reasonably well measured in the U.S. economy. The most likely source of measurement error in labor input is not in the quantity of hours, but in the amount of effort per hour. The best case for an alternative explanation of cyclical productivity fluctuations based on measurement problems in labor input runs along the following lines: When demand is strong, workers accomplish more per hour. They are paid for their accomplishments, but not in cash on a current basis. The pay is in the form of low accomplishments in the next slump. Workers suffer a disamenity from higher rates of accomplishment and firms perceive the disamenity in the form of an implicit piece-rate wage for accomplishments. Long-term implicit contracts pass on the psychic costs as implicit financial costs to the firm.

All of the ingredients I have listed are essential to make the measurement error explanation work. If there is no disamenity to accomplishing more, the firm is not in equilibrium unless it is asking for the maximal rate of accomplishments in recessions as well as booms. Cyclical fluctuations in work effort can occur only if the firm has to pay for effort. The

payment for higher effort cannot occur on a current basis. If it did, real compensation per hour would fluctuate along with productivity. In fact, hourly compensation is very stable over wide fluctuations in employment, output, and productivity (see Figure 5.2 in Hall, 1990). But the majority of workers work under long-term employment relationships, so it is certainly possible that there are fluctuations in work effort as part of the workings of implicit employment contracts.

The same story can be told about capital. Productivity measures assume that the firm uses the services of all of the capital available. If equipment and structures deteriorate over time and not because of use, there is no pure user cost of capital. It costs a firm no more to use all of its capital than to use part, so it would be inexplicable if part of the existing capital stock were unused. In that case, there would be no possibility of cyclical errors in measuring capital input. But if there is a user cost of capital, firms have a capital supply decision that is formally similar to the labor supply decision. Optimal capital utilization declines in recessions. Productivity measurements based on the assumption of full capital utilization overstate cyclical fluctuations in productivity. Johnson's (1989) careful review of this issue, however, finds little support for the user cost explanation of variations in utilization.

One of the assumptions underlying Solow's productivity measurement method in the form used in my work is that firms choose the level of capital to minimize expected cost. This assumption rules out chronic excess capacity. If firms systematically overinvest, the marginal product of capital will fall short of the real rental cost of capital. The elasticity used for capital in the productivity formula overstates the true elasticity of the production function with respect to capital, and, as a result, there is an understatement of the true elasticity with respect to labor. The result is to make measured productivity procyclical when true productivity is not. One interpretation of the finding of procyclical productivity is chronic excess capacity in many industries. This interpretation presents no problems for the message of this paper. Chronic excess capacity almost certainly leads to flat labor demand—the basic explanation for the standard view of an downward sloping marginal product schedule is the inefficiency of crowding more and more workers onto a limited stock of machines.

## *7. Inventories*

The behavior of inventories of storable goods provides another type of evidence on marginal cost and the slope of the marginal product of labor. Firms should use inventories to schedule production during peri-

ods when marginal cost is low and the marginal product of labor is high. Under neoclassical assumptions, these periods should be slumps, so firms should use inventories to make production smoother over time than sales are. With external complementarities and thick-market effects, times of lowest cost and highest productivity will be the times of highest output. Firms will schedule high output to coincide with times of high sales. They will build inventories during peak periods, rather than depleting inventories as they would under neoclassical conditions. The cyclical behavior of inventories provides a simple way to distinguish a neoclassical convex economy from an economy with important complementarities.

This evidence seems to favor complementarities. First, it has been known for some years that production is more, not less volatile than sales. Blinder (1986), West (1986), and others have noted this departure from the predictions of neoclassical models. But the excess volatility of production is not conclusive. If costs vary over time, the neoclassical firm will take advantage of periods of low cost to build inventories and will deplete them during times of high cost. Production will vary over time even if sales are completely stable. A simple comparison of volatility is not enough if there are other sources of production volatility beyond variations in sales.

Valerie Ramey (1991) demonstrates fairly convincingly that cost variations do not explain why firms accumulate inventories during times of high production. She examines the joint behavior of output and finished goods inventories in industries that produce to stock rather than to order. The following simplification of Ramey's approach shows how inventory behavior reveals the curvature of technology.

Consider a profit-maximizing firm. Within a broader optimization problem through which the firm determines its sales, there is a subproblem of minimizing the cost of those sales. Suppose the expected cost of producing to meet given sales is proportional to

$$\frac{1}{2} E_t \sum_{\tau=t}^T \left[ \gamma y_{\tau}^2 + (x_{\tau-1} - \alpha s_{\tau})^2 \right]. \quad (7.1)$$

Here  $E_t$  is the expectation conditional on information at time  $t$ ,  $y$  is output,  $x$  is the end-of-period stock of finished-goods inventories, and  $s$  is the level of sales. The parameter  $\gamma$  controls the curvature of the technology; if the firm perceives upward-sloping marginal cost,  $\gamma$  will be positive. The parameter  $\alpha$  controls the inventory/sales ratio. An identity links the variables:

$$x_t = x_{t-1} + y_t - s_t. \quad (7.2)$$

A first-order condition necessary for the optimal scheduling of production is

$$E_t[\gamma(y_t - y_{t+1}) + x_t - \alpha s_{t+1}] = 0. \quad (7.3)$$

This condition characterizes the cost-minimizing policy, for negative as well as positive values of  $\gamma$  (see Ramey, 1991).

Now let

$$\begin{aligned} h_t &= x_t - \alpha s_{t+1} \\ &= x_t - x_{t-1} - (\alpha s_{t+1} - x_{t-1}). \end{aligned} \quad (7.4)$$

The variable  $h_t$  is inventory investment in excess of the amount needed to maintain the level of inventories at its usual relation to sales;  $h_t$  measures inventory investment undertaken to smooth production plus a purely random element related to surprises in sales. The first-order condition in terms of  $h_t$  is

$$E_t h_t = -\gamma(y_t - E_t y_{t+1}). \quad (7.5)$$

Alternatively,

$$h_t = -\gamma(y_t - y_{t+1}) + \epsilon_t \quad (7.6)$$

Here  $\epsilon$  is an expectation error satisfying  $E_t \epsilon_t = 0$ .

Equation (7.6) strips the first-order condition to its bare essentials. A firm with sharply rising marginal cost ( $\gamma \gg 0$ ) will deplete its inventories by setting  $h_t < 0$  when it is producing more this period than it plans to produce next period ( $y_t - y_{t+1} > 0$ ). Note that the inventory draw-down affects the magnitude of  $y_t - y_{t+1}$ ;  $h_t$ ,  $y_t$ , and  $y_{t+1}$  are all variables controlled directly by the firm. When the optimal output plan calls for lower output this period than next period, the firm with rising marginal cost will accumulate inventories in excess of the level required by maintenance of the inventory/sales ratio.

Rising marginal cost has a sharp and robust implication: When an outside event stimulates product demand temporarily, it should also cause an inventory draw-down, in the sense of a negative value of  $h_t$ . To put it differently, an instrumental variable positively correlated with

$y_t - y_{t+1}$  should be negatively correlated with  $h_t$ . The negative of the ratio of the covariances is the instrumental variable estimator of  $\gamma$ . By contrast, the firm with flat marginal cost is indifferent to the scheduling of production. Its only objective is to maintain its inventory/sales ratio at the prescribed level  $\alpha$ , so it always plans for  $h_t = 0$ . An instrumental variable positively correlated with  $y_t - y_{t+1}$  will have zero correlation with excess inventory accumulation. The instrumental variable estimator for  $\gamma$  will be zero.

For a firm with decreasing marginal cost ( $\gamma < 0$ ), it is efficient to bunch production. The firm would produce its output for all periods in the first period but for the cost of departing from the normal inventory/sales ratio,  $\alpha$ . Even in the face of that cost, the firm amplifies fluctuations in output so as to obtain the economies of bunching output. Equation (7.6) shows that the firm builds extra inventories in the same periods when current output exceeds expected future output. An instrument positively correlated with  $y_t - y_{t+1}$  will also be positively correlated with  $h_t$ , and the IV estimate of  $\gamma$  will be negative.

Ramey's model as estimated is considerably more elaborate than the one just discussed. The cost function is cubic in output and the linear term depends on the wage, the price of materials, and the price of energy. There is a time trend in the quadratic term. There are costs of adjustment of the level of output in the form of a term involving the square of  $y_t - y_{t-1}$ . Finally, there are random shifts in the technology itself, in the adjustment cost term, and in the target inventory/sales ratio.

In Ramey's work, the exogenous variables that shift product demand and do not shift product supply are three measures of federal military spending, the relative price of oil, a dummy variable for the political party of the president, and population. The seven industries Ramey studies are food, tobacco, apparel, chemicals, petroleum, and autos. Except for the auto industry, a dummy for auto strikes also serves as an instrument. For the tobacco industry, a set of variables characterizing federal regulation is included. In all seven industries, the estimate of  $\gamma$ , the slope of the marginal cost schedule, is negative. In four of the seven industries, the point estimate of  $\gamma$  is more than two standard errors below zero, so the evidence against rising marginal cost is statistically unambiguous. All seven of the industries tend to bunch production during times of high sales. They typically accumulate inventories beyond the amount needed to maintain the normal inventory/sales ratio at the same time that output is strong because sales are high. Firms with rising marginal cost would behave in the opposite way, building inventory stocks in times of weak sales and drawing them down when sales are high. Ramey's strong statistical evidence in favor of production

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bunching is inconsistent with rising marginal cost and downward-sloping labor demand.

### *8. Flatness of Labor Supply*

I turn now to the labor supply side of the story. I find the concept of organizational capital to be helpful in explaining the argument made in this paper, although one does not have to believe that organizational capital is well defined to accept the flatness of labor supply. An economy has high organizational capital when it has successfully matched its heterogeneous resources to each other in a way that achieves a high level of output. Organizational capital is built by the matching process. Most important is the matching of workers to jobs—the building of teams of managers, desk workers, troubleshooters, and production workers. The allocation of workers to the stock of fixed capital is also part of the process of organizational capital accumulation. Because many organizational decisions deal with the question of whether or not to operate units of production with substantial fixed costs when they are in operation, reorganization often involves large, sudden changes. As Davis and Haltiwanger (1990) show, large cutbacks in employment at the plant level are a central feature of recessions.

Organizational capital deteriorates over time. Products and capital become obsolete. Workers age and may lose their comparative advantages in their current jobs. An economy producing flat out with low unemployment and low rates of new job matching will gradually suffer a decline in productivity relative to the level that could be achieved by pausing to reorganize.

The way many professionals run their own offices provides an analogy that may be useful. During periods of intense effort, one's office becomes more and more disorganized. Piles of unsorted materials develop first on desks and tables and later on the floor. As disorganization cumulates and the office's level of organizational capital deteriorates further and further, the professional's productivity begins to suffer. Finally, at the first letup in the need to produce output, the professional turns to reorganizing the office. Measured output may be low during that period, but the time spent reorganizing pays off in its contribution to future productivity. That time represents a type of capital accumulation.

The concept of organizational capital involves some challenging issues of ownership. In particular, search theory generally concludes that employer and worker share the benefit of the bargain created by an improved job match. Can a free market ensure that a decentralized process of reorganization will satisfy the first-order condition that the

marginal product of labor in goods production equals the marginal product in the creation of organizational capital? The model will make that assumption. However, I think that the basic conclusion—that the allocation of labor between the two activities is highly sensitive to current goods demand—carries over to more realistic models that recognize the limits of decentralization.

Reorganization may suffer from congestion effects—whose influence is similar to adjustment costs in the accumulation of physical capital—from agglomeration efficiencies. In the model developed in the next section, I assume, in effect, that congestion and agglomeration just offset each other. The technology for building organizational capital is linear, rather than concave (as it would be if congestion dominated) or convex (as it would be if agglomeration dominated). Specifically, one hour of a worker's time devoted to job seeking or other organizational activities builds one unit of organizational capital. The flatness of labor supply to goods production follows directly from this assumption of linearity. Work time diverted from goods production generates a flow of new organizational capital. Instantaneously, the flow has no effect on the magnitude of the stock. Hence the marginal product of time spent building organizational capital is independent of the amount of time currently being spent. The slope of labor supply arises only from the influence of the level of goods employment on the marginal product of organizational capital. The marginal product schedule is precisely the labor supply schedule to goods production.

One of the implications of this hypothesis is that the job-finding rate for one job searcher is not sensitive to the number of other searchers. In particular, in recessions, time spent looking for or waiting for work is almost as productive as it is in booms. The primary evidence is Blanchard and Diamond's (1990) finding that job-finding rates for unemployed workers are almost the same in recessions as in booms. Recessions are periods of greater total volume of job changes, but are not times when it takes longer to find work.

In this model, labor is allocated between production and creation of organizational capital. The amount of labor available for the combination of the two activities is a constant, independent of the real wage, real interest rate, or other relative prices. In other words, substitution of work and leisure is not part of the story of employment fluctuations—in this respect, the model takes exactly the opposite view from the RBC model. The model developed here considers only the allocation of labor between the two activities; it is not a general equilibrium model. The essential relative price that connects labor allocation to the rest of the economy is the real interest rate, which I take as exogenous.



One simple way to think of the model is that it describes a small economy embedded in a large world economy with a single tradable good. The small economy is a price-taker with respect to the relative price of current and future deliveries of the good. Alternatively, one can think of the real interest rate as the economic signal of the urgency of current production of goods in a closed economy. When product demand is high today relative to the future, a higher real interest rate is needed to clear the market for delivery of current goods. One source of high product demand could be higher military purchases, as studied by Barro (1980) in a model where the real interest rate clears the goods market. Another could be a shift of preferences toward current consumption, as in Baxter and King (1990). A third could be a spontaneous element in physical capital accumulation, as in Hall (1991). In any case, the mechanism to be described transmits an increase in product demand into an increase in employment.

Although there is reasonable evidence that exogenous increases in product demand raise the real interest rate in the U.S. economy (Hall, 1980), I think it is important to emphasize that observed real interest rates may be poorly correlated with the variable contemplated by the model. In the first place, absent markets for indexed securities, there is the problem of removing the expected inflation component from observed nominal interest rates. In the second place, agency problems may drive a wedge between the real rate applied by business managers and the rate observed in securities markets. In view of these problems, I prefer to think of the real rate in the model as the shadow price of current use of goods. In this framework, I would encourage the reader to think of the model as describing the effects of shifts in product demand on employment, rather than the effects of the real interest rate on employment.

Let

$N$ : employment in goods production

$\bar{N}$ : total labor supply, a constant independent of the real wage and the real interest rate

$G$ : stock of organizational capital

$\delta$ : depreciation rate of organizational capital

$K$ : stock of physical capital

$w$ : real wage

$r$ : exogenous real interest rate.

The technology in goods production has constant returns to scale in the three factors and is described by the production function  $F(N, G, K)$ . The

(Marshallian) demand for labor in goods production is the marginal product of labor,  $\partial F(N,G,K)/\partial N$ .

The technology for the creation of organizational capital is that one unit of labor diverted from goods production creates one unit of capital. Consequently, organizational capital accumulation is total labor supply less labor employed in goods production and less the replacement of depreciated capital:

$$\dot{G} = \bar{N} - N - \delta G. \quad (8.1)$$

The supply schedule for labor in the goods sector is the marginal loss from diverting a unit of labor from organizational capital accumulation to goods production. The marginal loss is the present value of the stream of future marginal products of the organizational capital. Little is lost by evaluating the future stream under the assumption of an unchanging interest rate and unchanging marginal product (an earlier version of the paper showed how to solve the problem more precisely, but little is added by the extra precision). Thus labor supply is

$$\frac{1}{r+\delta} \frac{\partial F(N,G,K)}{\partial G}. \quad (8.2)$$

The slope of labor supply is

$$\frac{1}{r+\delta} \frac{\partial^2 F(N,G,K)}{\partial G \partial N}. \quad (8.3)$$

If organizational capital and labor are sufficiently complementary in goods production, the labor supply curve slopes upward—the higher the level of employment, the higher the marginal product of organizational capital and hence the higher the marginal loss from diverting a worker from organizational capital formation to goods production. But the slope of labor supply is not restricted by theory. If organizational capital and labor are sufficiently substitutable, labor supply can slope downward. Convexity of the technology does not place a restriction on the sign of the cross partial derivative,  $\partial^2 F/\partial G \partial N$ .

In times of high current product demand (a high real interest rate), the labor supply schedule shifts downward—at any given level of goods employment, the present value of the marginal product of organizational capital falls because the discount rate rises. The goods sector moves down and to the right along its labor demand curve, as portrayed

in Figure 1. The economy substitutes toward goods production and away from the formation of organizational capital. As goods employment rises, the real wage falls.

If  $\beta$  is the elasticity of labor demand with respect to the real wage and  $\lambda$  is the elasticity of labor supply with respect to the real wage (the reciprocal of the cross-elasticity of the marginal product of organizational capital), then the elasticity of equilibrium goods employment with respect to the rental price of organizational capital ( $r + \delta$ ) is

$$\frac{1}{1/\beta + 1/\lambda} \quad (8.4)$$

Thus, as depicted in Figure 1, a high elasticity of labor demand,  $\beta$ , and a high elasticity of labor supply,  $\lambda$ , lead to high sensitivity of goods employment to changes in product demand, mediated by the real interest rate.

I have already discussed the evidence on the elasticity of labor demand,  $\beta$ . At this stage, there does not seem to be a good way to measure the cross partial derivative,  $\partial^2 F / \partial G \partial N$  or the corresponding elasticity of labor supply,  $\lambda$ . The observed sensitivity of goods employment to shifts in goods demand suggests that the cross partial is small and  $\lambda$  is large; this proposition does not contradict any well-known piece of evidence.

There is evidence on one important part of the model developed in this section, namely the assumption that one unit of labor produces one unit of organizational capital. This assumption forbids congestion in the creation of organizational capital. An important part of the organizational capital of the economy is the stock of worker–job matches. The linearity assumption holds that the rate of creation of new matches per hour of job search is the same in booms, when the number of job searchers is small, as it is in recessions, when the number is large. I will review empirical findings on this point.

### *9. The Linear Relation between Job Search and Accumulation of Organizational Capital*

A distinctive feature of the model in this paper is the hypothesis that a linear technology transforms labor time into organizational capital. As I noted earlier, congestion in the worker–job matching process would cause diminishing marginal creation of organizational capital per unemployed worker as the volume of unemployment increased. The supply of labor to production of goods and services would be more upward sloping in the presence of congestion effects. Agglomeration efficiencies

would have the opposite effect. Does the hypothesis that congestion and agglomeration are absent or offsetting find any support in the data?

Blanchard and Diamond (1990) have studied flows in the labor market in considerable detail. The flow of workers into jobs from unemployment may be considered a rough measure of the flow of newly created organizational capital. Then the relation between the flow of time spent in unemployment and the flow of workers to employment measures the relevant technology. If the technology were one of strict proportionality, the hazard rate—the monthly probability of a job-seeker finding a new job—would be the same when unemployment is low or high. Blanchard and Diamond find that the hazard rate falls slightly when unemployment rises—a recession that raises unemployment by two percentage points reduces the job-finding rate from a normal level of 24.0% per month to 21.8% per month. There are two reasons to think that this figure overstates the structural response to a shift in product demand. First, there are mix effects over the business cycle. In a recession, a larger fraction of the unemployed are experienced workers who probably have lower job-finding rates under any conditions (I am not aware of any data on job-finding rates by experience, but data from the Current Population Survey show longer duration of unemployment for older workers and for men, and both of these characteristics are positively correlated with experience). Second, some of the fluctuations in unemployment considered in Blanchard and Diamond's work are the result of spontaneous shifts in the job-finding rate. A decline in job-finding will result in higher unemployment. Hence there may be a simultaneity bias in the direction of apparent congestion effects.

Although Blanchard and Diamond find that the flow of workers from job search to employment rises during recessions, they also find that the flow from not-in-the-labor-force ( $N$ ) to employment ( $E$ ) falls in recessions (see their Fig. 9, p. 117). The decline in the  $N - E$  hazard rate is very small, because the number of people out of the labor force is large. At the narrowest level, the behavior of job matching for people not actively looking for work is irrelevant for the question raised here, which has to do with the success rate for those actively looking. However, the narrow view puts too much faith on the ability of the unemployment survey to identify active job searchers. In order to interpret the  $N - E$  flow within the framework of this paper, one would have to know something about the cyclical movements of the number of people classified as not in the labor force who are actually active searchers. I am not aware of any evidence on the sign of this relationship. The data used by Blanchard and Diamond on people out of the labor force but desiring work do not speak to the question of active job search.

Davis and Haltiwanger (1990) (D–H) provide data on the volume of job matching in manufacturing. They observe quarterly changes in the employment levels of individual plants. If plants with rising employment never lost or terminated workers, and if plants with declining employment never hired workers, then the D–H data would reveal the volume of new matches directly. Instead, their data understate actual movements of workers. My impression is that the understatement is not a serious problem in interpreting the data, but confirming that impression is a topic for further research. Under the hypothesis of no counterflows, D–H consider the volume of employment declines as a measure of job terminations and the volume of employment increases as a measure of newly created jobs. From these, they derive two measures of new matches. One is an upper bound that is attained in the case where every worker who departs goes off to another industry and every worker who is hired comes from another industry. The other is a lower bound that is attained if every departing worker is hired within the same industry (when growth exceeds shrinkage) or if every new hire comes from those just leaving jobs in the same industry (when shrinkage exceeds growth).

D–H document the positive relationship between unemployment and the volume of job matches (Table 8, p. 164). The issue for this paper, however, is not whether the marginal product of time spent looking for work is positive, but rather if it declines with increases in the number of job seekers. In that connection, I have looked at the statistical relation between the D–H job-matching flows, the total civilian unemployment rate, and the squared unemployment rate (standard errors in parentheses):

*Upper bound measure of job-matching flow*

$$m_t = 0.204 - 0.80u_t + 10.5u_t^2. \\ (3.17) \quad (21.0)$$

*Lower bound measure of job-matching flow*

$$m_t = 0.292 - 5.3u_t + 40.3u_t^2. \\ (3.3) \quad (22.2)$$

In both cases, the marginal product of unemployment in producing job matches rises with unemployment, according to the positive coefficient on squared unemployment. For the upper-bound measure, the positive coefficient could easily have arisen from sampling variation. For the lower-bound measure, there is only a small likelihood that the nonlinearity arose from sampling variation; the  $t$  statistic is 1.8.

Blanchard and Diamond's data suggest small departures from linearity in the direction of congestion effects—diminishing marginal value of time spent looking for work as the number of people looking increases. D-H's data, on the other hand, show some signs of increasing marginal value of time spent looking. Tentatively, it appears to me that the hypothesis of linear transformation of time into organizational capital is not unreasonable. Plainly this is an area where further research will pay off.

### 10. General Equilibrium Summary

Recall that the model of the allocation of labor between goods production and creation of organizational capital reached the following relation between the real interest rate and the level of employment:

$$\frac{N - N^*}{N^*} = \frac{1}{1/\beta + 1/\lambda} \frac{r - r^*}{r + \delta} \quad (10.1)$$

The variables with asterisks are base values and those without asterisks are perturbed values due to a product demand shock. The empirical work reported earlier suggested that the labor demand elasticity,  $\beta$ , is around 5. Even with Cobb–Douglas technology, the elasticity is around 3. To illustrate the magnitudes involved, I will assume that the labor supply elasticity,  $\lambda$  (in the sense of the relation between the marginal product of organizational capital and employment), is 2. I will further assume that organizational capital deteriorates 10% per year. The resulting elasticity of employment with respect to the rental price of organizational capital is 1.4. Small changes in the urgency of goods production, as measured by the shadow real interest rate  $r$ , generate large movements of labor between goods employment and building organizational capital.

To complete the model, suppose that  $d$  is a product demand disturbance stated as a proportion of GNP, and that the reduced form equation relating the shadow real interest rate to the demand disturbance is

$$\frac{r - r^*}{r^* + \delta} = \gamma d. \quad (10.2)$$

A representative value for  $\gamma$  might be 0.5—a shift in product demand equal to 1% of GNP might raise the shadow real interest rate by 7 basis points. Then the elasticity of employment with respect to the demand shift would be  $(0.5) \times (1.4) = 0.7$ , which is in line with direct regression measures of the effect of, say, military spending on employment.

## 11. Conclusions

Most macroeconomists agree that research should take unemployment seriously. The conspicuous fact that large numbers of workers move from employment to unemployment in the course of a recession calls for real economic analysis. Efforts to make wage rigidity the starting point for a model of the high substitutability of work and unemployment have not been widely accepted, for lack of good underlying economic rationalization. The model in this paper makes wage rigidity a derived conclusion rather than the starting point.

There is growing evidence that the labor market in recession does not undergo a decline in matching efficiency. Rather, a recession is a time when the matching process is called on to operate at much higher than normal volumes. In recessions, some firms cut back employment sharply while the majority continue to hire workers. The volume of matches each month rises approximately in proportion to the number of unemployed job-seekers. Although the numerical volume of new matches is only a rough proxy for the underlying concept of creation of organizational capital, the facts on matching do seem to provide some support for the view that the marginal product of time spent job seeking does not fall in recessions.

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## Comment

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In this paper, Robert Hall develops a model of the cycle that stresses organizational capital and agglomeration effects. I am persuaded that both of these effects are important features of the economy and so I welcome this exploration of them. Incorporating organizational capital and agglomeration into a realistic model of the cycle is an important task for macroeconomists. I hope Robert Hall builds on this work to help us understand the way in which demand and technology shocks are propa-



gated and interact with each other. However, I am not persuaded that his new model provides a real business cycle model that is consistent with observation.

The following are the stylized facts that, taken collectively, suggest to Hall that agglomeration effects are important to the cycle.

1. Declines in employment during recessions in the manufacturing sector are not made uniformly, but rather are concentrated in large reductions in employment in some plants.
2. Job finding rates remain high during recessions.
3. Productivity is higher during booms than when output is low.
4. Inventories fluctuate more than production.
5. Increases in productivity in one industry are positively correlated with increases in aggregate output.
6. "Exogenous" events that stimulate the demand for output in an industry or stimulate labor supply by affecting labor demand in other industries result in increases in employment and small decreases in wages.

The model proposed in Hall's paper to explain these facts is that there are complementarities associated with both production and reorganization so that it pays to concentrate production all at the same time, and it pays to concentrate organizational capital accumulation at the same time. The economy thus fluctuates between periods of high production and periods of high reallocation. In the model, the optimal allocation of resources depends on the rate of interest. Exogenous events induce a shift either toward or away from goods production and consequently to a change in the observed level of output. In particular, a decrease in the real rate of interest will shift the optimal allocation of resources away from goods production and toward the accumulation of organizational capital. The model argues, therefore, a result that surely must come as a surprise to the Fed, that recessions are caused by low real rates of interest. Hall does not test this aspect of his model directly, instead, he says that the appropriate real interest rate is not observable because discount rates used by individual firms may vary for idiosyncratic reasons. However, a key element in the Hall theory is that there is some decentralized mechanism that leads to coordinated shifts toward the accumulation of organizational capital or toward production. This mechanism must be the common, observed component of company discount rates. Coordination cannot take place using the unobserved idiosyncratic component. Since either goods production or the accumulation of organizational capital is equally productive, there is no welfare loss associated with re-

cessions. People are making a voluntary decision to shift resources in response to a change in the relative price of the two activities.

I like the idea of organizational capital, and I think it is important in the determination of economic growth and is a reason why some countries have found it difficult to develop. Organizational capital is not easily transferable among countries. A large multinational company can set up a whole new factory in a developing country, but it either has to spend time and money accumulating organizational capital in the new plant or it can import the managers and many of the workers from the United States to get the factory started. And that defeats the purpose of investing in a low-wage country.

Another example of the importance of organizational capital closer to home is the Toyota production method has been responsible for major productivity advances in the assembly of automobiles and in related assembly operations in Japanese industry. U.S. auto companies have been trying over several years to change their plants, with only mixed success. The Toyota method requires the abandonment of existing organizational capital and the accumulation of new capital—a costly change.

I also sort of like agglomeration effects. This is an interesting and potentially important idea. We observe many institutions and arrangements that indicate the importance of these effects. Most companies operate with the same work week and concentrate in large cities despite the serious congestion costs that result from these choices. There have to be important economies of agglomeration that are offsetting the congestion.

I also find it plausible that there can be significant thick-market effects in the labor market. One parable here is the annual AEA meetings and their associated round of job market interviews. Clearly there are efficiency gains in gathering everyone together in the same place and at the same time.

While I recognize the importance of organizational capital and of agglomeration effects, it is not at all clear that these are playing a major role in the business cycle. The Diamond coconut economy is widely cited to support the assumption of agglomeration effects, but this model is often misinterpreted as a model of production externalities. In Diamond's model people climb trees and collect nuts, and these are activities that are independently pursued with no technological spillovers. There is a *trading* externality such that each firm is more likely to produce if other firms are producing because the probability of making a trade is increased. I like this Diamond model a lot as a model of demand spillovers, the kind of thing that lies behind the Keynesian multiplier.

The Caballero and Lyons (1989) empirical estimates in which aggregate output appears in industry-level production functions are interest-

ing, and I am willing to give them weight. But not as much as Hall gives them. It is not surprising that including aggregate output in an industry productivity equation does well. There have been common productivity shocks, such as the oil price shocks, that will give rise to the observed correlations. And of course there are the demand spillovers that will pick up the common component of the cycle in aggregate demand, and, hence, will also give rise to the kind of results that Caballero and Lyons report, giving short-run increasing returns in production. In this regard, I note the paper by Bartelsman, Caballero, and Lyons (1991) that shows that at cyclical frequencies "the linkage between an industry and its *customers* is the overriding factor in the transmission of external effects."

Further, what about the observations that go against agglomeration effects. Why have so many manufacturing plants moved to the southern states? Why are corporate headquarters moving out of New York City? Why has the big trend in retailing been away from high volume central city stores such as those on 47th street and toward outlet malls that are being built miles into the country? The other trend in retailing is toward suburban luxury malls where one bored assistant sells one pair of Argyle socks for fifty dollars to the only customer who shows up that day. As others have noted, if agglomeration effects are really so important, why don't we see higher productivity in Bangladesh.

Hall will respond, of course, that other things are not equal and that agglomeration effects are only one reason for productivity differences, but that argument is a two-edged sword. We also need to take other things into account before we conclude that the high productivity in Hall's favorite examples are due to agglomeration. One reason that New York City has high productivity is that it has high levels of physical capital, high levels of human capital, and high levels of organizational capital. There are certainly agglomeration effects *intramarginally*. That is why we invented corporations. That is why we invented New York City and Los Angeles and regions such as Silicon Valley or Route 128. The question is whether these effects are still operating importantly on the margin, whether they are relevant to the cycle.

The weak link in much of the new model building is that it is hard to find the kind of major *production* externalities that Hall talks about. Somebody needs to visit some companies and see if they can bring one of these externalities home in a cage so we can look at it. What is it that is raising productivity when all companies expand together?

I also have a problem with the idea that recessions are particularly good times for job finding. At the time of the AEA meetings there is a tremendous increase in both workers looking for jobs and employers looking for workers. Both the supply of labor and the demand for it are

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increased in a coordinated fashion. Recessions do not look exactly like this. Labor force participation decreases and the number of discouraged workers increases.

I have no quarrel with the Davis and Haltiwanger (1990) or the Blanchard and Diamond (1990) labor market evidence, but Hall's analysis of labor demand presented in this paper is problematic. The instruments used in his analysis are neither terribly exogenous nor terribly powerful. The impact of oil price shocks on productivity is open to debate, but certainly they have been cited as a major reason for the slow growth in productivity. Economic conditions affect presidential elections. Changes in military expenditure are probably more nearly exogenous, but not perfectly so. For example, there was a substantial military build up in the Kennedy years associated with Kennedy's commitment to getting the country moving again.

If Hall's econometric results were impeccable these criticisms might be muted, but this is not the case. The coefficients seem very fragile. The sign on the labor demand elasticity is reversed if the direction of the regression is reversed. There is a very wide variation across industries that is not explained in the paper.

On the labor supply side, I agree that the short-run labor supply schedule is very flat, but I disagree with Hall's view that this slope reflects a rational choice on the allocation of time among alternative uses so that the amount of unemployment is socially efficient. Somehow, says Hall, there is a decentralized process by which firms know of the gains from reorganization and they then bring about the necessary adjustment. I do not understand this process.

On the issue of inventories, my copy of Hall's paper arrived together with Alan Blinder's piece with Louis Maccini (1991) on inventory research, and I was struck in reading the paper by the way in which macro research seems to have distorted its methodology. The rational choice model has become the paramount criterion for analysis; observation and deduction take a back seat. Blinder and Maccini spend much of their time seeing if one can jump through enough hoops to reconcile the rational choice model with observation. They point out that if you ask business people how they determine their inventories, they generally talk about the Ss model. They note that this model can be tested and it fits the observed behavior of inventories pretty well. At that point, it seems to me, the burden of proof should be on the critics to explain why they think using the Ss model is irrational. I would rather see research follow Alan's lead in another area and ask businessmen why they use the Ss rule. Have they tried anything else? Do they know their own short-run marginal cost and, if so, do they take that into account in

setting inventories? Putting any paradigm ahead of observation and enquiry is a distortion of the scientific method. Inventory behavior is indeed suggestive that marginal cost curves are pretty flat or possibly downward sloping. If that were not the case, then the Ss rule of thumb would probably have broken down. But the cyclical pattern of inventory holding may not be tightly related to production technology.

To conclude I want to ask how many of Hall's stylized facts can be accommodated within a more conventional model of the cycle, one that is consistent with the way that a typical business will describe a recession, namely as a period where prices and wages are not that different to what they were at full employment (and will be again when there has been a recovery), but the firms would like to sell more output and cannot find customers.

Start with some shock to the economy that induces a cyclical downturn. I am not sure that the nature of the initial shock is all that important, and different cycles may have very different initiating events, but to be specific I will assume a money supply shock. The monetary shock reduces aggregate demand, and at the level of the individual firm this fall in aggregate demand is felt as a reduction in sales at prevailing prices—the firm level demand schedule has shifted in and the elasticity of demand, to the extent that this is a well-defined concept in an oligopoly, has changed sharply. What happens now? It does not cut its price by much, and some of the reasons for this are discussed elsewhere in this volume. We do not know which reasons are the most important, but the fact that there is an aggregate general equilibrium model of the economy that has the property that a proportional fall in all wages and prices will avoid any decline in real output does not tell us whether this individual firm's decision is rational.

Given the shift in its demand curve, the firm will certainly find it rational to reduce employment and its response is not well modeled as a movement along a stable schedule in which labor demand depends only on the real wage. It is a shift in such a schedule. What form does the employment response take? The firm knows that some of its plants are borderline in terms of long-term profitability. This means that the fall in demand has driven the present value of these marginal plants to zero and so it permanently closes them. In general, firms will concentrate production in the plants that are most profitable and some firms will give up and close their whole operations. In this economy, do we see employment reductions concentrated in plant closings or large reductions in employment, consistent with the Haltiwanger–Davis results? Absolutely.

The firm then makes a decision about which workers to lay off. Some

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of its workers are weak in terms of quality or suitability for the job they are in, and so the firm lays them off knowing that they will not be rehired. Some workers it would like to rehire later, but keeping them on is too expensive. Like NFL teams, it puts some workers on temporary layoff and hopes that they are not claimed by another team. Some workers are essential to production and the firm keeps them. They do not have enough to do and so (to mix my metaphors), they are given pit stop tasks such as maintenance tasks or accumulation of organizational capital while the caution flag is in effect. Are hiring rates high during this recession? Absolutely. Many of the laid off workers are rehired quickly. Are firms reorganizing and shifting workers around? Absolutely.

Are layoffs privately efficient in the sense that the marginal value of time equals the shadow wage? I am not sure of the answer to that. In terms of social efficiency, I am persuaded that recessions are inefficient. Better coordination of economic decisions would increase aggregate employment, output, and welfare. And the Diamond model is a useful parable in understanding what is going on. It describes well the ripple effect of a recession. The expectation of falling output and employment generates further declines in output and employment, and the economy can move to a temporary equilibrium with low production and sales.

In this economy, is productivity lower in recessions? I believe Hall of a couple of years ago: there are short-run increasing returns and market power, so that firms adjust their production by moving around a short-run U-shaped cost curve.

This more conventional view of the cycle seems to be broadly consistent with the facts of the cycle, but this consistency has been achieved by departures from the simple textbook framework. Modeling the cycle as if it were made up of identical firms and workers is not adequate. Reorganization may be an important part of the response of the economy to a fall in demand and trading externalities are important in understanding how a small initial shock may lead to a widespread downturn. Perhaps production externalities are important also. We know they are important for technology development and long-term growth, and I have no basis for ruling them out for the cycle. But I do not think they eliminate aggregate demand as perhaps the most important element in cyclical dynamics. In recessions, firms would like to produce and sell more even with no changes in prices. They are not deciding to produce less because reorganization is so profitable.

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## Comment

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The impressive thing about this paper is its audacity. It presents important ideas and notions that, if valid, would change the way economists think about the macroeconomy. Creating visions is much more difficult than refining them, but ultimately that is what all of us try to do. So one can admire the attempt and appreciate the strategy without necessarily regarding this paper as the final word. And that I am afraid is my view.

There is an old discussion joke to describe my reaction to this paper: how it contains much that is new and much that is true, but, unfortunately, what is new is not true and what is true is not new. Then I realized that I did not think there was very much that was true in this paper, so that the joke does not apply.

I am going to discuss three things: first, the strategy; second the approach to labor supply—the “recessions as reorganizations” notion; and third, the approach to labor demand—the “47th Street Photo business.”

Let me talk first about the strategy. I welcome Hall’s use of the term that Olivier and I first coined a couple of years ago, “fragile equilibria.” Since that term had not gone anywhere, I had coined two new expressions reflecting the same concept: “X economics versus scissors economics” and “acute angle economics versus right angle economics.”

Let me provide a cookbook approach to fragile-equilibria economics. First, you find a reason for your model to be reduced to two schedules. Second, you find a reason for one of the schedules to have a perverse slope. Third, you claim that in any case the schedule can also be relatively flat. At this point, you are left with three options: (1) you can take the modest approach that Hall has followed today and argue that given two flat schedules, a shift in either one will result in large displacements in quantity; (2) you can take a more aggressive approach and claim that if

the schedules move a little more, they will lie on top of each other, and therefore there will be a continuum of equilibria; or (3) you can become really ambitious and argue that if the schedules wiggle a bit more, the result is multiple equilibria. All of these things, which are often differentiated, are in fact very closely related.

There is another virtue to fragile-equilibrium economics: one does not need to have a very convincing story about what causes the schedules to shift, since small shocks will lead to large movements. In this case, this is useful since the paper does not tell a compelling story about the origin of the shocks.

Let me discuss the shock mechanism as I understand it from the paper. What this paper argues is that firing a worker imposes a fixed cost on the firm. When the interest rate goes up—not the actual interest rate but the grand shadow price interest rate that is conveniently unobservable—the firm reduces investment. Since firing people is an investment the firm does less firing and, hence, it is left with more people. With more people around, there are agglomeration effects, and the real wage ends up being higher. The shock is that when there is a higher interest rate, there will be less reorganization. That means that fewer people will be fired. Another way of stating this would be to say that when the interest rate is high, people are willing to take jobs more quickly, since, after all, search is an investment, and investing in finding a better job is a poor idea.

That is the mechanism that is operating. I have nothing more to add, other than to describe the mechanism and the source of shocks.

Let me now proceed to the paper's two schedules. First, there is a supply curve that reflects that the probability of finding a good match—it*\i.e.*, creating better capital for yourself—is about the same in a recession as in a boom.

Let me consider the evidence on this point. First, look at Figure 1. Murphy and Topel (1987) show that intersectoral and interregional mobility are lower during recessions. Job-to-job mobility, without unemployment, occurs less during recessions. So, in fact, the economy reorganizes itself less during recessions than during booms.

Second, consider the facts on the duration of unemployment (which, by the way, were first developed by an MIT assistant professor in the early 1970s). The incidence of long duration unemployment does increase significantly in recessions. Also, expected duration for the typical person who is unemployed, as distinct from the typical person flowing into unemployment, increases in recessions. On this point see Figure 2.

Third, as Figure 3 shows, the quit rate is highly procyclical. One wonders why, if job searching is just as productive in bad times as in good



Figure 1 MURPHY-TOPEL ESTIMATES OF SECTORAL MOBILITY

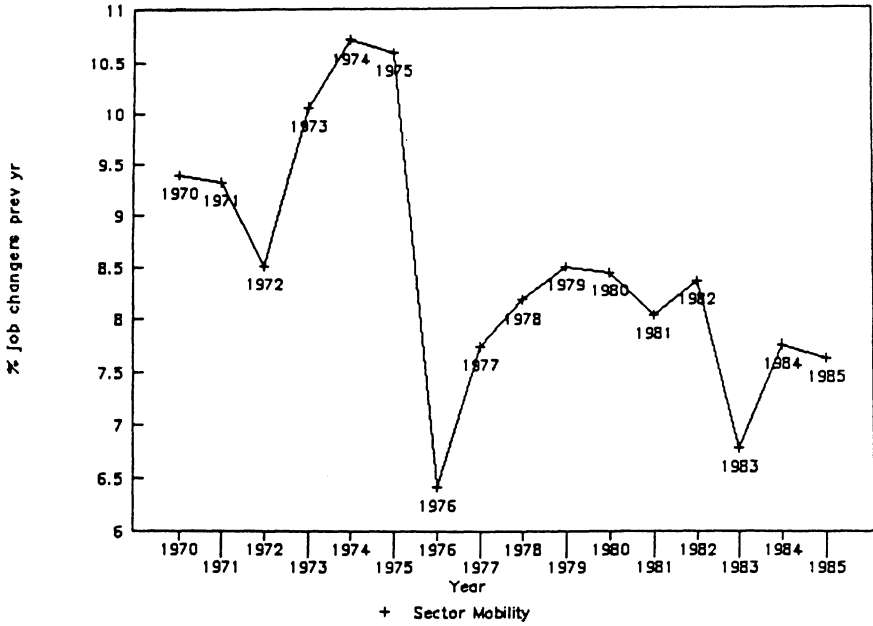
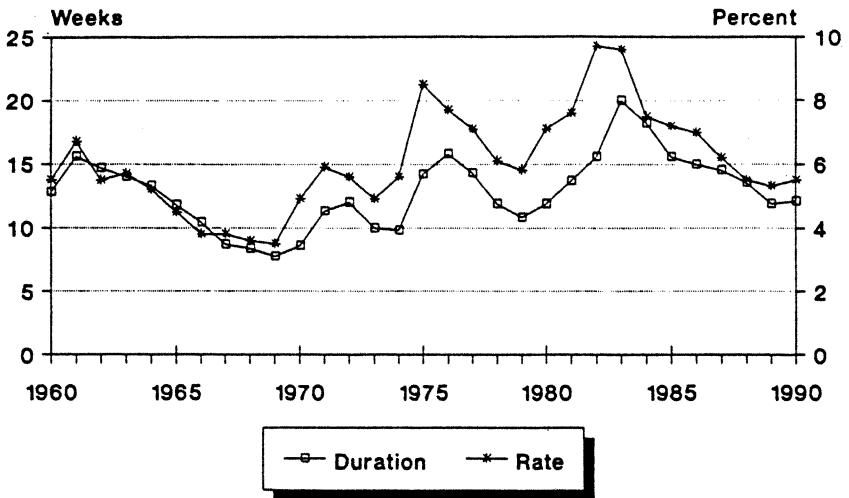


Figure 2 UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AND AVERAGE DURATION



Source: Economic Report of the President  
February 1991

times. In fact in good times people decide to go into the search activity and reorganize themselves, whereas in bad times, they do not.

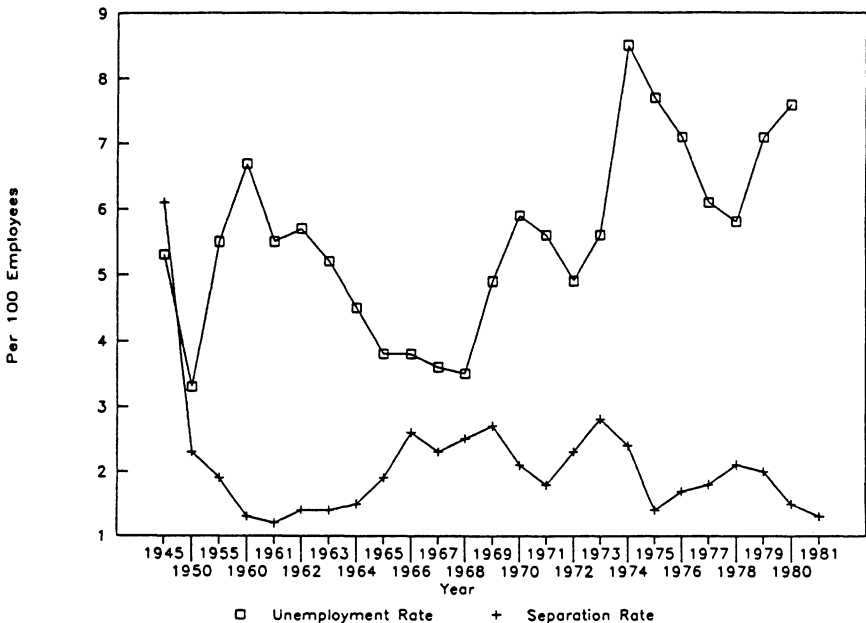
Fourth, in good times the rate of labor force entry goes up. In bad times the rate of labor force withdrawal goes up. That is exactly what one would expect if in fact the basic activity of reorganizing yourself is much less productive in bad times than it is in good times.

Fifth, the evidence suggests that, at least in some areas, when the unemployment rate is high, reservation wages are lower and that job-to-job wage growth is lower for those who find their jobs during recessions rather than during booms.

Sixth, if one looks at the aggregate level, one finds, as Dickens (1982) did, that productivity growth is slower over the long term after a deep recession, and not the other way around. This runs contrary to the notion that recessions are times when good capital is created.

Finally, when wars start, economies reorganize themselves very impressively, quickly, and effectively, without substantial unemployment. When wars end, a similar reorganization takes place with a great deal of unemployment. This suggests that it is aggregate demand that explains the difference and that the change in unemployment has nothing to do with the amount of reorganization that is taking place. Even leaving

Figure 3 QUILTS AND UNEMPLOYMENT



aside the strong statement that wages are rigid because there is reorganization, the bold statement that more effective reorganization takes place during recessions rather than in booms strikes me as quite unlikely.

What of the labor demand side? Here, there is no question that there is a major issue in explaining procyclical productivity and in explaining procyclical real wages. Hall's work has done much in defining this issue.

When I was originally asked to discuss this paper, I was told that this was going to be the moment when we were going to see the real empirical evidence behind the "47th Street Photo" business. Hall was going to present this. So I looked eagerly for labor demand elasticities that take account of agglomeration economies, since that seemed like a good place to start. The first thing I did was average the numbers in the Cobb–Douglas column and average the elasticities in Hall's column. To my surprise, I discovered that in fact the average was lower in Hall's column than it was in the Cobb–Douglas column. Then I was reminded that averaging in the negative is not quite legitimate. So I went back and reread the paper, and it said "In every industry my view is supported except for two." Then I counted how many there were and the total was three. The evidence in toto at the end of all this strikes me as substantially less than compelling.

I was going to make some remarks, the drift of which is that none of the instruments struck me as likely to be particularly compelling in a study like this, and if all of the "47th Street Photo" business buys you is no more than saying that the elasticity of substitution is 1.3 rather than 1.0, it seems somewhat anticlimactic to me.

What about the inventories evidence? My reaction to this, which could well be wrong, is that almost all of the work on manufactured goods inventories does not prove much of anything, if one thinks correctly about the economics of the problem. For instance, let us take automobiles. We have General Motors, a set of auto dealers, and customers. The problem is to ship the goods from the manufacturers to the customers as inexpensively as possible. Between General Motors and the dealerships, the problem of storing the goods will presumably be worked out, assuming there are long-term contracts and so forth, in a cost minimizing way. And surely if there is any place in the economy where there are implicit long-term contracts, it is in this chain. If, for example, stores are always full, and there is a total inventory that must be kept, one will then observe that the elasticity of inventory at the manufacturing level will be much greater than if the economy went from a low point to a high point. And that is precisely the kind of observation that produces the conclusion that there is a procyclical behavior of inventories.

So it seems to me that the basic research strategy for studying inventories in a disaggregated way is basically misguided once one recognizes that there are long-term contracts and long-term relationships that reach for cost minimizing solutions with those who are involved in the distribution channel.

Nonetheless, there is a real and central question for someone in this room to resolve conclusively during the next several years, in providing a convincing explanation for why real wages and productivity are so procyclical.

As Hall acknowledges, it is difficult to name a complementarity that supports this, and one hesitates to rely on something so unlikely. So it would be a great triumph if somebody found two of them and caged them. This would be terrific micro evidence for this notion. If it takes us several years to think of two of them to cage, one has to wonder how plausible this is as an overall notion.

I was surprised that there was no allusion in these debates to a notion that strikes me as equally plausible or equally implausible as complementarities with supergames we heard about this morning. This is the notion that recessions are the times during which liquidity problems are resolved, that capital is a factor of production, and that low capital costs translate into lower prices and, therefore, higher real wages, and that booms are times when the relevant real interest rate is low. This is something that shows up in prices and causes real wages to be higher. That notion has a set of problems that are neither more nor less plausible than the notions being put forth here.

At the end of the day, sabermetricians, who are to Tommy Lasorda what econometricians are to Nick Brady, have noted a regularity that I fear applies to Hall's effort here: that is that the people who score the most home runs also have the most strikeouts.

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#### *Discussion*

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In response to criticism of his choice of instruments, Hall argued that factor prices do not shift production functions. The price of oil does

affect the economy, but it does not shift the production function. Thus, it is a valid instrument. The same is true of military purchases. As for inventories, the strong, positive correlation of aggregate output and aggregate inventories is robust and flies in the face of sharply rising marginal costs. Finally, Hall agreed that it was surprising to him that his estimates of the elasticity of capital-labor substitution was so close to Cobb–Douglas. He argued, though, that the Cobb–Douglas elasticity was not something widely agreed to by the profession and is an important result in itself.

Olivier Blanchard objected to Hall's interpretation of his work with Peter Diamond. They find that the matching function exhibits constant returns to scale, which implies that the efficiency of matching in recessions is low. Also, while the probability of leaving unemployment for employment does not go down much in recessions, many people move from employment into out of the labor force. Thus, overall, duration increases. Hall responded that the relationship in question is between the volume of people employed and the stock of people looking for work. While using unemployment as a measure of time is problematic, the question is whether the relationship is linear, and the above does not address that issue.

Robert Barsky submitted that Hall's model recasts a sectoral shift theory of aggregate movements with temporal agglomeration as a new twist. Thus, all of the evidence against that theory such as Abraham and Katz could be brought to bear against the paper. He also asked why, in light of the fact that few vacancies and quits occur during recessions, only firms initiate reorganizations. Hall responded that the issue is a contractual relation of who is given the responsibility of making the decision to initiate reorganization, and his paper with Lazear speaks to that issue. In good times labor chooses; in bad times management chooses. The efficient outcome still arises.

Julio Rotemberg questioned whether grouping industries together and imposing the same elasticity of labor demand within each group was legitimate. He also agreed with Hall's use of the price of oil as an instrument for productivity shocks. He noted that its legitimacy rested on whether it shifted the marginal product of labor schedule. It can under standard production functions, but its effect is probably small. Martin Baily thought that it would affect the rate of technological change for a value added production function. Hall stated that when using value added there is an assumption of perfect complementarity but that deviations are second-order.

Robert Gordon stated that he disagreed with the strategy of modeling

movements of labor as movements along a stable labor demand curve and instead represent movements off of the curve. He also offered that the concept of the breakdown of organizational capital represents mismeasurement of labor input, capital input and output. These three types of mismeasurement can explain the procyclicality of productivity.

