Unbundling Labor

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The views herein are those of the authors and not the Federal Reserve System

This Paper

- Has technological change made jobs more or less similar?
- What are the implications for wage inequality?
- When does such technological change arise?

1970 - Cafe



2020 - Starbucks





Today

1. Facts

A. Heterogeneity in skill requirements across occupations

 \downarrow Low skill jobs $\ ,\ \uparrow$ High skill jobs

B. Inequality in wages *within* occupations

 \downarrow Low skill jobs $\ ,\ \uparrow$ High skill jobs

2. Theory

- Technological change consistent with A. causes B.
- Nests three standard frameworks that are silent on links b/w A. and B.
- Endogenize A. as appropriate technology choice
- 3. Additional Facts (time permitting)
 - Declining *experience premium* in low skill jobs
 - Declining overtime premium / part-time penalty in low skill jobs
 - Increasing *occupation switching* in low skill jobs

Fact A. - Technology

High skill jobs have become more different Low skill jobs have become more similar

Approach

- 1. O*NET data on 250+ skills and J occupations. Split: 2003-09, 2010-18
- 2. Reduce to $4 \times J$ matrix of skills $\mathbf{A}_t = \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{a}_{1t}, \dots, \mathbf{a}_{Jt} \end{bmatrix}$ (Lise Postel-Vinay, 2020)
- 3. Distance between occupations (Gathmann Schönberg, 2010)

Skill 1

$$\mathbf{a}_{jt} / ||\mathbf{a}_{jt}||$$

 $\mathbf{a}_{j't} / ||\mathbf{a}_{j't}||$
Skill 2

4. Compare the distribution of these distances $\theta(j, j')$ across periods

[▶] Details - Dimension Reduction

Fact A. - Technology

High skill jobs have become more different Low skill jobs have become more similar



Median distance between low skill occupations down ≈ 5 degrees

Fact B. - Wages

Wages in high skill jobs have become more different Wages in low skill jobs have become more similar

Approach

- Log annual earnings from the CPS $\log y_{it}$
- Residuals after controlling for observables e_{it}

 $Year_t, NAICS1_{it}, Ed_{it}, Race_{it}, Sex_{it}, FirmSize_{it}, Exp_{it}, Exp_{it}^2, Hours_{it}$

- Estimate in 15 year windows. Separately for low and high skill occupations
- Decompose $var(e_{it})$ into within- and between-occupation components

Fact B. - Wages

Wages in high skill jobs have become more different Wages in low skill jobs have become more similar



Variance of residuals. Red = High wage occupations, Blue = Low wage occupations

Robust across {All,Male,Female} × {Fix occupations in 1980, 2010}

Theory

Overview

- Builds on Rosen (1983), Heckman Scheinkman (1987)
- Workers supply multiple skills, heterogeneity in comparative advantage
- Tasks/occupations demand multiple skills
- Workers must supply skills to single task/occupation
- "More diversity in skill supply than skill demand"

Model

- Static competitive equilibrium model
- Two skills, workers $i \in [0, 1]$ endowed with $x(i), y(i) \sim H(x, y)$
- Two occupations j = 1, 2 with different skill intensities
- Competitive equilibrium wages

$$w_j(i) = \lambda_{jX} x(i) + \lambda_{jY} y(i) \quad \rightarrow \quad var\Big(\log w_j(i)\Big|j\Big)$$

- Within occupation inequality determined by two forces
 - 1. Distribution of skills conditional on selection
 - **2.** Gradient of within-occupation skill prices $\{\lambda_{jX}, \lambda_{jY}\}$

Production

- Final good

 $U(C_1, C_2)$

- Production of task/occupation j

$$C_{j} = F_{j}\left(X_{j}, Y_{j}\right) = \left[\alpha_{j}X_{j}^{\sigma} + (1 - \alpha_{j})Y_{j}^{\sigma}\right]^{\frac{1}{\sigma}}, \quad \sigma < 1$$
$$X_{j} = \int x(i)\phi_{j}(i) \, di, \qquad Y_{j} = \int y(i)\phi_{j}(i) \, di, \qquad \phi_{j}(i) \in \{0, 1\}$$

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BUNDLED - Worker i must allocate x(i), y(i) to the same task j

Efficient Allocation – Relaxed Problem

$$\max_{\phi_{1x}(i)\in\{0,1\},\phi_{1y}(i)\in\{0,1\}} U\Big(F_1(X_1,Y_1),F_2(X_2,Y_2)\Big)$$

subject to

with shadow prices $\lambda_{jX}, \lambda_{jY}$

$$X_{1} = \int \phi_{1x}(i) x(i) di \longrightarrow \lambda_{1X} = U_{1}F_{1X}$$

$$X_{2} = \int \left[1 - \phi_{1x}(i)\right] x(i) di \longrightarrow \lambda_{2X} = U_{2}F_{2X}$$

$$Y_{1} = \int \phi_{1y}(i) y(i) di \longrightarrow \lambda_{1Y} = U_{1}F_{1Y}$$

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and person-by-person bundling constraints

 $\phi_{1x}(i) = \phi_{1y}(i) \quad \text{for all} \quad i \in [0, 1]$

- Result. Can replace continuum of person-by-person constraints with single aggregate constraint
- Given X_1 what is minimum and maximum Y_1 bundled along with it?

Aggregate bundling constraint: $Y_1 \in \left[\underline{B}(X_1), \overline{B}(X_1)\right]$

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- Construct X_1 using workers with highest x(i)/y(i) first

$$X_1 = \int_0^{i^*} x(i) \, di, \qquad \underline{B}(X_1) = \int_0^{i^*} y(i) \, di$$

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- Result. If the skill distribution H(x, y) has no mass points, then
 - **1.** \underline{B} is strictly increasing, strictly *convex*
 - **2.** \overline{B} is strictly increasing, strictly *concave*
 - **3.** Continuously differentiable, with derivative $\underline{B}'(X_1) = y(i^*) / x(i^*)$

Feasible allocations must satisfy aggregate bundling constraint $Y_1 \in [\underline{B}(X_1), \overline{B}(X_1)]$. Determined by joint distribution of skills H(x, y), independent of technology.



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Independent skills $H(x, y) = H_X(x)H_Y(y)$.

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Positively correlated skills H(x, y), shrinks feasible set.

Feasible allocations must satisfy aggregate bundling constraint $Y_1 \in [\underline{B}(X_1), \overline{B}(X_1)]$. Determined by joint distribution of skills H(x, y), independent of technology.



Negatively correlated skills H(x, y), expands feasible set.

Efficient Allocation

$$\max_{X_1,Y_1} U\Big(F_1\Big(X_1,Y_1\Big),F_2\Big(\overline{X}-X_1,\overline{Y}-Y_1\Big)\Big)$$

subject to aggregate bundling constraint



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subject to aggregate bundling constraint

$$\underbrace{Y_1 \ge \underline{B}(X_1)}_{\text{Multiplier: } \underline{\mu}}$$

- First order conditions

$$X_1: \quad \lambda_{1X} = \lambda_{2X} + \underline{\mu} \underline{B}'(X_1)$$

$$Y_1: \quad \lambda_{1Y} = \lambda_{2Y} - \mu$$

- Multiplier μ does not appear in original problem, but is key to skill prices

Unbundled Allocation

'Contract curve' equates marginal rates of technical substitution: $F_{1X}/F_{1Y} = F_{2X}/F_{2Y}$. Unbundled allocation (*) equates U_1/U_2 to marginal rate of transformation F_{2k}/F_{1k} .



Bundled Allocation

Bundling constraint binds. Cannot 'break open' workers to get at underlying skill content. $U_1\Big[F_{1X} + \underline{B}'(X_1)F_{1Y}\Big] = U_2\Big[F_{2X} + \underline{B}'(X_1)F_{2Y}\Big], \qquad Y_1 = \underline{B}(X_1)$



Wages

 $w_1(i) = \lambda_{1X} x(i) + \lambda_{1Y} y(i)$



Wages





Wages





- When is the equilibrium bundled or unbundled?
- Definition symmetric economy. Weight α on primary skill, $\overline{X} = \overline{Y}$, no other restrictions on H(x, y)
- Result. For each symmetric economy unique factor intensity α^* such that:

(i) The equilibrium is unbundled if and only if $\alpha \leq \alpha^*$.

- (ii) If unbundled, then $X'(\alpha) > 0$, and $\mu(\alpha) = 0$.
- (iii) If bundled, then $X(\alpha) = X(\alpha^*)$ and $\mu(\alpha) > 0$ with $\mu'(\alpha) > 0$.
- What implications does this have for wages?
- Result. For each occupation j there is a unique factor intensity $\alpha_j^{**} \ge \alpha^*$, that depends on moments of H(x, y), such that $\uparrow \alpha$ increases the variance of log wages in occupation j if and only if $\alpha > \alpha_j^{**}$

 \blacktriangleright Details - Formulas for α^* and α^*

Skill Bias and Inequality

Varying $\alpha \in \{0.50, \dots, 0.75\}$. As occupations become more different, bundling constraint binds and *primary* skill prices increase relative to *secondary* skill prices.



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Low Skill Occupations in the US: 1970 vs 2020

\uparrow Skill bias \rightarrow Bundled / Sorted Equilibrium \rightarrow \uparrow Inequality



 $\Downarrow Skill \ bias \ \rightarrow \ Unbundled \ / \ Unsorted \ Equilibrium \ \rightarrow \ \Downarrow \ Inequality$



Three Special Cases

Katz-Murphy,	Roy,	Lindenlaub
	\checkmark	\frown
$\theta \rightarrow 1$	$\alpha_j \rightarrow 1$	$J \rightarrow \infty$

Three Special Cases

$$\underbrace{Katz-Murphy}_{\theta \to 1}, \underbrace{Roy}_{\alpha_j \to 1}, \underbrace{Lindenlaub}_{J \to \infty}$$

1. *Katz-Murphy*

$$F_1 = \begin{bmatrix} \alpha_{1L}L^{\sigma} & + \alpha_{1H}H^{\sigma} \end{bmatrix}^{\frac{1}{\sigma}}, \qquad \boldsymbol{x}(i) \in \left\{ \left(l(i), 0 \right), \left(0, h(i) \right) \right\}$$

- "Complete" skill supply \Rightarrow Always unbundled

- Law of one price holds for each skill

$$w(i) = \lambda_L l(i) + \lambda_H h(i)$$
$$var(\log w(i) | 1) = var(\log w(i))$$

1. Katz-Murphy

Entire set feasible. Equilibrium always unbundled, regardless of technology. Workers not sorted. All workers indifferent. No returns to comparative advantage.



Three Special Cases

$$\underbrace{Katz-Murphy}_{\theta \to 1}, \underbrace{Roy}_{\alpha_j \to 1}, \underbrace{Lindenlaub}_{J \to \infty}$$

2. Roy model

$$F_1 = Z_1 X_1, \qquad X_1 = \int x(i)\phi_1(i) \, di, \qquad x(i) = \exp\left(\boldsymbol{\beta}'_X \boldsymbol{\xi}(i)\right)$$

- Extreme factor bias \Rightarrow Always bundled
- One positive price for each "skill composite"

$$w_1(i) = \lambda_{1X} x(i)$$
$$var\left(\log w(i) \mid 1\right) = var\left(\log x(i) \mid i < i^*\right)$$

2. Roy Model

Equilibrium always bundled. Workers sorted by comparative advantage. Skill prices $\lambda_{1X}/\lambda_{2Y}$ pinned down by relative skills of marginal worker. $w_1(i) = \lambda_{1X}x(i)$



$\textbf{Technology} \rightarrow \textbf{Skill Prices} \rightarrow \textbf{Inequality}$

- Roy model - Returns to individual characteristics $\boldsymbol{\xi}(i)$ are exogenous:

 $\log w_1(i) = \log \lambda_{1X} + \boldsymbol{\beta}'_X \boldsymbol{\xi}(i)$

Skill prices enter only through occupation fixed effect

- Our model - To a first order approximation

$$\log w_1(i) \approx \log \overline{w}_1 + \widetilde{\boldsymbol{\beta}}_1' \boldsymbol{\xi}(i), \qquad \widetilde{\boldsymbol{\beta}}_1 = \widetilde{\lambda}_1 \boldsymbol{\beta}_X + \left(1 - \widetilde{\lambda}_1\right) \boldsymbol{\beta}_Y$$

Returns to individual characteristics $\boldsymbol{\xi}(i)$ are endogenous to skill prices

$$\widetilde{\lambda}_1 = \frac{\lambda_{1X}\overline{x}_1}{\lambda_{1X}\overline{x}_1 + \lambda_{1Y}\overline{y}_1}$$

Shocks re-weight characteristics $\boldsymbol{\xi}(i)$ via changes in skill prices $\lambda_{1X}, \lambda_{1Y}$. Roy model is special case where $\lambda_{1Y} = 0$ always.

Three Special Cases

$$\underbrace{Katz-Murphy}_{\theta \to 1}, \underbrace{Roy}_{\alpha_j \to 1}, \underbrace{Lindenlaub}_{J \to \infty}$$

3. Lindenlaub

$$\int_0^j Y(j') \, dj' = \int_0^j X(j') \, dj' \quad \text{for all } j \in [0, J] \quad \to \quad \underline{\mu}_j$$

- Continuum $\alpha(j) \in [0,1] \Rightarrow 1:1 matching \Rightarrow All workers are marginal$
- Continuum of skill prices

$$w_j(i) = \lambda_X(j)x(i) + \lambda_Y(j)y(i)$$
$$var\Big(\log w(i) \mid j\Big) = 0$$

Endogenous Technology

Endogenous Technology

Under what conditions do these changes in factor intensities emerge endogenously from an expansion in the set of available technologies?

1. Production function

$$F_j = \left[\alpha_j \left(a_{jX} X_j \right)^{\sigma} + (1 - \alpha_j) \left(a_{jY} Y_j \right)^{\sigma} \right]^{1/\sigma}, \qquad \sigma < 1$$

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2. Technology frontier

$$\left[a_{jX}^{\rho} + a_{jY}^{\rho}\right]^{1/\rho} = \overline{A}_j, \qquad \rho > 1$$

- Problem. Taking skill prices λ_{jX} , λ_{jY} as given, choose a_{jX} , a_{jY} to minimize marginal cost subject to technology frontier.

Available Technologies

Technology frontier $[a_{jX}^{\rho} + a_{jY}^{\rho}]^{1/\rho} = \overline{A}_j$. As $\rho \searrow 1$ can reach more combinations of a_{jX}, a_{jY} for given \overline{A}_j .



- Assumption. To rule out corner solutions:

$$\sigma < \frac{\rho}{1+\rho}$$

- Result. Bundling cutoff α^* is increasing in ρ if and only if $\sigma > 0$.

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$$\sigma < \frac{\rho}{1+\rho}$$

- Result. Bundling cutoff α^* is increasing in ρ if and only if $\sigma > 0$.
- Application. Now consider reduction from $\rho = \infty$ to $\rho = 1$
 - (i) Short-run equilibrium, $\rho = \infty$, as if exogenous $a_{jX}, a_{jY} = 1$
 - (ii) Long-run equilibrium, $\rho = 1$, endogenous a_{jX}, a_{jY}

- Result

(i) If $\sigma > 0$, skills are *substitutes*, initially unbundled equilibrium becomes endogenously bundled if decrease in cutoff sufficiently large

$$\underline{\alpha_{\rho=1}^*} < \alpha < \alpha_{\rho=\infty}^*$$

bundled in long run

- Result

(i) If $\sigma > 0$, skills are *substitutes*, initially unbundled equilibrium becomes endogenously bundled if decrease in cutoff sufficiently large



(ii) If $\sigma < 0$, skills are *complements*, initially bundled equilibrium becomes endogenously unbundled if increase in cutoff sufficiently large

$$\underbrace{\alpha_{\rho=1}^* > \alpha}_{\rho=\infty} > \alpha_{\rho=\infty}^*$$

unbundled in long run

Case (i) $\sigma > 0$. Bundling Labor



Skills are substitutes.

Case (i) $\sigma > 0$. Bundling Labor

Endogenous technology more biased to primary skill, more "Roy-Like". Bundling constraints tighter. Greater returns to comparative advantage in primary skill. Increasing within-occupation wage inequality.



Skills are substitutes.

Case (ii) $\sigma < 0$. Unbundling Labor



Skills are complements.

Case (ii) $\sigma < 0$. Unbundling Labor

Endogenous technology less biased to primary skill, less "Roy-Like". Bundling constraints slacken. Lower returns to comparative advantage in primary skill. Decreasing within-occupation wage inequality.



Skills are complements.

Additional Facts

▶ Skip to End

1. Occupation Switching



2. Experience Premium



One extra year experience associated with 2 to 3 percent higher wage

$$\log y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_{Exp}^{\tau} Exp_{it} + \beta_{Exp}^{\tau} Exp_{it}^{2} + \beta_{Hours}^{\tau} \log Hours_{it} + \beta_{Size}^{\tau} Size_{it} \dots + \beta_{X}^{\tau} [Year_{t}, Race_{it}, NAICS1_{it}, Ed_{it}, Sex_{it}]$$

3. Hours Premium



(=1): wage independent of hours, (≥ 1) : wage increasing in hours

 $\log y_{it} = \alpha + \beta_{Exp}^{\tau} Exp_{it} + \beta_{Exp}^{\tau} Exp_{it}^{2} + \beta_{Hours}^{\tau} \log Hours_{it} + \beta_{Size}^{\tau} Size_{it} \dots + \beta_{X}^{\tau} [Year_{t}, Race_{it}, NAICS1_{it}, Ed_{it}, Sex_{it}]$

1. More *occupation switching* in low skill jobs

2. Smaller *experience premium* in low skill jobs

3. Smaller overtime premium / part-time penalty in low skill jobs

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 - Unbundled equilibrium features indeterminate occupational choice
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- 1. More *occupation switching* in low skill jobs
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- 2. Smaller *experience premium* in low skill jobs
 - Add learning by doing in the direction of occupation skill bias Cavounidis Lang (JPE, 2020)
 - Experience premium \leftrightarrow Inframarginal rents
 - Unbundling labor reduces gradient of primary / secondary skill prices
 - Reduces observed experience premium
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 - Unbundlled equilibrium \leftrightarrow Workers are more "substitutable"

Summary

1. Facts

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B. Inequality in wages *within* occupations

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2. Theory

- General equilibrium Rosen (1983), Heckman Scheinkman (1987)
- Technological change consistent with A. causes B.
- Nests three standard frameworks that are silent on links b/w A. and B.
- Endogenize A. as appropriate technology choice (Caselli Coleman 2006)
 - Expand set of available technologies
 - Endogenous unbundling when skills \boldsymbol{X} and \boldsymbol{Y} are substitutes
 - Endogenous bundling when skills \boldsymbol{X} and \boldsymbol{Y} are complements

Appendix

Fact A. - Technology

Input is a $J \times K$ normalized matrix of skill measures **A** from O*NET

1. Apply principal components with $K^* \ll K$

$$\mathbf{A}_{[J \times K]} = \widehat{\mathbf{A}}_{[J \times K^*]} \widehat{\mathbf{P}}_{[K^* \times K]} + \mathbf{U}_{[J \times K]}$$

2. To name skills, rotate principal components s.t. satisfy K^* orthogonality conditions

$$\mathbf{A}_{[J \times K]} = \left(\widehat{\mathbf{A}}_{[J \times K^*]}\Psi\right) \left(\Psi^{-1}\widehat{\mathbf{P}}_{[K^* \times K]}\right) + \mathbf{U}_{[J \times K]} \rightarrow \mathbf{A}^* = \widehat{\mathbf{A}}\Psi$$

 \implies Final skill 1, places a weight of 1 on k = 1, and zero on $k \in \{2, \ldots, K^*\}$

- **3.** Use as K^* 'anchoring' skills those used by Acemoglu Autor (2011)
 - Non-routine cognitive: Analytical "Analyzing data / information"
 - Non-routine cognitive: Interpersonal "Maintaining relationships"
 - Routine cognitive "Importance of repeating the same tasks"
 - Routine manual "Controlling machines and processes"

[▶] Back - Fact A. Technology

Empirics - Details

- All data based on March CPS "last year" questions
- Occupation, Industry Dorn (1990) harmonized cross-walk
 - Drop military
 - Occupation skill = Fraction of workers with high-school or less
 - Occupations sorted on occupation skill
- Use Heathcote, Perri and Violante (2010)
 - Earnings = Wage income + $(2/3) \times$ Self employment income
 - Annual hours = Weeks worked last year \times Usual hours worked per week
 - Wage = Earnings / Annual hours
 - Age 25-65, Wage $>0.5\times$ Federal minimum wage, Hours > One month of 8hr days
- Regression controls for residualized wage:
 - Worker education (3 levels), Industry (1 digit), Experience, Experience² Race, Log hours,
 - Experience = (age max(years in school, 12)) 6

[▶] Back - Wages

Analytics - Details

- Amount of X in occupation 1

$$X(\alpha) = \frac{\alpha^{\frac{1}{1-\sigma}}}{(1-\alpha)^{\frac{1}{1-\sigma}} + \alpha^{\frac{1}{1-\sigma}}} \overline{X}.$$

- Cut-off

$$\overline{X} - X(\alpha^*) = \underline{B}(X(\alpha^*))$$

- Variance of log wages - $\widehat{w}_j(i) = \zeta_{jX}\widehat{x}(i) + \zeta_{jY}\widehat{y}(i)$, within-j deviations

$$\begin{aligned} \operatorname{Var}_{j}\left[\widehat{w}\right] &= \operatorname{Var}_{j}\left[\widehat{y}\right] + \zeta_{jX}^{2} \operatorname{Var}_{j}\left[\widehat{x} - \widehat{y}\right] + 2\zeta_{jX} \operatorname{Cov}_{j}\left[\widehat{y}, \, \widehat{x} - \widehat{y}\right] \\ \zeta_{jX} &= \frac{\lambda_{jX} \, \overline{x}_{j}}{\lambda_{jX} \, \overline{x}_{j} + \lambda_{jY} \, \overline{y}_{j}} \end{aligned}$$

- Cut-off - In symmetric economy RHS depends on distribution of skills

$$\left(\frac{\alpha_1^{**}}{1-\alpha_1^{**}}\right) \middle/ \left(\frac{\alpha^*}{1-\alpha^*}\right) = \underbrace{\left(\frac{\operatorname{Var}_1[\,\widehat{y}\,] - \operatorname{Cov}_1[\,\widehat{x}\,,\,\widehat{y}\,]}{\operatorname{Var}_1[\,\widehat{x}\,] - \operatorname{Cov}_1[\,\widehat{x}\,,\,\widehat{y}\,]}\right) \left(\frac{\overline{y}_1}{\overline{x}_1}\right)}_{\text{If this is < 1, then }\alpha^{**} = \alpha^*}$$

Back - Propositions