

THE ESTABLISHMENT-LEVEL BEHAVIOR OF VACANCIES AND HIRING*

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This paper is the first to study vacancies, hires, and vacancy yields at the establishment level in the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, a large sample of US employers. To interpret the data, we develop a simple model that identifies the flow of new vacancies and the job-filling rate for vacant positions. The fill rate moves counter to aggregate employment but rises steeply with employer growth rates in the cross section. It falls with employer size, rises with worker turnover rates, and varies by a factor of four across major industry groups. We also develop evidence that the employer-level hiring technology exhibits mild increasing returns in vacancies, and that employers rely heavily on other instruments, in addition to vacancies, as they vary hires. Building from our evidence and a generalized matching function, we construct a new index of recruiting intensity (per vacancy). Recruiting intensity partly explains the recent breakdown in the standard matching function, delivers a better-fitting empirical Beveridge curve, and accounts for a large share of fluctuations in aggregate hires. Our evidence and analysis provide useful inputs for assessing, developing, and calibrating theoretical models of search, matching, and hiring in the labor market. *JEL* Codes: D21, E24, J60.

I. INTRODUCTION

In many models of search, matching, and hiring in the labor market, employers post vacancies to attract job seekers.¹ These

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1. This description fits random search models such as Pissarides (1985) and Mortensen and Pissarides (1994), directed search models with wage posting such as Moen (1997) and Acemoglu and Shimer (2000), on-the-job search models such

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models often feature a matching function that requires job seekers and job vacancies to produce new hires. The concept of a job vacancy also plays an important role in mismatch and stock-flow matching models of the labor market.² Despite a key role in theoretical models, relatively few empirical studies consider vacancies and their connection to hiring at the establishment level. Even at more aggregated levels, our knowledge of vacancy behavior is very thin compared to our knowledge of unemployment. As a result, much theorizing about vacancies and their role in the hiring process takes place in a relative vacuum.

This study enriches our understanding of vacancy and hiring behavior and develops new types of evidence for assessing, developing, and calibrating theoretical models. We consider vacancy rates, new hires, and vacancy *yields* at the establishment level in the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS), a large sample of US employers. The vacancy yield is the flow of realized hires during the month per reported job opening at the end of the previous month. Using JOLTS data, we investigate how the hires rate, the vacancy rate, and the vacancy yield vary with employer growth in the cross section; how they differ by employer size, worker turnover, and industry; and how they move over time.

We first document some basic patterns in the data. The vacancy yield falls with establishment size, rises with worker turnover, and varies by a factor of four across major industry groups. Employers with no recorded vacancies at month's end account for 45% of aggregate employment. At the same time, establishments reporting zero vacancies at month's end account for 42% of all hires in the following month.

The large share of hires by employers with no reported vacancy at least partly reflects an unmeasured flow of new vacancies posted and filled within the month. This unmeasured vacancy flow also inflates the measured vacancy yield. To address this and other issues, we introduce a simple model of daily hiring

as Burdett and Mortensen (1998) and Nagypál (2007), and many others. The precise role of vacancies differs across these models. See Mortensen and Pissarides (1999); Rogerson, Shimer, and Wright (2006); and Yashiv (2006) for reviews of research in this area.

2. See, for example, Hansen (1970) and Shimer (2007) for mismatch models and Coles and Smith (1998) and Ebrahimi and Shimer (2010) for stock-flow matching models.

dynamics. The model treats data on the monthly flow of new hires and the stock of vacancies at month's end as observed outcomes of a daily process of vacancy posting and hiring. By cumulating the daily processes to the monthly level, we can address the stock-flow distinction and uncover the flow of new vacancies and the average daily job-filling rate during the month.

The job-filling rate is the employer counterpart to the much-studied job-finding rate for unemployed workers.³ Although theoretical models of search and matching carry implications for both job-finding and job-filling rates, the latter has received little attention. Applying our model, we find that the job-filling rate moves countercyclically at the aggregate level. In the cross section, vacancy durations are longer for larger establishments, and job-filling rates are an order of magnitude greater at high compared to low turnover establishments. Most strikingly, the job-filling rate rises very steeply with employer growth in the cross section—from 1% to 2% per day at establishments with stable employment to more than 10% per day for establishments that expand by 7% or more in the month.

Looking across industries, employer size classes, worker turnover groups, and establishment growth rate bins, we find a recurring pattern: the job-filling rate exhibits a strong positive relationship to the gross hires rate. The same pattern emerges even more strongly when we isolate changes over time at the establishment level. This pattern suggests that employers rely heavily on other instruments, in addition to vacancies, as they vary the rate of new hires. Other instruments—such as advertising expenditures, screening methods, hiring standards, and compensation packages—influence job-filling rates through effects on applications per vacancy, applicant screening times, and acceptance rates of job offers. Another explanation for the positive relationship between job-filling rates and gross hires in the micro data is increasing returns to vacancies in the employer-level hiring technology.

To evaluate these explanations and extend our analysis in other ways, we consider a generalized matching function defined over unemployed workers, job vacancies, and “recruiting intensity” per vacancy (shorthand for the effect of other instruments).

3. Recent studies include Hall (2005a, 2005b); Shimer (2005, 2012); Yashiv (2007); Petrongolo and Pissarides (2008); Elsby, Michaels, and Solon (2009); and Fujita and Ramey (2009).

As we show, the corresponding hiring technology implies a tight relationship linking the hires elasticity of job-filling rates in the micro data to employer-level scale economies in vacancies and recruiting intensity per vacancy. Partly motivated by this relationship, we devise an approach to estimating the degree of scale economies using JOLTS data. We find evidence of mild increasing returns to vacancies in the employer-level hiring technology. This novel result—interesting in its own right—allows us to recover the combined role of other (nonvacancy) recruiting instruments in hiring outcomes from the empirical hires elasticity of job-filling rates. Our evidence and analysis lead us to conclude that recruiting intensity per vacancy drives the empirical hires elasticity of job-filling rates.

Our analysis and empirical investigation also yield new insights about aggregate labor market fluctuations. Consider a standard CRS matching function defined over job vacancies (v) and unemployed persons (u): $H = \mu v^{1-\alpha} u^\alpha$, where $\mu > 0$ and $0 < \alpha < 1$. The implied vacancy yield is a decreasing function of labor market tightness, as measured by the vacancy-unemployment ratio. Figure I plots this implied vacancy yield and shows that it closely tracks the measured vacancy yield in JOLTS data from 2001 to 2007.⁴ But the relationship broke down in a major way in the next four years: conditional on the number of vacant jobs and unemployed workers, new hires are much lower from 2008 to 2011 than implied by a standard matching function. This breakdown is a significant puzzle.

We provide a partial explanation and remedy for the breakdown, building from micro evidence to quantify recruiting intensity per vacancy at the aggregate level. The resulting generalized matching function outperforms the standard matching function in several respects. First, as Figure I shows, incorporating a role for recruiting intensity reduces the discrepancy between the measured vacancy yield and the empirical construct implied by the matching function. Second, and closely related, our recruiting

4. The ratio of hires to vacancies is often treated as a measure of the job-filling rate. We reserve the latter term for the measure that adjusts for the stock-flow difference between the monthly flow of gross hires and the end-of-month vacancy stock in JOLTS data. As an empirical matter, the daily fill rate is nearly proportional to the vacancy yield in the aggregate time-series data. So, we do not lose much by focusing on the vacancy yield in Figure I, and we gain simplicity. In the micro data, however, the near proportionality between vacancy yields and job-filling rates fails, and it becomes important to respect the stock-flow distinction.

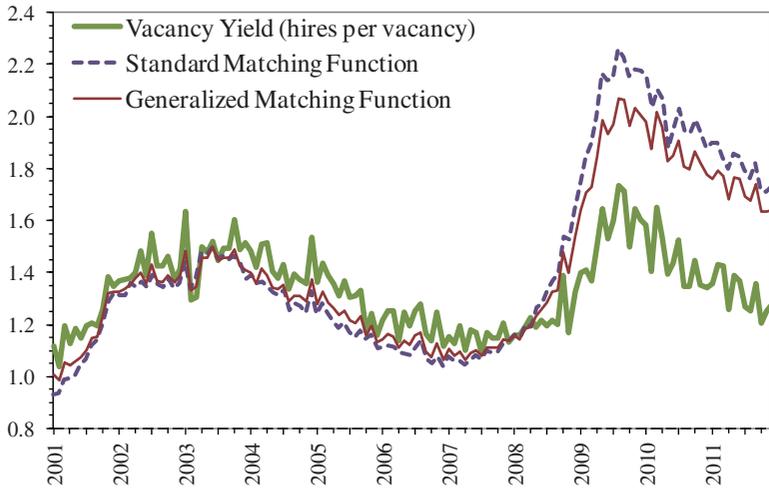


FIGURE I

Measures of Inverse Market Tightness, January 2001 to December 2011

intensity measure explains about one quarter of the aggregate time-series residuals produced by the standard matching function, residuals that other authors interpret in terms of mismatch or fluctuations in matching efficiency. Third, by generalizing the matching function to include a role for recruiting intensity, we obtain a better-fitting empirical Beveridge curve in national and regional data. Finally, over the period covered by the JOLTS data, our recruiting intensity index accounts for much of the movement in aggregate hires.⁵

Our work also relates to several previous empirical studies of vacancy behavior. The pioneering work of Abraham (1983, 1987) and Blanchard and Diamond (1989) uses the Help Wanted Index (HWI) to proxy for vacancies, and many other studies follow their lead. The Help Wanted Index yields sensible patterns at the

5. In related work, we develop additional evidence that the recruiting intensity concept and generalized matching function improve our understanding of aggregate labor market fluctuations. Davis, Faberman, and Haltiwanger (2012) show that industry-level movements in job-filling rates are at odds with implications of the standard matching function but consistent with the implications of our generalized matching function. Davis (2011) shows that using our recruiting intensity index in a generalized matching function helps explain the plunge in job-finding rates during the Great Recession and their failure to recover afterward.

aggregate level (Abraham 1987; Blanchard and Diamond 1989; Shimer 2005), but it cannot accommodate an employer-level analysis. Several recent studies exploit aggregate and industry-level JOLTS data on hires, separations, and vacancies (Hall 2005a; Shimer 2005, 2007; Valetta 2005). Earlier studies by Holzer (1994), Burdett and Cunningham (1998), and Barron, Berger, and Black (1999) consider vacancy behavior in small samples of US employers. Van Ours and Ridder (1991) investigate the cyclical behavior of vacancy flows and vacancy durations using periodic surveys of Dutch employers. Coles and Smith (1996), Berman (1997), Yashiv (2000), Dickerson (2003), Andrews et al. (2008), and Sunde (2007) exploit vacancy data from centralized registers of job openings in various countries.

The next section describes our data and measurement mechanics. Section III documents basic patterns in the behavior of vacancies and hires. Section IV sets forth our model of daily hiring dynamics, fits it to the data, recovers the daily job-filling rate, and develops evidence of how the fill rate varies over time and in the cross section. In Section V, we interpret the evidence and extend the analysis in several ways. We introduce the generalized matching function, and show how to extract information about the role of recruiting intensity and scale economies in the hiring process. We then turn to aggregate implications and relate our evidence to leading search models. Section VI concludes with a summary of our main contributions and some remarks about directions for future research.

II. DATA SOURCES AND MEASUREMENT MECHANICS

The Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) samples about 16,000 establishments per month. Respondents report hires and separations during the month, employment in the pay period covering the 12th of the month, and job openings at month's end. JOLTS data commence in December 2000, and our establishment-level sample continues through December 2006. We drop observations that are not part of a sequence of two or more consecutive observations for the same establishment. This restriction enables a comparison of hires in the current month to vacancies at the end of the previous month, an essential element of our micro-based analysis. The resulting sample contains 577,268 observations, about 93% of the full sample that the

BLS uses for published JOLTS statistics. We have verified that this sample restriction has little effect on aggregate estimates of vacancies, hires, and separations.⁶ While our JOLTS micro data set ends in December 2006, we consider the period through December 2011 for analyses that use published JOLTS data.

It will be helpful to describe how job openings (vacancies) are defined and measured in JOLTS. The survey form instructs the respondent to report a vacancy when “a specific position exists, work could start within 30 days, and [the establishment is] actively seeking workers from outside this location to fill the position.” The respondent is asked to report the number of such vacancies on “the last business day of the month.” Further instructions define “active recruiting” as “taking steps to fill a position. It may include advertising in newspapers, on television, or on radio; posting Internet notices; posting ‘help wanted’ signs; networking or making ‘word of mouth’ announcements; accepting applications; interviewing candidates; contacting employment agencies; or soliciting employees at job fairs, state or local employment offices, or similar sources.” Vacancies are not to include positions open only to internal transfers, promotions, recalls from temporary layoffs, jobs that commence more than 30 days hence, or positions to be filled by temporary help agencies, outside contractors, or consultants.

Turning to measurement mechanics, we calculate an establishment’s net employment change in month t as its reported hires in month t minus its reported separations in t . We subtract this net change from its reported employment in t to obtain employment in $t - 1$. This method ensures that the hires, separations, and employment measures in the current month are consistent with employment for the previous month. To express hires, separations, and employment changes at t as rates, we divide by the simple average of employment in $t - 1$ and t . The resulting growth rate measure is bounded, symmetric about zero, and has other desirable properties, as discussed in Davis, Haltiwanger, and Schuh (1996). Unless noted otherwise, we measure the vacancy

6. There is a broader selection issue in that the JOLTS misses most establishment births and deaths, which may be why our sample restriction has little impact on aggregate estimates. Another issue is the potential impact of JOLTS imputations for item nonresponse, on which we rely. See Clark and Hyson (2001), Clark (2004), and Faberman (2008) for detailed discussions of JOLTS. See Davis et al. (2010) for an analysis of how the JOLTS sample design affects the published JOLTS statistics.

rate at t as the number of vacancies reported at the end of month t divided by a measure of total jobs, defined as the sum of vacancies and the simple average of employment in $t - 1$ and t . The vacancy yield in t is the number of hires reported in t divided by the number of vacancies reported at the end of $t - 1$.

III. SECTORAL AND ESTABLISHMENT-LEVEL PATTERNS

III.A. Cross-Sectional Patterns

Table I draws on JOLTS micro data to report the hires rate, separation rate, vacancy rate, and vacancy yield by industry, employer size group, and worker turnover group. Worker turnover is measured as the sum of the monthly hires and separations rates at the establishment. All four measures show considerable cross-sectional variation, but we focus our remarks on the vacancy yield. Government, Health & Education, Information, and FIRE have low vacancy yields on the order of 0.8 hires during the month per vacancy at the end of the previous month. Construction, an outlier in the other direction, has a vacancy yield of 3.1. The vacancy yield falls by more than half in moving from establishments with fewer than 50 employees to those with more than 1,000. It rises by a factor of ten in moving from the bottom to the top turnover quintile.

What explains these strong cross-sectional patterns? One possibility is that matching is intrinsically easier in certain types of jobs. For example, Albrecht and Vroman (2002) build a matching model with heterogeneity in worker skill levels and in skill requirements of jobs. Jobs with greater skill requirements have longer expected vacancy durations because employers are choosier about whom to hire. Barron, Berger, and Black (1999) provide evidence that search efforts and vacancy durations depend on skill requirements. Davis (2001) identifies a different effect that leads to shorter durations in better jobs. In his model, employers with more productive jobs search more intensively because the opportunity cost of a vacancy is greater. Thus, if all employers use the same search and matching technology, more productive jobs fill at a faster rate. Yet another possibility is that workers and employers sort into separate search markets, each characterized by different tightness, different matching technologies, or both. Given the standard matching function described in the introduction, this type of heterogeneity gives rise to

TABLE I
 AVERAGE MONTHLY WORKER FLOW RATES, VACANCY RATES, AND VACANCY YIELDS BY
 INDUSTRY, SIZE, AND TURNOVER, 2001 TO 2006

	Hires rate	Separations rate	Vacancy rate	Vacancy yield	Employment share
Nonfarm employment	3.4	3.2	2.5	1.3	–
Major industry					
Natural resources & mining	3.1	3.0	1.5	2.0	0.5
Construction	5.4	5.4	1.7	3.1	5.3
Manufacturing	2.3	2.6	1.7	1.3	11.3
Transport, wholesale, utilities	2.7	2.7	1.9	1.4	8.0
Retail trade	4.5	4.4	2.3	1.9	11.4
Information	2.2	2.4	2.6	0.8	2.4
FIRE	2.3	2.2	2.5	0.9	6.1
Prof. & business services	4.6	4.2	3.5	1.3	12.4
Health & education	2.7	2.3	3.5	0.7	12.7
Leisure & hospitality	6.3	6.0	3.4	1.8	9.3
Other services	3.3	3.2	2.3	1.4	4.1
Government	1.6	1.3	1.9	0.8	16.5
Establishment size class					
0–9 employees	3.4	3.3	2.0	1.6	12.1
10–49 employees	4.0	4.0	2.3	1.7	23.2
50–249 employees	4.0	3.8	2.6	1.5	28.3
250–999 employees	3.1	2.9	2.8	1.1	17.1
1,000–4,999 employees	2.1	1.9	3.0	0.7	13.0
5,000+ employees	1.7	1.5	2.4	0.7	6.4
Worker turnover category					
No turnover	0	0	1.1	0	24.4
First quintile	0.5	0.6	1.7	0.3	15.1
Second quintile	1.3	1.2	2.6	0.5	15.1
Third quintile	2.4	2.2	2.9	0.8	15.1
Fourth quintile	4.5	4.3	3.1	1.4	15.1
Fifth quintile (highest)	13.5	13.0	4.4	3.1	15.1

Notes. Estimates tabulated from our sample of JOLTS micro data, containing 577,268 monthly establishment-level observations from 2001 to 2006. Rates of hires and separations are monthly flows expressed as a percent of employment. The vacancy rate is the stock of open job positions on the last business day of the month expressed as a percent of total jobs (employment plus vacancy stock). The vacancy yield is the flow of hires during the month expressed as a percentage of the vacancy stock on the last day of the previous month. The employment share is employment as a percent of total nonfarm employment. Turnover is the sum of the hires rate and the separations rate for the monthly establishment-level observation.

differences in vacancy yields across labor markets defined by observable and relevant employer characteristics.

Another explanation recognizes that firms recruit, screen, and hire workers through a variety of channels, and that reliance on these channels differs across industries and employers.

For example, construction firms may recruit workers from a hiring hall or other specialized labor pool for repeated short-term work, perhaps reducing the incidence of measured vacancies and inflating the vacancy yield. In contrast, government and certain other employers operate under laws and regulations that require a formal search process for the vast majority of new hires, ensuring that most hiring is mediated through measured vacancies. More generally, employers rely on a mix of recruiting and hiring practices that differ in propensity to involve a measured vacancy and in vacancy duration. These methods include bulk screening of applicants who respond to help-wanted advertisements, informal recruiting through social networks, opportunistic hiring of attractive candidates, impromptu hiring of unskilled workers in spot labor markets, and the conversion of temp workers and independent contractors into permanent employees. Differences in the mix of recruiting, screening, and hiring practices lead to cross-sectional differences in the vacancy yield.

III.B. The Establishment-Level Distribution of Vacancies and Hires

Table II and Figure II document the large percentage of employers with few or no reported vacancies. In the average month, 45% of employment is at establishments with no reported vacancies. The employment-weighted median vacancy rate is less than 1% of employment, and the median number of vacancies is just one. At the 90th percentile of the employment-weighted distribution, the vacancy rate is 6% of employment and the number of vacancies is 63. Weighting all establishments equally, 88 percent report no vacancies, the vacancy rate at the 90th percentile is 3%, and the number of vacancies at the 90th percentile is just one. The establishment-level incidence of vacancies is highly persistent: only 18% of vacancies in the current month occur at establishments with no recorded vacancies in the previous month.

Establishments with zero hires during the month account for 35% of employment, which suggests that many employers have little need for hires at the monthly frequency. However, Table II also reports that 42% of hires take place at establishments with no reported vacancy going into the month. This fact suggests that average vacancy durations are very short, or that much hiring is not mediated through vacancies as the concept is defined and measured in JOLTS. We return to this issue in Section IV.

TABLE II
 ADDITIONAL STATISTICS ON HIRES AND VACANCIES

Statistic	Percent
Employment at establishments with no hires in t	34.8
Employment at establishments with no vacancies at end of $t - 1$	45.1
Vacancies at end of t at establishments with no vacancies at end of $t - 1$	17.9
Hires in t at establishments with no vacancies at end of $t - 1$	41.6

See Table I for notes. Statistics are for nonfarm establishments.

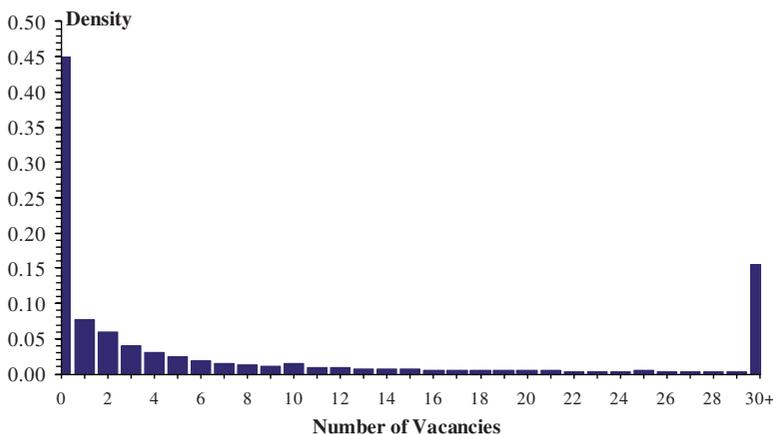


FIGURE II

Distribution of Vacancies over Establishments, Employment-Weighted

III.C. Hires, Vacancies, and Establishment Growth

We next consider how hires, vacancies, and vacancy yields co-vary with employer growth rates at the establishment level. To estimate these relationships in a flexible nonparametric manner, proceed as follows. First, partition the feasible range of growth rates, $[-2.0, 2.0]$, into 195 nonoverlapping intervals, or bins, allowing for mass points at -2 , 0 , and 2 . We use very narrow intervals of width $.001$ near zero and wider intervals in thinner parts of the distribution. Next, sort the 577,000 establishment-level observations into bins based on monthly employment growth rates, and calculate employment-weighted means for

the hires rate, the vacancy rate, and the vacancy yield for each bin. Equivalently, we perform an OLS regression of the outcome variables on an exhaustive set of bin dummies. The regression coefficients on the bin dummies recover the nonparametric relationship of the outcome variables to the establishment-level growth rate of employment. Under the regression approach, it is easy to introduce establishment fixed effects or other controls.

Figures III, IV, and V display the nonparametric regression results.⁷ The hires relation must satisfy part of an adding-up constraint, because net growth is the difference between hires and separations. Thus, the minimum feasible value for the hires rate lies along the horizontal axis for negative growth and along the 45-degree line for positive growth. Hiring exceeds this minimum at all growth rates, more so as growth increases.

Figure III shows a highly nonlinear, kinked relationship between the hires rate and the establishment growth rate. The hires rate declines only slightly with employment growth at shrinking establishments, reaching its minimum for establishments with no employment change. To the right of zero, the hires rate rises slightly more than one-for-one with the growth rate of employment. This cross-sectional relationship says that hires and job creation are very tightly linked at the establishment level. Controlling for establishment fixed effects in the regression, and thereby isolating within-establishment time variation, does little to alter the relationship. In fact, the “hockey-stick” shape of the hires-growth relation is even more pronounced when we control for establishment fixed effects.

Figure IV reveals a qualitatively similar relationship for the vacancy rate. Vacancy rates average about 2% of employment at contracting establishments, dip for stable establishments with no employment change, and rise with the employment growth rate at expanding establishments. The vacancy-growth relationship for expanding establishments is much less steep than the hires-growth relationship. For example, at a 30% monthly

7. We focus on monthly growth rate intervals in the -30 to 30% range because our estimates are highly precise in this range. For visual clarity, we smooth the nonparametric estimates using a centered, five-bin moving average except for bins at and near zero, where we use no smoothing.

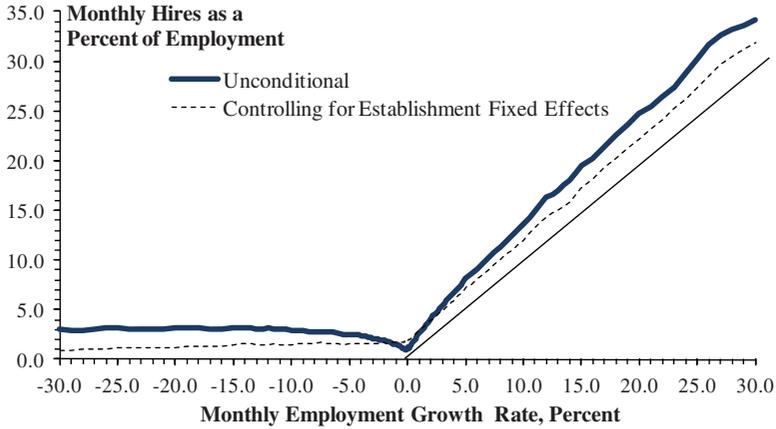


FIGURE III
Hires and Establishment Growth in the Cross Section, JOLTS Data

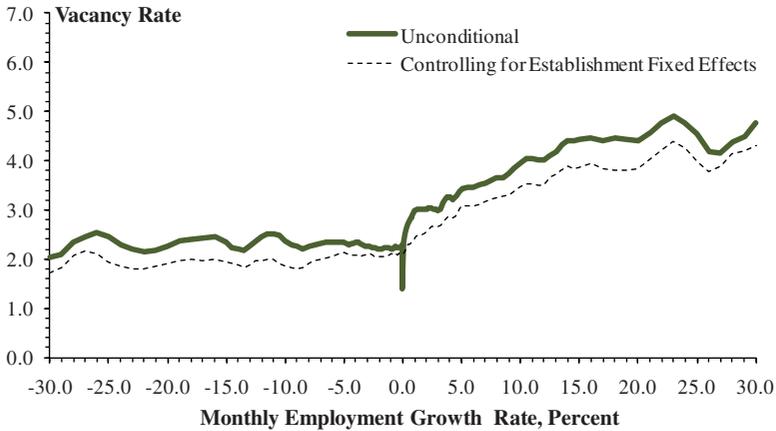


FIGURE IV
Vacancies and Establishment Growth in the Cross Section, JOLTS Data

growth rate, the vacancy rate is 4.8% of employment compared to 34.2% for the hires rate.

Figure V presents the vacancy yield relationship. We report total hires divided by total vacancies in each bin, which is similar to dividing the hires relation in Figure III by the vacancy relation

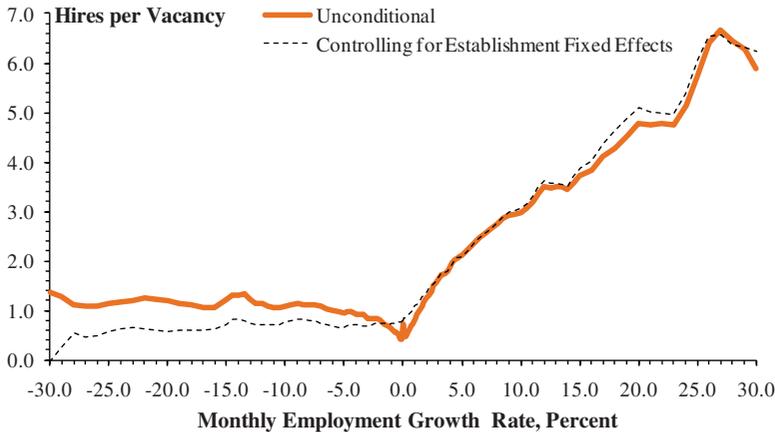


FIGURE V

Vacancy Yields and Establishment Growth in the Cross Section

in Figure IV.⁸ Among contracting establishments, vacancies yield about one hire per month. There is a discontinuity at zero that vanishes when controlling for establishment fixed effects. Among expanding establishments, the vacancy yield increases markedly with the growth rate. The strongly increasing relation between vacancy yields and employer growth survives the inclusion of establishment fixed effects.⁹ In other words, employers hire more workers per recorded vacancy when they grow more rapidly.

Taken at face value, this finding is starkly at odds with the proposition that (expected) hires are proportional to vacancies. This proposition holds in the textbook search and matching model and most other models with undirected search, as we discuss below. It is unclear, however, whether this finding accurately

8. It is not identical because the hires and vacancy rates have different denominators. Another alternative is to construct the vacancy yield at the establishment level and then aggregate to the bin level by computing employment-weighted means. This alternative, which restricts the sample to establishments with vacancies, yields a pattern very similar to the one reported in Figure V.

9. We regress the hiring (and vacancy) rates on bin dummies and establishment fixed effects, recovering the coefficients on the bin dummies and adding an equal amount to each coefficient to restore the grand employment-weighted mean. We then take the ratio of resulting hiring and vacancy rates to obtain the curve in Figure V with controls for establishment fixed effects. Restricting the sample to establishments with vacancies and running the fixed effects regression directly on the ratio of hires to vacancies yields a very similar plot.

portrays the underlying economic relationship. It may instead reflect a greater unobserved flow of new vacancies filled during the month at more rapidly growing establishments. The basic point is that, because of time aggregation, we cannot confidently infer the economic relationship between vacancies and hires from raw JOLTS data. We address this concern in the next section.

IV. JOB-FILLING RATES AND VACANCY FLOWS

IV.A. A Model of Daily Hiring Dynamics

Consider a simple model of daily hiring dynamics, where $h_{s,t}$ is the number of hires on day s in month t , and $v_{s,t}$ is the number of vacancies. Denote the daily job-filling rate for vacant positions in month t by f_t , which we treat as constant within the month for any given establishment. Hires on day s in month t equal the fill rate times the vacancy stock:

$$(1) \quad h_{s,t} = f_t v_{s-1,t}.$$

The stock of vacancies evolves in three ways. First, a daily flow θ_t of new vacancies increases the stock. Second, hires deplete the stock. Third, vacancies lapse without being filled at the daily rate δ_t , also depleting the stock. These assumptions imply the daily law of motion for the vacancy stock during month t :

$$(2) \quad v_{s,t} = ((1 - f_t)(1 - \delta_t))v_{s-1,t} + \theta_t.$$

In fitting the model to data, we allow f_t , θ_t , and δ_t to vary with industry, establishment size, and other observable employer characteristics.

Next, sum equations (1) and (2) over τ workdays to obtain monthly measures that correspond to observables in the data. For vacancies, relate the stock at the end of month $t - 1$, v_{t-1} , to the stock at the end of month t , τ days later. Cumulating (2) over τ days and recursively substituting for $v_{s-1,t}$ yields the desired equation:

$$(3) \quad v_t = (1 - f_t - \delta_t + \delta_t f_t)^\tau v_{t-1} + \theta_t \sum_{s=1}^{\tau} (1 - f_t - \delta_t + \delta_t f_t)^{s-1}$$

The first term on the right is the initial stock, depleted by hires and lapsed vacancies during the month. The second term is the flow of new vacancies, similarly depleted.

Hires are reported as a monthly flow in the data. Thus, we cumulate daily hires in (1) to obtain the monthly flow, $H_t = \sum_{s=1}^{\tau} h_{s,t}$. Substituting (2) into (1), and (1) into the monthly sum, and then substituting back to the beginning of the month for $v_{s-1,t}$ yields

$$H_t = f_t v_{t-1} \sum_{s=1}^{\tau} (1 - f_t - \delta_t + \delta_t f_t)^{s-1} + f_t \theta_t \sum_{s=1}^{\tau} (\tau - s) (1 - f_t - \delta_t + \delta_t f_t)^{s-1}. \quad (4)$$

The first term on the right is hires into the old stock of vacant positions, and the second is hires into positions that open during the month. Given H_t, v_t, v_{t-1} , and δ_t the system (3) and (4) identifies the average daily job-filling rate, f_t , and the daily flow of vacancies, θ_t .

IV.B. Estimating the Model Parameters

To estimate f_t and θ_t , we solve the system (3) and (4) numerically after first equating $\tau \delta_t$ to the monthly layoff rate. That is, we assume vacant job positions lapse at the same rate as filled jobs undergo layoffs. The precise treatment of δ matters little for our results because any reasonable value for δ is an order of magnitude smaller than the estimates for f . Thus, the job-filling rate dominates the behavior of the dynamic system given by (1) and (2). We treat all months as having $\tau = 26$ working days, the average number of days per month less Sundays and major holidays. We calculate the average vacancy duration as $1/f_t$ and express the monthly vacancy flow as a rate by dividing $\tau \theta_t$ by employment in month t .¹⁰

When estimating parameters at the aggregate level, we use published JOLTS statistics for monthly flows of hires and layoffs and the end-of-month stock of vacancies. We use the pooled-sample JOLTS micro data from 2001 to 2006 to produce

10. We also tried an estimation approach suggested by Rob Shimer. The approach considers steady-state versions of (1) and (2) and sums over τ workdays to obtain $f = (H/v)(1/\tau)$ and $\theta = (f + \delta - f\delta)v$. This system is simple enough to solve by hand. In practice, the method works well on aggregate data, delivering estimates for f_t and θ_t close to the ones implied by (3) and (4). At more disaggregated levels, estimates based on the steady-state approximation often diverge from those implied by (3) and (4), sometimes greatly. Note that the estimated job-filling rate based on the steady-state approximation is simply a rescaled version of the vacancy yield. We stick to the method based on (3) and (4) for our reported results.

parameter estimates by industry, size class, turnover category, and growth rate bin.

IV.C. Fill Rates and Vacancy Flows over Time

Figure VI shows monthly time series from January 2001 to December 2011 for the estimated flow of new vacancies and the daily job-filling rate. The monthly flow of new vacancies averages 3.6% of employment, considerably larger than the average vacancy stock of 2.7%. Vacancy stocks and flows are pro-cyclical, with stronger movements in the stock measure. The average daily job-filling rate is 5.2% per day. It ranges from a low of 4.0% in February 2001 to a high of 6.9% in July 2009, moving countercyclically. Mean vacancy duration ranges from 14 to 25 days.¹¹ Clearly, vacancy durations and job-filling rates exhibit large cyclical amplitudes.¹²

IV.D. Results by Industry, Employer Size, and Worker Turnover

Table III presents cross-sectional results based on the pooled-sample JOLTS micro data from 2001 to 2006. The job-filling rate ranges from about 3% per day in Information, FIRE, Health & Education, and Government to 5% in Manufacturing, Transport, Wholesale & Utilities, Professional & Business Services, and Other Services; 7% in Retail Trade and Natural Resources & Mining; and 12% per day in Construction. Table III also shows that job-filling rates decline with employer size, falling by more than half in moving from small to large establishments. The most striking pattern in the job-filling rate pertains to worker turnover categories. The job-filling rate ranges from 1.1% per day in the lowest turnover quintile to 11.4% per day in the highest turnover quintile. These cross-sectional differences have received little attention in the theoretical literature,

11. Our vacancy duration estimates are similar to those obtained by Burdett and Cunningham (1998) and Barron, Berger, and Black (1999) in small samples of US establishments but considerably shorter than those obtained by van Ours and Ridder (1991) for the Netherlands and Andrews et al. (2008) for the United Kingdom.

12. Figures B.1–B.3 in Online Appendix B apply our methods to data on new hires from the Current Population Survey and the Conference Board's Help Wanted Index to provide additional evidence on the cyclicity of job-filling rates.

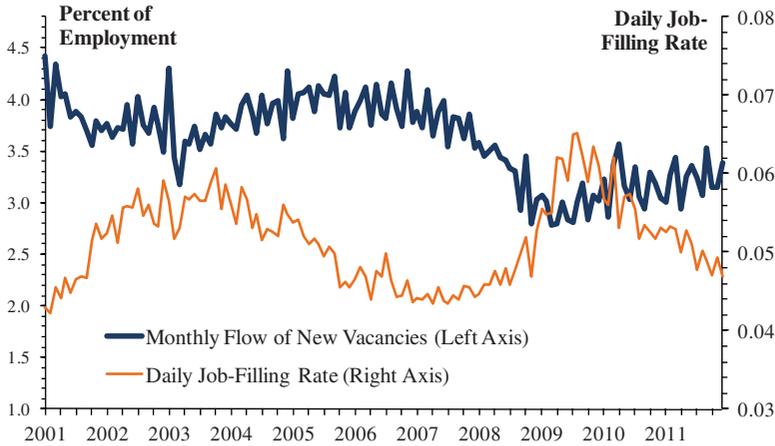


FIGURE VI

New Vacancy Flows and Daily Job-Filling Rate, Model-Based Estimates Using Published JOLTS Data, January 2001 to December 2011

but they offer a natural source of inspiration for model building and a useful testing ground for theory.¹³

IV.E. Vacancy Flows and Fill Rates Related to Establishment Growth Rates

Section III finds that the vacancy yield increases strongly with the employment growth rate at expanding establishments. As we explained, this relationship is at least partly driven by time aggregation. To address the role of time aggregation, we now recover the job-filling rate as a function of employer growth. Specifically, we sort the establishment-level observations into 195 growth rate bins and then estimate f and θ for each bin using the moment conditions (3) and (4). In this way, we obtain nonparametric estimates for the relationship of the job-filling rate to the establishment growth rate. This estimation exercise also yields the monthly flow of new vacancies by growth rate bin.

Figure VII displays the estimated relationships. Both the fill rate and vacancy flow rate exhibit a pronounced kink at zero and increase very strongly with the establishment growth rate to the

13. To be sure, there has been some theoretical work that speaks to cross-sectional differences in job-filling rates, including the works by Albrecht and Vroman (2002) and Davis (2001) mentioned above.

TABLE III
RESULTS OF HIRING DYNAMICS MODEL BY INDUSTRY, SIZE, AND TURNOVER

	Daily job-filling rate, f_t	Monthly vacancy flow rate, $\tau \cdot \theta_t$ (pct. of empl.)	Mean vacancy duration, $1/f_t$ (in days)
Nonfarm employment	0.050	3.4	20.0
Major industry			
Natural resources & mining	0.078	3.1	12.8
Construction	0.121	5.4	8.3
Manufacturing	0.052	2.3	19.3
Transport, wholesale, utilities	0.052	2.7	19.1
Retail trade	0.073	4.5	13.7
Information	0.031	2.2	32.0
FIRE	0.034	2.3	29.0
Prof. & business services	0.049	4.6	20.4
Health & education	0.028	2.7	35.4
Leisure & hospitality	0.069	6.3	14.6
Other services	0.053	3.3	18.8
Government	0.032	1.6	31.4
Establishment size class			
0–9 employees	0.061	3.3	16.5
10–49 employees	0.066	4.0	15.2
50–249 employees	0.059	4.0	17.1
250–999 employees	0.041	3.1	24.1
1,000–4,999 employees	0.026	2.1	37.9
5,000+ employees	0.026	1.7	38.9
Worker turnover category			
First quintile (lowest turnover)	0.011	0.4	87.9
Second quintile	0.019	1.3	52.8
Third quintile	0.030	2.4	32.8
Fourth quintile	0.054	4.6	18.4
Fifth quintile (highest turnover)	0.114	14.0	8.7

See notes to Table I.

right of zero. Fill rates rise from 3% per day at establishments that expand by about 1% in the month to 9% per day at establishments that expand by about 5%, and to more than 20% per day at those that expand by 20% or more in the month. The job-filling rate and flow rate of new vacancies are relatively flat to the left of zero.

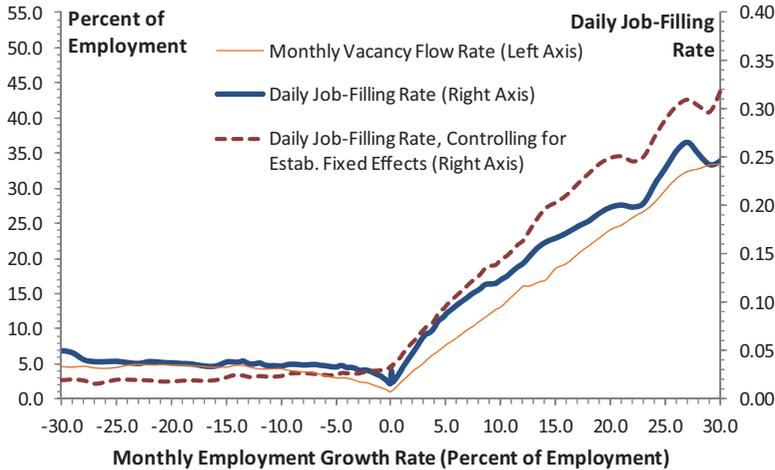


FIGURE VII

Fill Rates and Vacancy Flows as Functions of Establishment Growth

One important conclusion is immediate from Figure VII: the strong positive relationship between vacancy yields and employer growth rates among expanding establishments is not simply an artifact of time aggregation. If it were, we would not see a positive relationship between the job-filling rate and employer growth to the right of zero. In fact, we see a very strong positive relationship.¹⁴ To check whether unobserved heterogeneity underlies this result, we control for establishment-level fixed effects in fitting the relationship between job-filling rates and establishment-level growth rates.¹⁵ Controlling for heterogeneity actually *strengthens* the relationship between the job-filling rate and the growth rate of employment. Removing time effects (not shown) has negligible impact.

14. This is not to say that time aggregation plays no role in the observed vacancy yield relationship to employer growth. On the contrary, Figure VII shows that the vacancy flow rises strongly with employment growth at expanding establishments, much more strongly than the vacancy stock in Figure IV. This pattern implies that vacancy yields are more inflated by time aggregation at faster growing establishments. In other words, time aggregation is part of the explanation for the vacancy yield relation in Figure V. But it is not the main story, and it does not explain the fill-rate relationship to employer growth in Figure VII.

15. We solve moment conditions (3) and (4) using the fixed effects estimates from Figures III and IV.

Another possible explanation for the fill-rate relationship in Figure VII stresses randomness at the micro level. In particular, the stochastic nature of job filling induces a spurious positive relationship between the realized job-filling rate and the realized employer growth rate. Lucky employers fill jobs faster and, as a result, grow faster. To quantify this mechanical luck effect, we simulate hires, vacancy flows, and employment paths at the establishment level for fitted values of f , θ , δ , the separation rate, and the cross-sectional distribution of vacancies. We let the parameters and the empirical vacancy distribution vary freely across size classes. By construction, the simulation delivers a positive relationship between the realized job-filling rate and the realized growth rate through the luck effect.

Figure VIII overlays the empirical job-filling rates on the simulated rates. We perform the simulations under two polar assumptions for the allocation of new vacancy flows, θ , in each size class: first, by allocating the flows in proportion to the observed distribution of employment in the micro data, and second, by allocating in proportion to the distribution of vacancy stocks. Either way, the simulations reveal that the luck effect is much too small to explain the empirical fill-rate relationship. The luck effect produces a fill-rate increase of about 2 to 3 percentage points in moving from 0% to 10% monthly growth and up to another 1 point in moving from 10% to 30% growth. That is, the luck effect accounts for one-tenth of the observed positive relationship between job filling and growth at growing employers. We conclude that the vacancy yield and fill-rate patterns in Figures V and VII reflect something fundamental about the nature of the hiring process and its relationship to employer growth. We develop an explanation for this pattern below.

IV.F. *Fill Rates and Gross Hires: A Recurring Pattern*

Recalling Figure III, Figures VII, and VIII also point to a strong relationship across growth rate bins between the job-filling rate and the gross hires rate. Figure IX shows that this relationship is indeed strong. The nature of the pattern is also noteworthy: as the gross hires rate rises, so does the job-filling rate. The empirical elasticity of the job-filling rate with respect to the gross hires rate is 0.820, which flatly contradicts the view that employers vary vacancies in proportion to desired hires. Figure B.5 in the Online Appendix shows that a

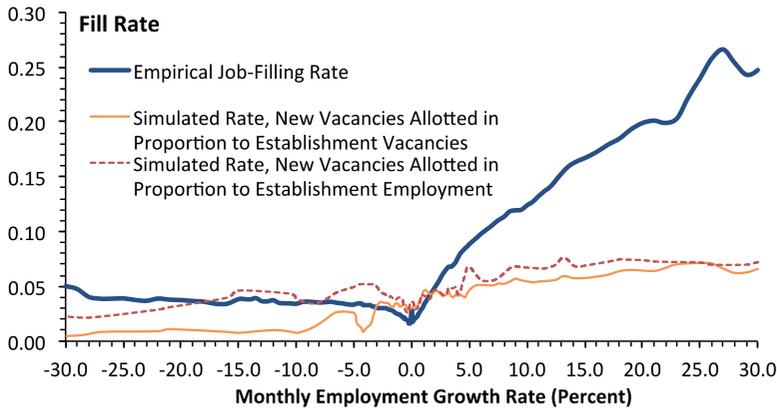


FIGURE VIII
Empirical and Simulated Job-Filling Rates Compared

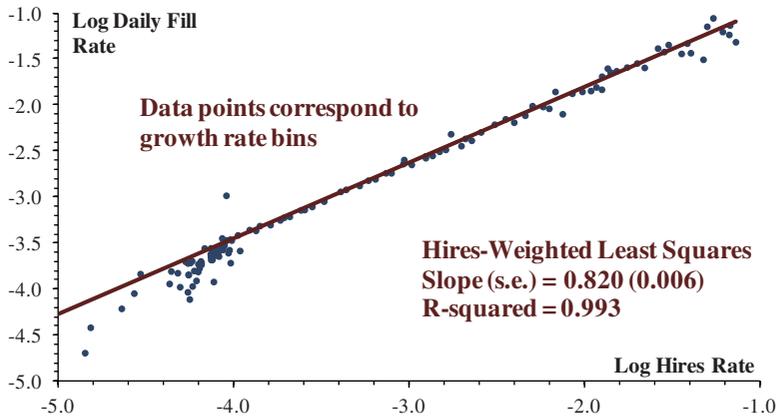


FIGURE IX
Job-Filling Rates and Gross Hires Rates by Growth Rate Bin

very similar pattern holds across industries, employer size classes, and worker turnover groups. The large positive hires elasticity of job-filling rates is a novel empirical finding with important implications for theory, as we show in Section V.

IV.G. Hires by Establishments with No Reported Vacancies

According to Table II, 41.6% of hires occur at establishments with no reported vacancies at month's start. We now consider

how well the model of daily hiring dynamics accounts for this feature of the data. Recalling equation (4), the model-implied flow of hires due to vacancies newly posted during the month is given by

$$f_t \theta_t \sum_{s=1}^{\tau} (\tau - s)(1 - f_t - \delta_t + \delta_t f_t)^{s-1}.$$

Of course, some of these hires into new vacancies occur at establishments that start the month with old vacancies. So, we multiply the expression for hires into new vacancies by the employment share of establishments with no reported vacancies, and then divide by observed total hires to obtain the model-implied share of hires at establishments with no reported vacancies. When computing this model-implied share, we disaggregate by industry, employer size, and worker turnover to capture the heterogeneity in job-filling rates and vacancy flow rates seen in Table III. That is, we first calculate the model-implied share of hires at establishments with no reported vacancies by sector and then compute the hires-weighted mean over sectors, which we compare to the 41.6% figure.

Table IV reports the results of the comparison. When we slice the data by 6 employer size categories crossed with (up to) 15 worker turnover categories and a broad division into goods-producing and service-producing industries, our model of daily hiring dynamics implies that 27.4% of all hires occur at establishments with no recorded vacancies. This quantity is about two-thirds of the 41.6% figure observed directly in the data. The other classifications reported in Table IV produce somewhat smaller figures for hires at establishments with no reported vacancies. We do not consider finer classifications because of concerns about sparsely populated cells and imprecise cell-level estimates of f and θ .

Table IV tells us that time aggregation accounts for most, but by no means all, hires at establishments with no reported vacancies. The unexplained hires may reflect a failure to adequately capture cross-sectional heterogeneity in f and θ or some other form of model misspecification. Perhaps the most natural interpretation, however, is that many hires are not mediated through measured vacancies. For example, JOLTS definitions exclude vacancies for positions that could not begin within 30 days. Certain other hires are unlikely to be captured by the JOLTS

TABLE IV
ACCOUNTING FOR HIRES AT ESTABLISHMENTS WITH NO REPORTED VACANCY

Percent of hires at establishments with no vacancy at end of previous month	
From data	41.6
Implied by model of daily hiring dynamics	
Industry (12) \times Size (6) disaggregation	25.2
Industry (12) \times Turnover (6) disaggregation	26.0
Size (6) \times Turnover (6) disaggregation	27.0
Industry (12) \times Size (2) \times Turnover (6) disaggregation	26.7
Industry (2) \times Size (6) \times Turnover (up to 15) disaggregation	27.4

Notes. The table compares the percent of hires at establishments with no reported vacancy at the end of the previous month in the JOLTS data (top panel) to the percent implied by versions of the daily hiring dynamics model (lower panel). Model versions differ in the sector-level parameter heterogeneity allowed, as indicated in the row descriptions. Numbers in parentheses indicate the level of disaggregation for the indicated category (e.g., 12 industries, 6 size classes, etc.) In the bottom row, turnover quintiles are disaggregated into as many as 15 categories for the smaller employer size groups, where cell counts permit. The total number of cells used in the bottom row is 111. To compute the model-implied percent of hires at establishments with no reported vacancy, we apply the model sector by sector and then compute the hires-weighted mean across sectors of model-implied values.

vacancy measure, because they involve hires into positions with zero prior vacancy duration. Using data on job applications and hires in the 1982 wave of the Employment Opportunity Pilot Project Survey, Faberman and Menzio (2010) report that 20% of all new hires involve no formal vacancy or recruiting time by the employer. Based on Table IV and our discussion here, we think the topic of hires not mediated through vacancies warrants attention in future research and in surveys of hiring practices.

V. INTERPRETATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

V.A. *Hires Are Not Proportional to Vacancies in the Cross Section: Two Interpretations*

Standard specifications of equilibrium search and matching models include a constant-returns-to-scale (CRS) matching function defined over job vacancies and unemployed workers. In versions of these models taken to data, the number of vacancies is typically the sole instrument employers use to vary hires. The expected period- t hires for an employer e with v_{et} vacancies are $f_t v_{et}$, where the fill rate f_t is determined by market tightness at t and the matching function, both exogenous to the employer. That

is, hires are proportional to vacancies in the cross section, i.e., conditional on market tightness.¹⁶ Since the same fill rate applies to all employers, the standard specification implies a zero cross-sectional elasticity of hires (and the hires rate) with respect to the fill rate. This implication fails—rather spectacularly—when set against the evidence in Figures VII, VIII, and IX.¹⁷

What accounts for this failure? One possibility is that employers act on other margins using other instruments, in addition to vacancies, when they increase their hiring rate. They can increase advertising or search intensity per vacancy, screen applicants more quickly, relax hiring standards, improve working conditions, and offer more attractive compensation to prospective employees. If employers with greater hiring needs respond in this way, the job-filling rate rises with the hires rate in the cross section and over time at the employer level. We are not aware of previous empirical studies that investigate how these aspects of recruiting intensity per vacancy vary with employer growth and hiring.

Another class of explanations involves scale and scope economies in vacancies as an input to hiring. It may be easier or less costly to achieve a given advertising exposure per job opening when an employer has many vacancies rather than few. Similarly, it may be easier to attract applicants when the employer has a variety of open positions. Recruiting also becomes easier as an employer grows more rapidly if prospective hires perceive greater opportunities for promotion and lower layoff risks. These remarks point to potential sources of increasing returns to vacancies in the employer-level hiring technology.

Alternatively, one might try to rationalize the evidence by postulating suitable cross-sectional differences in matching efficiency. We think an explanation along those lines is unsatisfactory in two significant respects. First, it offers no insight into why

16. To see the connection to our model of daily hiring dynamics, recall from footnote 10 that steady-state approximations of (1) and (2) yield $H \approx \tau fv$.

17. Online Appendix A makes this point in a different way. Using the daily model of hiring dynamics, we express log gross hires as the sum of two terms—one that depends only on the job-filling rate, and one that depends on the numbers of old and new vacancies. Computing the implied variance decomposition, the vacancy margin accounts for half or less of the variance in log gross hires across industries, size classes, turnover groups, and growth rate bins. The proportionality implication says that vacancy numbers are all that matter for cross-sectional hires variation, sharply at odds with the variance decomposition results.

matching efficiency varies across sectors in line with the gross hires rate. Second, sectoral differences in matching efficiency do not explain the key result in Figure VII (Figure IX): the job-filling rate is much higher when a given establishment grows (hires) rapidly, relative to its own sample mean growth (hires) rate, than when it grows (hires) slowly. A stable CRS hiring technology at the establishment level cannot produce this pattern when vacancies are the sole instrument employers vary to influence hiring.

V.B. Generalized Matching and Hiring Functions

It will be useful to formalize a role for other recruiting instruments and for employer-level scale economies. Start by writing the standard matching function ($H = \mu v^{1-\alpha} u^\alpha$).¹⁸

$$(5) \quad \sum_e H_{et} = H_t = \mu \left(\frac{v_t}{u_t} \right)^{-\alpha} v_t = \mu \left(\frac{v_t}{u_t} \right)^{-\alpha} \sum_e v_{et} \equiv f_t \sum_e v_{et}.$$

For an individual employer or group of employers, e , (5) implies hires $H_{et} = f_t v_{et}$. Here and throughout the discussion below, we ignore the distinction between hires and expected hires by appealing to the law of large numbers when e indexes industries, size classes, or worker turnover groups. The simulation exercises reported in Figure VIII indicate that we can safely ignore the distinction for growth rate bins as well.

Now consider a generalized hiring function that allows for departures from CRS at the micro level while incorporating a role for employer actions on other recruiting margins using other instruments, x :

$$(6) \quad H_{et} = \mu \left(\frac{v'_t}{u_t} \right)^{-\alpha} q(v_{et}, x_{et}) \equiv \tilde{f}_t q(v_{et}, x_{et}), \quad \text{where } \sum_e q(v_{et}, x_{et}) = v'_t,$$

v'_t is the effective number of vacancies at the aggregate level, and the function $q(\cdot, x)$ captures micro-level scale economies and other margins. When $q(v_{et}, x_{et}) \equiv v_{et}$, aggregation of (6) delivers the standard Cobb-Douglas matching function. For $q(v_{et}, x_{et}) \equiv v_{et} \tilde{q}(x_{et})$, the hiring function includes other margins

18. Following customary practice, we use a continuous time formulation in describing the matching functions. We account for the time-aggregated nature of the monthly data in the empirical implementations below.

but satisfies CRS in vacancies at the micro level.¹⁹ More generally, we have increasing, constant, or decreasing returns to vacancies at the micro level as $\partial q(\cdot, x_e)/\partial v_e$ is increasing, constant, or decreasing in v_e .

For the generalized hiring function (6), the employer's job-filling rate is $f_{et} = \tilde{f}_t q(v_{et}, x_{et})/v_{et}$. Now let $q(v_{et}, x_{et}) \equiv v_{et}^\gamma \tilde{q}(x_{et})$, where $\gamma > 0$ governs the degree of micro-level scale economies in vacancies. The job-filling rate becomes

$$(7) \quad f_{et} = \tilde{f}_t v_{et}^{\gamma-1} \tilde{q}(x_{et}).$$

Taking logs and differentiating with respect to the hiring rate, \bar{H}_{et} , we obtain

$$\frac{d \ln f_{et}}{d \ln \bar{H}_{et}} = \frac{d \ln \tilde{f}_t}{d \ln \bar{H}_{et}} + (\gamma - 1) \frac{d \ln v_{et}}{d \ln \bar{H}_{et}} + \frac{d \ln \tilde{q}(x_{et})}{d \ln \bar{H}_{et}}.$$

The right side of this equation includes a term involving vacancy stock data, which could be problematic given the time aggregation issues discussed above. To obtain a parallel equation involving vacancy flows, use the steady-state relation $v_{et} = \theta_{et}/f_{et}$ (ignoring lapsed vacancies) to substitute out the vacancy stock and rearrange:

$$(8) \quad \frac{d \ln f_{et}}{d \ln \bar{H}_{et}} = \left(\frac{1}{\gamma}\right) \frac{d \ln \tilde{f}_t}{d \ln \bar{H}_{et}} + \left(\frac{\gamma - 1}{\gamma}\right) \frac{d \ln \theta_{et}}{d \ln \bar{H}_{et}} + \left(\frac{1}{\gamma}\right) \frac{d \ln \tilde{q}(x_{et})}{d \ln \bar{H}_{et}}.$$

Equation (8) lets us quantify the role of recruiting intensity per vacancy and employer-level scale economies in the variation of job-filling rates with the gross hires rate.

Recall from Figure IX that a hires-weighted regression yields a tightly estimated value of 0.82 for the elasticity on the left side of (8). The first elasticity on the right side of (8) is zero, because all employers face the same aggregate conditions at a point in time. The second term on the right side captures the contribution of departures from CRS to the empirical elasticity on the left side. In particular, establishments with a larger flow of vacancies fill openings faster if $\gamma > 1$. The last term captures the contribution

19. See Chapter 5 in Pissarides (2000) for analysis of a search equilibrium model with a similar hiring function. Pissarides speaks of an employer's recruiting or advertising intensity, but his specification is like ours when we impose CRS in vacancies at the micro level.

of employer actions on other margins, i.e., the role of recruiting intensity per vacancy.

According to (8), the contribution of scale economies is bounded above by the empirical elasticity of vacancy flows with respect to the gross hires rate. To obtain evidence on this elasticity, we fit a hires-weighted regression of log vacancy flows per establishment on the log gross hires rate in the bin-level data. Taking the same approach as in Figure IX to control for establishment fixed effects, the estimate for $d \ln \theta_{et} / d \ln \bar{H}_{et}$ is 0.56 (s.e. = 0.13). Since $[(\gamma - 1) / \gamma]$ is bounded above by unity, it follows that even an arbitrarily high degree of scale economies cannot fully rationalize the evidence in Figure IX. Consider $\gamma = 2$, an extremely strong scale effect.²⁰ Plugging into (8) with $d \ln \theta_{et} / d \ln \bar{H}_{et} = 0.56$, scale economies account for only one-third of the fill-rate variation in Figure IX. We conclude that recruiting intensity per vacancy is the chief force—possibly the only important force—behind the employer-level relationship of the job-filling rate to the gross hires rate.

Equation (8) also delivers a lower bound on the size of the recruiting intensity elasticity, $d \ln \tilde{q}(x_{et}) / d \ln \bar{H}_{et}$. In particular, solving (8) for this elasticity and using the empirical finding that $d \ln f_{et} / d \ln \bar{H}_{et} > d \ln \theta_{et} / d \ln \bar{H}_{et}$, it is easy to show that $d \ln \tilde{q}(x_{et}) / d \ln \bar{H}_{et}$ is bounded below by 0.56 for $\gamma > 0$ and, moreover, that the implied elasticity increases with γ . In short, and regardless of the returns-to-scale parameter γ , our evidence in combination with (8) implies that employers substantially increase recruiting intensity per vacancy as they increase the gross hires rate.

V.C. Returns to Vacancies in the Employer-Level Hiring Technology

The foregoing analysis reveals a major role for recruiting intensity. To sharpen this point, we consider two sources of

20. From (7), the job-filling rate is proportional to the level of vacancies when $\gamma = 2$. From Table I, the ratio of separation rates in the 5,000+ category to the 50–249 category is $(1.5/3.8) = 0.395$. Thus, the steady-state vacancy flow at an employer with 5,000 workers is nearly 40 times larger than at one with 50 workers. So, $\gamma = 2$ implies tremendously faster job filling at the larger employer. While larger and smaller employers may differ in other respects that affect job-filling rates, Tables I and III show no sign of such a powerful scale effect in the pattern of vacancy yields and job-filling rates by employer size.

evidence on the size of γ . First, we note that aggregate matching function studies suggest γ is close to one. To see why, set $q(\cdot) \equiv v'_{et}$ and aggregate in (6) to obtain $\ln H = \ln \mu + \alpha \ln u + (\gamma - \alpha) \ln v$, approximating the sum of log vacancies by the log of the sum. Thus, scale economies at the micro level carry over to increasing returns at the aggregate level. As it turns out, few of the many studies summarized in Petrongolo and Pissarides (2001, Table 3) find evidence of increasing returns in the aggregate matching function. Yashiv (2000), an exception, obtains results consistent with $\gamma = 1.36$. Most studies of the aggregate matching function support $\gamma = 1$.

Second, we develop new evidence by fitting a regression derived from (7) to JOLTS data aggregated to industry \times employer size cells and pooled over the 2001–2006 period.²¹ We select the aggregation level and specify the regression model to isolate variation in the scale of employer hiring activity, as measured by vacancies per establishment. Pooling over time increases cell density and suppresses cyclical variation in market tightness and recruiting intensity, both of which would undermine our efforts to isolate scale effects.

Letting i and s index industries and size classes and taking logs in (7) yields

$$\ln f_{is} = \ln \tilde{f} + (\gamma - 1) \ln v_{is} + \ln \tilde{q}(x_{is}) + \epsilon_{is},$$

where f_{is} is the job-filling rate in the industry-size cell, $\ln \tilde{f}$ is a constant that absorbs the average level of market tightness during the sample period, v_{is} is the number of vacancies per establishment in the cell, $\ln \tilde{q}(x_{is})$ is average recruiting intensity per vacancy, and ϵ_{is} captures sampling error in the cell-level data and unobserved differences in matching efficiency and market tightness.

OLS estimation of this specification gives rise to several econometric concerns. First, failing to control for recruiting intensity can lead to an omitted-variable bias. Second, OLS estimation suffers from an endogeneity bias if matching efficiency differences partly drive the variation in v_{is} . Third, OLS estimation can also lead to a form of division bias. To see the issue, recall the steady-state approximation $f \approx H/v$ implied by our model of daily hiring dynamics. This approximation indicates that

21. We use 12 major industry sectors and 6 size classes. For two industries, the largest size classes have very sparse cells. We therefore aggregate these cells into the next largest size class, providing us with 70 cell-level observations.

measurement errors in v enter into our model-based estimates of f derived from (3) and (4).

We deal with these concerns as follows. First, we include industry and size class fixed effects to capture differences in both match efficiency and recruiting intensity across industries and size classes. Second, we include the average employment growth rate in the industry-size cell during the sample period, g_{is} , as a proxy for residual differences in recruiting intensity per vacancy not captured by the fixed effects. Third, we instrument $\ln v_{is}$ with the log of employment per establishment in the cell using two-stage least squares. This instrument addresses division bias and we think largely takes care of endogeneity bias. Differences in the scale of employment across industry-size cells mainly reflect fundamentals related to product demand, factor costs, and the output production function, not differences in matching efficiency.

Another potential concern is the regression model's specification in terms of the vacancy stock, v , which is subject to time aggregation. To address this concern, we consider a second regression model specified in terms of vacancy flows, θ , measured as the average vacancy flow per establishment in the industry-size cell. Using the steady-state relation, $v_{is} = \theta_{is}/f_{is}$, and substituting, our second regression model has the same form as above but with θ_{is} replacing v_{is} and a coefficient of $(\gamma - 1)/\gamma$ on $\ln \theta_{is}$. We estimate both regression specifications by OLS and two-stage least squares.

Table V presents the results. Three of the four estimates for γ provide statistically significant evidence of mild increasing returns to vacancies. In light of our remarks about potential biases and time aggregation, our preferred estimate uses 2SLS estimation of the specification with vacancy flows, which yields $\gamma = 1.33$. Following the suggestion of a referee, we also estimated specifications without the g_{is} control. Rather than include an imperfect control for unobserved variation in recruiting intensity, the idea is to rely on a bounding argument. In particular, the natural concern is that the recruiting-intensity component of the error term covaries positively with desired hiring and, hence, with vacancies. In this case, dropping g_{is} yields an upwardly biased estimate of γ . When we reestimate without the g_{is} variable, we obtain results nearly identical to Table V. Thus, our results in Table V are not sensitive to concerns about the g_{is} control.

TABLE V

ESTIMATES OF RETURNS TO SCALE IN VACANCIES IN THE EMPLOYER HIRING TECHNOLOGY
(REGRESSION DEPENDENT VARIABLE: LOG DAILY JOB-FILLING RATE IN INDUSTRY-SIZE CELL)

Explanatory variable	Beginning-of-month vacancies, v_{t-1}		Monthly vacancy flow, θ_t	
	OLS	IV	OLS	IV
Coefficient	0.072	0.227	0.272	0.247
(std. error)	(0.082)	(0.086)	(0.057)	(0.080)
R^2	0.779	0.764	0.850	0.818
First-stage R^2	—	0.996	—	0.996
Implied γ , (scale economies)	1.072	1.227	1.374	1.328

Notes. The table reports results for regressions of the log daily job-filling rate on the log of the variable in the top row, using data pooled over the 2001–2006 period at the industry-size class level ($N=70$). All regressions contain industry and establishment size class fixed effects and include the mean employment growth rate in the industry-size cell as an additional control. IV estimates are from a two-stage least squares regression that instruments the variable in the top row with the log total employment in the industry-size cell. The coefficient (standard error) is for the (second-stage) estimate on the indicated explanatory variable.

Returning to (8), we can now more precisely quantify the roles of scale economies and recruiting intensity. Multiplying $(\gamma - 1)/\gamma = 0.33/1.33$ by $d \ln v_{et}/d \ln \bar{H}_{et} = 0.56$ yields a value less than 0.15 for the second term on the right side of (8), which amounts to a small fraction of the empirical elasticity on the left side. We conclude, therefore, that the strong positive relationship between job-filling rates and gross hires rates in Figure IX overwhelmingly reflects employer decisions to raise recruiting intensity when they increase the hiring rate. As a corollary, the strong relationship between fill rates and employer growth rates in Figure VII also reflects the role of recruiting intensity.

We should add that we do not see Table V as the final word on scale economies in employer-level hiring technologies. Our results say nothing about scale economies in the *creation* of job vacancies; they speak only to the effect of vacancy numbers on job-filling rates. Likewise, they say nothing about scale economies in the use of nonvacancy recruiting instruments. There is much room for additional investigations into the employer-level hiring technology using micro data.

V.D. Aggregate Implications

We now draw out several aggregate implications of our findings. We work with CRS at the micro level, so

$f_{et} = \tilde{f}_t \tilde{q}(x_{et})$.²² Aggregating (6) yields a generalized matching function defined over unemployment, vacancies, and recruiting intensity per vacancy:

$$H_t = \sum_e H_{et} = \mu \left(\frac{v'_t}{u_t} \right)^{-\alpha} \sum_e v_{et} \tilde{q}(x_{et}) = \mu \left(\frac{v'_t}{u_t} \right)^{-\alpha} v'_t = \mu v_t^{1-\alpha} u_t^\alpha \bar{q}_t^{1-\alpha},$$

where $\bar{q}_t = \sum_e \left(\frac{v_{et}}{v_t} \right) \tilde{q}(x_{et})$ and $v'_t = v_t \bar{q}_t$.

(9)

Here, \bar{q}_t is the vacancy-weighted mean impact of employer actions on other recruiting margins. If \bar{q}_t is time invariant, it folds into the efficiency parameter μ and (9) reduces to the standard matching function. However, we just established that employers adjust on other recruiting margins as they vary the gross hires rate, i.e., \tilde{q}_{et} varies strongly with the hires rate in the cross section. It stands to reason that \bar{q}_t , the vacancy-weighted cross-sectional mean of \tilde{q}_{et} , varies with the aggregate hires rate.

How important are employer actions on other recruiting margins for the behavior of aggregate hires? Dividing by employment and taking log differences in (9) yields $\Delta \ln \bar{H} = \alpha \Delta \ln \bar{u} + (1 - \alpha) \Delta \ln \bar{v} + (1 - \alpha) \Delta \ln \bar{q}$. Thus, to answer the question, we need to know how \bar{q}_t varies with \bar{H}_t over time. As a working hypothesis, we posit that \bar{q}_t varies with \bar{H}_t over time in the same way as \tilde{q}_{et} varies with \bar{H}_{et} in the cross section. That is, we set the elasticity of \bar{q}_t with respect to \bar{H}_t to 0.82. Given a value for α of about one-half, this working hypothesis yields the tentative conclusion that \bar{q}_t accounts for about 40% of movements in the aggregate hires rate. Of course, \bar{q} is correlated with \bar{u} and \bar{v} in the time series, so we cannot attribute 40% of the movements in aggregate hires uniquely to recruiting intensity. Nevertheless, this calculation suggests that recruiting intensity is an important proximate determinant of fluctuations in aggregate hires.

22. Although our preferred estimate in Table V is $\gamma = 1.33$, we work with the CRS case for several reasons. First, as remarked in Section V.B, the recruiting elasticity implied by (8) rises with γ . So, the CRS case entails a more conservative value (0.82) for the recruiting intensity elasticity. Second, the CRS case simplifies the aggregation in (9) by obviating the need to track the full cross-sectional distribution of vacancies. Third, Table V points to only mild departures from CRS in vacancies. Moreover, most studies of the aggregate matching function support CRS, as we explained at the outset of Section V.C.

Figure X displays the monthly index for recruiting intensity per vacancy implied by the working hypothesis over the period covered by published JOLTS data. The index exhibits sizable movements and, most notably, falls by about 20% from early 2007 to late 2009. This large drop in recruiting intensity had a material effect on the evolution of job-filling rates over this period. To see this point, recall that the job-filling rate is nearly proportional to the vacancy yield in aggregate data and use (9) to obtain $\Delta \ln(H/v) = -\alpha \Delta \ln(v/u) + (1 - \alpha) \Delta \ln \bar{q}$. The vacancy yield rose by 33.5 log points from its average value in 2007 to its average value in 2009. Given $\alpha = 0.5$ and the recruiting intensity index in Figure X, we calculate that the vacancy yield would have risen by 42 log points over this period had recruiting intensity remained at its 2007 level. In other words, the recruiting intensity drop from 2007 to 2009 substantially repressed the rise in job-filling rates.

Applying the generalized matching function (9) again, we can perform the same type of calculation for the job-finding rate of unemployed workers. The literature measures this rate in various ways, so we calculate its log change from 2007 to 2009 in three ways: the unemployment-to-employment transition rate in gross flows data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) fell by 49 log points; the unemployment escape rate calculated using CPS data on unemployment spell durations fell by 64 log points; and the job-finding rate calculated as H/u fell by 90 log points. The contemporaneous fall in recruiting intensity per vacancy accounts for about 10% to 20% of the decline in the job-finding rate over this period, depending on the job-finding rate measure. Given that the recruiting intensity index remains low through 2011, it continues to contribute to the historically low job-finding rates for unemployed workers in recent years.

In summary, under our working hypothesis, recruiting intensity accounts for sizable cyclical movements in aggregate hires, job-filling rates, and job-finding rates. To develop this conclusion, we built on micro evidence to motivate and construct our index of recruiting intensity. We recognize, however, that our working hypothesis involves a bit of a leap because it calibrates a time-series elasticity from cross-sectional evidence. We now evaluate this working hypothesis and consider several checks of our conclusions about the importance of recruiting intensity for aggregate fluctuations. Along the way, we develop additional evidence that the generalized matching function (9) and the

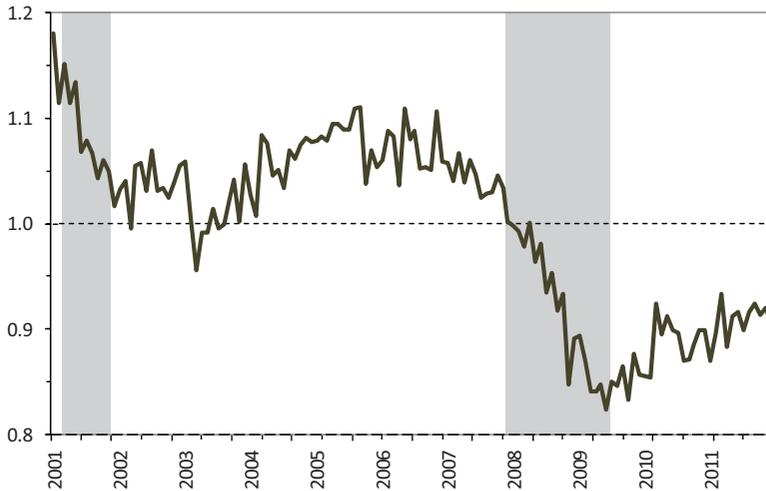


FIGURE X

Index of Recruiting Intensity Per Vacancy, January 2001 to December 2011

recruiting intensity index in Figure X improve our understanding of aggregate outcomes.

As a first check, if \bar{q} moves as posited with the aggregate rate of hires, the standard matching function suffers from a particular form of misspecification. Specifically, the standard function says that the aggregate vacancy yield obeys a simple relationship to market tightness given by $(H/v) = \mu(v/u)^{-\alpha}$. In contrast, the generalized matching function (9) yields $(H/v) = \mu(v/u)^{-\alpha} \bar{q}^{1-\alpha}$. Thus, if employers cut back on recruiting intensity per vacancy in weak labor markets, (9) implies a decline in the vacancy yield relative to $\mu(v/u)^{-\alpha}$. Returning to Figure I, we evaluate this implication for $\alpha = 0.5$. The vacancy yield falls well short of the benchmark implied by the standard matching function after early 2008, and it typically exceeds this benchmark in the stronger labor markets before 2008. This pattern supports the view that employers cut back on average recruiting intensity per vacancy, \bar{q} , in a weak labor market with a low hires rate.

As a second check, we plug aggregate data on hires, vacancies, and unemployment into the standard matching function (5) to back out a “Solow residual” or macro \bar{q} series, which we then compare to the micro-founded \bar{q} recruiting intensity measure in Figure X.

Figure XI carries out this comparison for $\alpha = 0.5$ and reveals that the two measures are very highly correlated over time.²³ Note that our micro-based recruiting intensity index varies much less than one-for-one with the macro-based Solow residual measure. Perhaps random errors in the data or the matching function (9) attenuate the estimated relationship in Figure XI, but the macro-based residual series also captures other forms of cyclical misspecification in the matching function. For example, if search intensity per unemployed worker declines in weak labor markets along with recruiting intensity per vacancy, then fluctuations in the macro-based series will exhibit greater amplitude. Davis (2011) reports evidence along these lines. Thus, we see our analysis of recruiting intensity as providing only a partial explanation for the matching function breakdown highlighted by Figure I.

Our third check finds the elasticity value that maximizes the fit of a Beveridge curve relationship augmented by recruiting intensity. Specifically, we regress the log of the aggregate unemployment rate on the log of the effective vacancy rate $\tilde{v}'_t = \tilde{v}_t \bar{q}_t$, where $\ln \bar{q}_t = \varepsilon \ln \bar{H}_t$ and ε is the fill-rate elasticity with respect to hires. Estimation by nonlinear least squares yields $\hat{\varepsilon} = .836$ in this approach based entirely on time-series variation, very close to the value of .820 from the cross-sectional evidence. This result shows that the recruiting intensity index we constructed using micro evidence performs well in capturing the aggregate effects of fluctuations in employers' use of other recruiting instruments.

Our fourth check considers whether our micro-based generalized matching function improves the fit of national and regional Beveridge curves compared to the standard matching function. Our fit metric is the residual RMSE in a time-series regression of the log unemployment rate on the log of the observed vacancy rate (standard) or the log effective vacancy rate (generalized). As reported in Table VI, the generalized matching function yields a better-fitting Beveridge curve in all cases. The RMSE is 20% smaller for the specification implied by the generalized

23. We have verified that the pattern in Figure XI holds for all values of the matching function elasticity α in the range from 0.3 to 0.7. The R-squared values never fall below 0.61 for α in this range, and they exceed 0.9 for $\alpha \in [0.4, 0.7]$. The goodness of fit between the two measures is maximized at $\alpha = 0.51$. The slope coefficient in a regression of the micro-based \tilde{q} on the macro-based \bar{q} is always less than one-half.

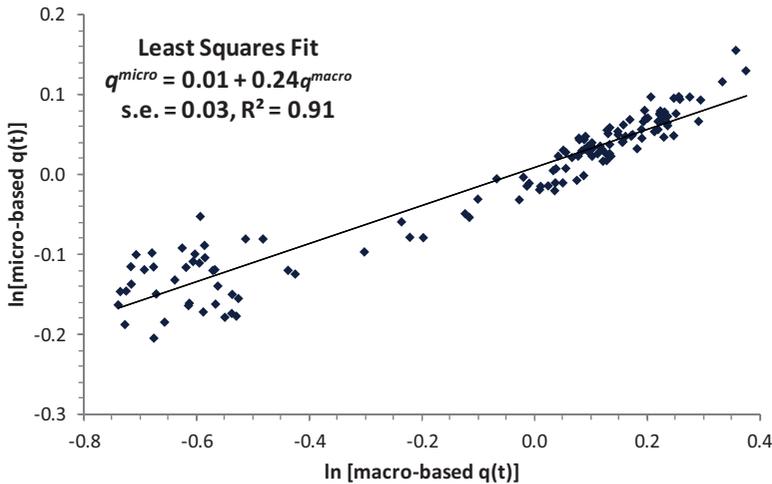


FIGURE XI

Recruiting Intensity Index (Micro q) Related to Solow Residual Implied by Standard Matching Function (Macro q), January 2001 to December 2011

matching function in the national data and 13–24% smaller across the four Census regions. We stress that the generalized matching function considered here does not nest the standard matching function, because it entails a specific time-series path for recruiting intensity per vacancy.²⁴

V.E. Additional Implications for Theoretical Models

We have now developed several pieces of evidence that point to an important role for employer actions on other recruiting margins in the hiring process. Obviously, this evidence presents a challenge to search and matching models that treat vacancies as the sole or chief instrument that employers manipulate to vary hires. Our evidence and analysis also present a deeper and less obvious challenge for the standard equilibrium search model: adding a recruiting intensity margin is not enough, by itself, to reconcile the standard theory with the evidence. This conclusion

24. In an analogous exercise, Online Appendix B reports that the effective labor market tightness ratio more accurately tracks fluctuations in the job-finding rate in national and regional data. See Table B.3.

TABLE VI
 BEVERIDGE CURVE FITS FOR STANDARD AND GENERALIZED MATCHING FUNCTIONS,
 MONTHLY DATA FROM JANUARY 2001 TO DECEMBER 2011

Aggregation level of unemployment and vacancy data	Time-series standard deviation, log unemployment rate	RMSE of residuals in regression on log vacancy rate, standard matching function	Percent reduction in RMSE using log effective vacancy rate, generalized matching function
National data	0.30	0.13	20.4
Northeast	0.27	0.17	17.2
Midwest	0.28	0.14	13.0
South	0.30	0.16	18.4
West	0.34	0.19	23.8

Notes. The table reports summary statistics and regression results for national and regional Beveridge curves. The dependent variable is the log unemployment rate, and the right-side variable is either the log vacancy rate (standard matching function) or the log effective vacancy rate (generalized matching function). Both rates are measured as percent of employment. The effective vacancy rate equals the product of the measured vacancy rate and our index of recruiting intensity per vacancy plotted in Figure X. As reported in the last column, the effective vacancy rate yields a better-fitting Beveridge curve at the national level and in all four Census regions.

follows by considering a version of the standard theory due to Pissarides (2000, Chapter 5) and confronting it with our evidence.

Pissarides analyzes a search equilibrium model with a generalized matching function similar to (9). In his model, the job-filling rate rises with recruiting intensity, and recruiting costs per vacancy are increasing and convex in the employer's intensity choice.²⁵ Wages are determined according to a generalized Nash bargain. Given this setup, Pissarides proves that optimal recruiting intensity is insensitive to aggregate conditions *and* takes the same value for all employers (given that all face the same recruiting cost function). As Pissarides explains, this result follows because employers use the vacancy rate as the instrument for attracting workers, and they choose recruiting intensity to minimize cost per vacancy.²⁶ The cost-minimizing intensity choice depends only on properties of the recruiting cost function.

25. His generalized matching function also allows for variable search intensity by unemployed workers, but that aspect of his model is inessential for the discussion at hand.

26. See the discussion related to his equations (5.22) and (5.30).

This invariance result implies that the textbook search equilibrium model—extended to incorporate variable recruiting intensity—cannot account for the evidence in Figures VII and IV. Those figures show that job-filling rates rise sharply with employer growth rates and gross hires rates in the cross section. Moreover, the invariance result precludes a role for recruiting intensity per vacancy in the behavior of aggregate hires. Thus, the standard theory cannot account for the evidence in Figures X and XI that average recruiting intensity varies over time and matters for aggregate hires and the job-finding rate. In sum, both the cross-sectional and time-series evidence are inconsistent with the standard theory.

We do not see this inconsistency as fatal to standard search equilibrium models with random matching. Rather, we think the evidence calls for a reevaluation of some of the building blocks in these models. One candidate for reevaluation is the standard free entry condition for new jobs. This condition ensures that vacancies have zero asset value in equilibrium. In turn, the zero asset value condition plays a key role in leading all employers to choose the same recruiting intensity. More generally, when job creation costs rise at the margin and job characteristics differ among employers, the optimal recruiting intensity and the job-filling rate increase with the opportunity cost of unfilled positions.²⁷ The free entry condition for new jobs is widely adopted in search and matching models because it simplifies the analysis of equilibrium. Our evidence indicates that the simplicity and analytical convenience come at a high cost. Stepping further away from the textbook model with random matching, there are other mechanisms that potentially generate heterogeneity in job-filling rates.²⁸ Our evidence is also informative about other theoretical models of hiring behavior. Figures VII and IX, for example, are hard to square with simple mismatch models. In these models, an employer fills vacancies quickly if its hiring requirements do not exhaust the pool of unemployed workers in the local labor market. That is, an employer with modest hiring needs enjoys a high job-filling

27. Davis (2001) analyzes an equilibrium search model with these features and shows that it delivers heterogeneity in recruiting intensity per vacancy and job-filling rates. See his equations (14) and (15) and the related discussion.

28. For example, Faberman and Nagypál (2008) show that a model with search on the job, a convex vacancy creation cost, and productivity differences among firms can deliver a positive relationship between the job-filling rate and employer growth rates in the cross section.

rate. In contrast, a rapidly expanding employer is more likely to exhaust the local pool of available workers. Thus, employers with greater hiring needs tend to fill vacancies more slowly and experience lower job-filling rates. In short, the basic mechanism stressed by mismatch models pushes toward a negative cross-sectional relationship between job-filling rates and employer growth rates.

Directed search models are readily compatible with the evidence in Figures VII and IX. These models come with a built-in extra recruiting margin, typically in the form of the employer's choice of a wage offer posted along with a vacancy announcement. The wage offer influences the arrival rate of job applicants and the job-filling rate. An employer that seeks to expand more rapidly both posts more vacancies and offers a more attractive wage. As a result, the job-filling rate rises with employer growth rates in the cross section. See Kaas and Kircher (2010) for an explicit analysis of this point.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study is the first to examine the behavior of vacancies, hires, and vacancy yields at the establishment level in the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, a large sample of US employers. We find strong patterns in hiring and vacancy outcomes related to industry, employer size, the pace of worker turnover, and employer growth rates.

Our study also innovates in several other respects. First, we develop a model of daily hiring dynamics and a simple moment-matching method that, when applied to JOLTS data, identifies the flow of new vacancies and the job-filling rate for vacant positions. Second, we show that job-filling rates rise steeply with the gross hires rate across industries, employer size classes, worker turnover groups, and employer growth rates—a novel finding with important implications for theory. Third, we show how to interpret the evidence through the lens of a generalized matching function and, in particular, how to extract information about scale economies in the employer-level hiring technology and how to identify the role of other recruiting instruments in the hiring process. Fourth, we develop evidence that employer actions on other recruiting margins account for a large share of movements in aggregate hires. We also show that

our micro-founded generalized matching function fares better than the standard matching function in accounting for aggregate movements in job-filling rates and job-finding rates. The effective vacancy concept embedded in our generalized matching function also leads to a more stable Beveridge curve in national and regional data. Finally, we show that the standard search equilibrium model cannot explain the cross-sectional and time-series evidence, even when the model is extended to incorporate a recruiting intensity margin. We also discuss possible modifications to the standard theory to help account for the evidence.

Much work remains to explain the patterns in vacancy and hiring behavior we uncover using JOLTS micro data. One partly unresolved issue involves the 42 percent of hires that occur at establishments with no reported vacancies at the start of the month. Our model of daily hiring dynamics accounts for two-thirds of these hires. The remaining one-third reflects some combination of model misspecification, systematic underreporting of vacancies by JOLTS respondents, and hires not mediated through vacancies. As we discuss in Section IV, evidence from other sources points to an important role for hires not mediated through vacancies. A fuller analysis of such hires requires information beyond what is currently available in JOLTS data. We plan to pursue this topic in future work.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary material is available at *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* online.

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