Work Allocation Forms: Substitution between Full-time, Part-time and Contracted Labour in the Creative Industries

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Abstract

One of the most pervasive trends in contemporary South African business is the substitution of alternative work forms for full-time, permanent employment. Part-time work and external contracting are used extensively by firms, ostensibly to adjust to altering work conditions. However, relatively little is understood about the process, context and contingencies of these substitutions. The present research focuses on work-allocation in the little researched 'creative industries', involving sectors such as audio-visual, design, craft and heritage. Our preliminary cross-sectional analysis of firm-level data illustrates some possible external and internal drivers and contexts for the relative switching between full-time, part-time and contracted labour. These include interactions between firm financial growth, employment growth or shrinkage, workforce experience, skills and capital intensity, and age of firm. Conclusions and directions for research and policy are suggested.

1. Introduction

The importance of alternative employment relationships has been growing worldwide (Kalleberg, 2000; Booth et al, 2002; Peck and Theodore, 2007) and locally (Bhorat et al, 2002). In particular, the surge in the use of temporary (contract) and part-time work arrangements since the 1970's has allowed firms to increase their numerical flexibility (vary their workforce size) and their functional flexibility (the ability of employees to perform a wider array of tasks or to improve their skills) (Casey et al, 1989; Bhorat et al, 2002). The dearth of firm-level data in South Africa has been an obstacle to understanding the demand side of labour markets, let alone the dynamics of producers'

choices between the use of permanent full-time, permanent part-time or contract workers. The purpose of this paper is to explore the drivers of demand for non-standard forms of employment, specifically differentiating between permanent part-time and temporary (contract) workers in the context of the creative industries in Gauteng.

Our preliminary analysis supports the view that the use of part-time and temporary (contract) labour is based on a more complex set of factors than cyclical market conditions alone. For example, "one way that media industries negotiate the dual pressures of innovation and uncertainty is through changing workplace norms" (Neff et al, 2005:307). Moreover, we find that part-time and contract work arrangements are distinct forms of buffer stock employment, driven by different sets of external and internal influences.

This article arises out of a broad study on the creative industries in South Africa, commissioned by the Gauteng Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation, in collaboration with the British Council (GDSACR, 2008). Firms in the so-called 'creative' cluster of industries are those whose activities "have their roots in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (DCMS, 2001) – such as visual arts, multimedia and craft[1]. Due to their typically small size, reliance on intangible intellectual assets, often unorthodox production activities, complex or fluid firm organisation and relatively low level of contribution to the economy, such firms are rarely included in economic or other workplace studies; they are also scattered under various categories in official statistics. However, the creative industries are potentially important employers, a growth area for

[1] See Section 3 for the full list of activities in the Gauteng Creative Industries Mapping Project (GDSACR, 2008).

South Africa; they are key facilitators of the links between the economic, political and social spheres of society; and they are often the pioneers in leading the transformation from "the industrial economy" into "the new economy" or "the creative economy" (Warhurst et al, 2005).

The GDSACR study was conducted in two parts: a short telephonic survey (which contained some data pertaining to work arrangements and other relevant variables, N = 490) and a long face-to-face interview of a sub-sample of firms (N = 185), which duplicated the shorter survey questions as well. This study utilises the responses to the questions in the shorter (albeit less informative) survey, as the sample of the smaller in-depth survey does not facilitate sub-group comparisons.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews some of the important theories explaining the demand for non-standard forms of employment from the firm's perspective. Section 3 gives more details about the data set and the descriptive analysis techniques used in this paper. The results are presented in Section 4. The findings are analysed in the light of our propositions and conclusions are drawn in Section 5.

2. Theoretical Perspectives on Alternative Employment Arrangements

The firm's approach to the decision about the type of contracts offered to workers at the hiring stage has to do with the assumption that that the termination of permanent employment contracts is costly, but also that there are benefits from retaining a "core" complement of permanent employees, even through adverse market conditions. Hence firms often use a combination of permanent and temporary employment contracts, with the latter being a "buffer stock" that can be expanded during favourable conditions and terminated in bad times (Garibaldi, 2006).

Firm Choices between Part-Time and Contract Buffer Stock

The literature on non-standard employment suffers from many definitional inconsistencies and variations in terminology. For the sake of clarity, we adhere to the following definitions of part-time and contract employment. Regarding part-time work, while we accept the general understanding that it is a type of regular wage work, in which the hours are below the statutory working week, we restrict our attention only to permanent (or open-ended) employment. For the purposes of this paper, contract work involves temporary (fixed-term or seasonal or project-based) employment, including the use of individual independent contractors or freelancers.

Even though theory and evidence predicting the use of buffer stock employment exist, including in the creative industries (Ducatel et al, 2000; Neff et al, 2005; Warhurst et al, 2005), there has been little research concerning the differentiation between part-time and contract buffer stock. However, this is a major focus of this paper.

While the choice between part-time and contract labour as choice of buffer stock has not received much attention, other theories may help: notably those in the context of transaction cost economics and resource-based theory (Barney, 1991 & 1995; Lacity & Hirshheim, 1993; Lepak & Snell, 1999; Williamson, 1985). Transaction cost theory presents the well-known argument that aspects of the transaction such as frequency, specificity, opportunism and uncertainty will dictate the extent of externalisation, while resource-based theory focuses on the extent to which the resource drives competitive advantage.

For the purposes of this investigation, not many of the transaction-specific variables are studied. However, transaction cost economics does offer some useful guidelines,

based on general firm environment, namely increasing internalisation (full- or part-time permanent, rather than contract employment) under conditions of higher asset specificity and frequency, especially when specificity is allied with high uncertainty and possibility of opportunism. This idea accords with the notion of buffer stock employment in uncertain times, but in addition it provides some bases for differentiating between part-time and contract options.

The core message of transaction cost economics (and indeed a key aspect of resource-based and other theories such as that of Lepak and Snell, 1999) is to differentiate between the uniqueness of the asset, both because this is a driver of internalisation, and also because it determines the extent to which uncertainty is determinative. Williamson (1985) assumed that uncertainty would only lead specific transactions to greater internalisation, as less unique, market-available assets (in this case, contract labour) could easily be adjusted to requirements at the time change occurs. This is an important point, because to the extent that it is true, it affects the manner and degree of firms' response to change. While many of the aspects of the transactions are not available to us as data, firm financial and workforce change, as well as firm age and capital intensity are key variables in the current dataset. These might be seen as proxies for uncertainty and value.

Firstly, financial change (i.e. growth or decline in firm turnover) is likely to be more externally driven, and an indicator of greater environmental uncertainty for firms. Under conditions of financial change, especially decline, the firm is likely to internalise assets that have some specificity (leading to fewer part-time contracts), but with a retention of contract labour that is market-provided and thus less affected:

Proposition 1: A large degree of financial change will generally lead to greater use of full-time or contract workers but fewer part-time workers

However, older firms are likely to have a better understanding of industry conditions and opportunities, broader networks, greater chances of future work, and better foresight of potential future contracts, therefore experience may ameliorate uncertainty.

Proposition 2: The effect in Proposition 1 will be less prevalent for older firms

Finally, employment changes may be a reaction to bad times, or a considered strategic reorientation by a firm (for instance, in response to innovation and/or new technology). Employment changes in the face of financial stability or growth may be a specific sign that the organisation is behaving proactively or strategically, which would favour part-time rather than contract work, since the employment changes are less likely to be reactionary and uncertain. On the other hand, employment shrinkages when financial times are poor may indicate attempts to reduce costs, rather than resource considerations, tending the firm towards more contract work. Therefore:

Proposition 3: Employment changes in times of financial growth will tend the firm towards a) more full-time employment, and b) more use of part-time work than contract labour as a complement to permanent employment

Proposition 4: Employment changes in times of financial decline will tend the firm towards a) more full-time employment, and b) more use of part-time work than contract labour as a complement to permanent

These propositions are tested as part of the general analysis conducted next.

3. Data and methodology

- As already mentioned, the GDSACR study was conducted through the means of a face-to-face and telephonic surveys of managers of firms in various creative industry sectors.

Participants

The sampling frame for the study was elicited from a combination of databases and telephonic lists proffered by the sponsoring organisations, industry bodies (such as the Gauteng Film Office (GFO) and the Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA)), as well as other means (e.g. a survey of the Gauteng business directories and websites and the "snowballing" approach, where interviewees were asked to recommend other potential survey respondents). Some 675 firms in total responded to the short survey questions. Of these, only 485 were retained in this study due to non-responses in the critical items on employment forms.

Measures

The following measures relevant to this study were gathered:

Employment: Total and relative use of alternative employment forms. We asked employers to report on the approximate number of permanent full-time, permanent part-time and contract employees in their 2006 workforces. Percentages of each category were derived from this.

Age of organisation. Three categories were given to respondents (0-4 years, 5-9 years, 10+ years).

Primary activity of organisation is a categorical measure including visual arts, performing arts, cultural tourism, multimedia, music, craft, audiovisual, cultural heritage, publishing, design, fashion and other.

Change in employment. The survey asks employers to estimate change in employment since 2005 using the following options: no change, 0 - 10% decrease, 10%+ decrease, 0 - 10% increase, 10% + increase.

Change in financial conditions. The survey simply asks employers to report on total firm turnover for both 2005 and 2006. We estimate change in financial conditions based on percentage change over this time.

Capital intensity. The survey asked companies to estimate the replacement value of their assets. Many respondents omitted this data, so this variable was imputed by calculating the average replacement value of physical assets, reported by each sub-sector, then grouping the sectors into three percentiles: low (crafts, publishing, visual arts and fashion), medium (multimedia, music, design) and high (performing arts, cultural tourism, audiovisual, cultural heritage) asset values. Unfortunately, we have to include the caveat that due to the obvious measurement problems, the intangible intellectual assets, which play a crucial role in the creative industries, are not included in the asset value.

Data Analysis

This preliminary study utilises only simple descriptive comparisons of contingency tables, as most of the variables are categorical or at best ordinal differentiators, and not amenable to continuous, non-parametric analyses. Even though Chi-Square analyses could in principle be conducted on the contingency tables, this was not considered feasible here, as no good basis for predicting an *a priori* distribution could be found. While comparison with the distributions in the overall labour market might be informative, and useful for another paper, this would move away from the basis of this particular article. Therefore descriptive statistics are maintained as the preferred data analysis technique.

4. Results

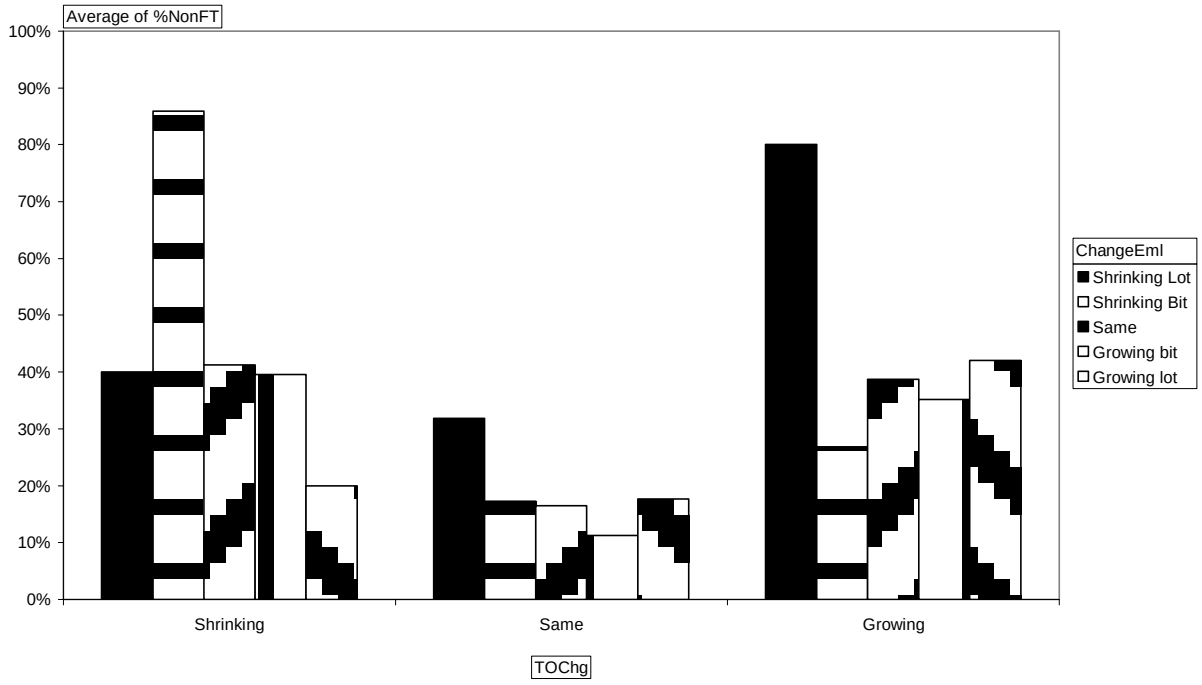
Across the entire sample, the average full-time/permanent complement of firms' workforces is 76% (SD = 34%), on average part-time usage is 12% (SD = 25%), with contract labour comprising some 11% (SD = 26%).

We began the analysis of possible drivers of employment forms with a breakdown across types of creative industries and various levels of capital intensity. However there was no manifest difference in employment forms across type of activity or capital intensity.

The second set of potential drivers involved the financial and employment conditions prevailing within the firm. We began this analysis with a simple breakdown of the relative use of all non-full-time employment over varying financial and employment conditions in the firm (for which we use change in financial turnover and firm's total workforce respectively, for the period 2005-2006).

Figure 1 shows the breakdown.

Figure 1: Alternative employment across varied financial and employment conditions



Notes. "TOChg" = change in financial turnover from 2005-2006, "ChangeEml" = change in the firm's workforce from 2005-2006, "NonFT" = non full-time employment.

As shown by

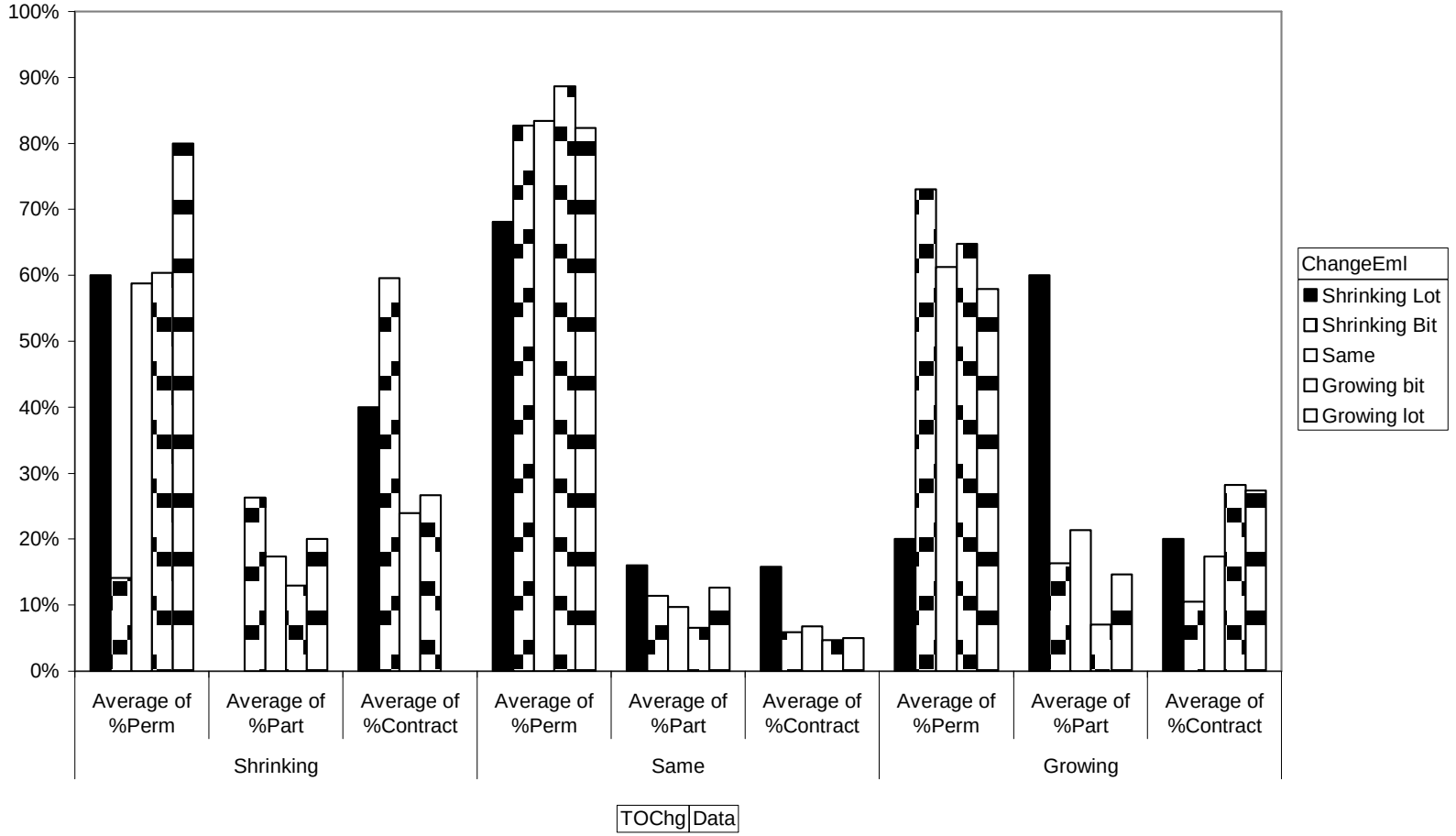
Figure 1, basic differences in employment trends seem to exist, depending on the basic financial conditions of the company. This preliminary analysis indicates that on average, employers select alternatives to full-time employment especially under two conditions: a) when financial strength (turnover) is shrinking and employment is shrinking in the order of less than 10%; b) when the company is growing financially but shrinking employment substantially (by >10%).

Table 1 and Figure 2 show the more complex breakdown where full-time (permanent), part-time and contract labour have been disaggregated and compared across change in financial turnover and workforce.

Table 1: Disaggregated employment usage across changes in turnover and employment

Change in Turnover	**Change in Employment**					**Grand Total**
	Shrinking Lot	**Shrinking Bit**	**Same**	**Growing bit**	**Growing lot**	
Shrinking						
%Permanent	60%	14%	59%	60%	80%	57%
%Part Part-time	0%	26%	17%	13%	20%	16%
%Contract	40%	60%	24%	27%	0%	27%
Same						
%Permanent	68%	83%	83%	89%	82%	84%
%Part Part-time	16%	11%	10%	7%	13%	10%
%Contract	16%	6%	7%	5%	5%	6%
Growing						
%Permanent	20%	73%	61%	65%	58%	61%
%Part Part-time	60%	16%	21%	7%	15%	18%
%Contract	20%	11%	17%	28%	27%	20%
Total %Permanent	64%	76%	76%	83%	73%	76%
Total %Part-time	17%	14%	13%	7%	14%	12%
Total %Contract	19%	11%	11%	10%	13%	11%

Figure 2: Disaggregated employment usage over varied financial and employment conditions



Notes. "TOChg" = change in financial turnover from 2005-2006, "ChangeEml" = change in the firm's workforce from 2005-2006.

The following are notable features of this analysis.

Under conditions of an economic downturn (shrinking turnover):

- The substitution noted earlier out of full-time employment when firms are shrinking in turnover and employment has shrunk somewhat (by less than 10%) is especially into contract labour. In such conditions, full-time labour comprises only 14% of the workforce, while contract labour comprises a large 60% of the workforce (compared to an average of 11% contract).
- Also notable is the strong substitution into full-time labour when financial turnover is shrinking but employment is growing strongly: under such conditions firms use predominantly full-time labour (80%) with 20% part-time and no contractors;
- In addition, when the firm is shrinking dramatically in both turnover and employment, the firms use 60% full-time and 40% contract labour with no part-time contracts being offered

Under conditions of unchanging economic conditions (constant turnover):

- There is lower than average full-time employment (68% vs. an average of 84%) when employment is dropping a lot (>10%), with substitution equally into part-time and contacted labour;
- On average, contract workers are used less when turnover is constant (6%), compared to when turnover is changing (growing: 20%; shrinking: 27%).

Under conditions of an economic upturn (growing turnover):

- Strongly shrinking employment is associated with substitution out of full-time (20% vs. an average of 61%) and into largely part-time labour (60% vs. 18% on average);
- However, if employment is only shrinking somewhat (<10%), then full-time employment is higher than average (73% vs 61% on average).

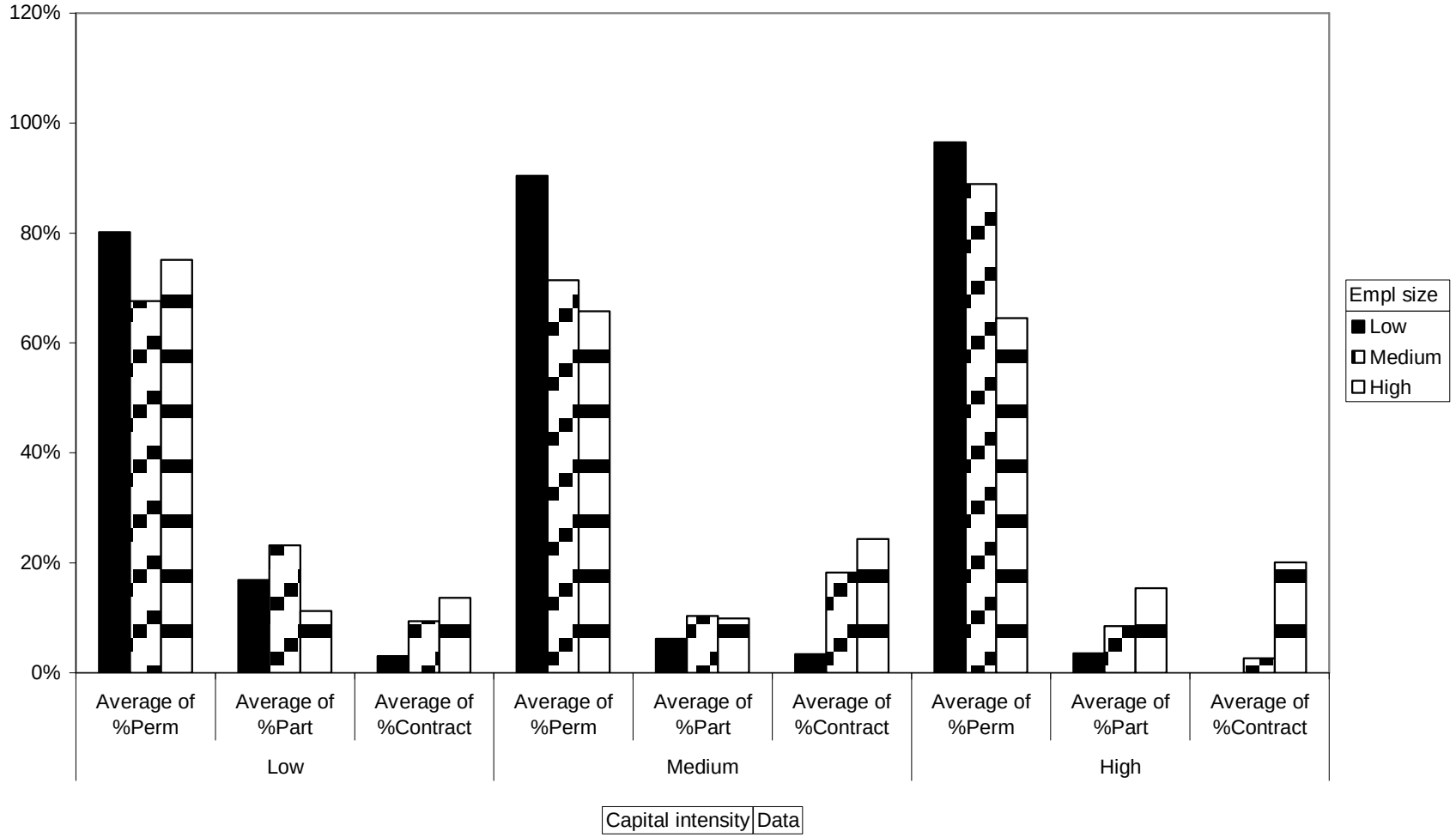
As discussed earlier, the age of the firm may have a further effect. Table 2 and Figure 3 show a three way analysis by financial and employment conditions as well as firm age. Firms that have been in business for less than ten years are classified as 'inexperienced' and those in existence for over a decade as 'experienced'. In this analysis, fewer categories were used for turnover and employment as cells are otherwise overly underpopulated.

Table 2: Disaggregated employment forms by turnover, employment and age of firm

Change in Turnover	Age of firm	Employment forms	Change in Employment			Grand Total
			Shrinking	Same	Growing	
Not growing	**Experienced**	*% Permanent*	81%	77%	91%	80%
		%Part-time	8%	13%	6%	11%
		%Contract	11%	10%	4%	8%
	Inexperienced	*% Permanent*	66%	89%	87%	86%
		% Part-time	19%	6%	8%	8%
		%Contract	14%	5%	4%	6%
Growing	**Experienced**	*% Permanent*		59%	46%	58%
		% Part-time		29%	46%	30%
		%Contract		12%	8%	12%
	Inexperienced	*%Permanent*	20%	73%	59%	63%
		% Part-time	60%	0%	20%	13%
		%Contract	20%	27%	21%	24%
Total %Permanent			69%	78%	86%	80%

Total Ave. of %Part-time	17%	13%	9%	12%
Total Average of %Contract	14%	9%	5%	8%

Figure 3: Employment forms across capital intensity and total workforce



The following is notable from Table 2 and Figure 3:

When firms are not growing (reporting shrinking or stable turnover):

- More established firms that are expanding in employment under these financial conditions use predominantly permanent full-time labour (91% vs. and average of 80%);
- Newer firms that are shrinking in employment under these conditions substitute predominantly out of full-time employment (66% vs. an average of 86%) and approximately equally into the other categories.

When turnover is growing:

- Older firms that expanded employment under these growing financial conditions, had lower than average full-time (46% vs. 58% on average), with substitution into predominantly into part-time (46% vs. 30% on average).
- Younger firms that are growing in turnover, but shrinking in employment, have very low full-time complements (20% vs. 63% on average), with strong substitution into part-time employment (60% vs. 13% on average).
- Younger firms that are growing in turnover but with stable workforce size, have higher-than-average proportion of full-time employees (73% vs. 63% on average), complementing entirely with contract staff and no part-time staff.

Finally, Table 3 and Figure 4 show the effect of capital intensity, controlling for total workforce size. The data on total workforce size was divided into three percentiles, which determined the following employment categories:

- Small firms: 1 – 3 employees
- Medium-sized firms: 4 – 6 employees
- Large firms: more than 6 employees (with the largest firm in the dataset reporting a total of 2 800 employees).

Of course, these firm size categories differ from official definitions of micro, small, medium and large enterprises, but they make sense within the "microcosm" of the creative industries, as 67% of firms in the dataset reported employing fewer than 10 people.

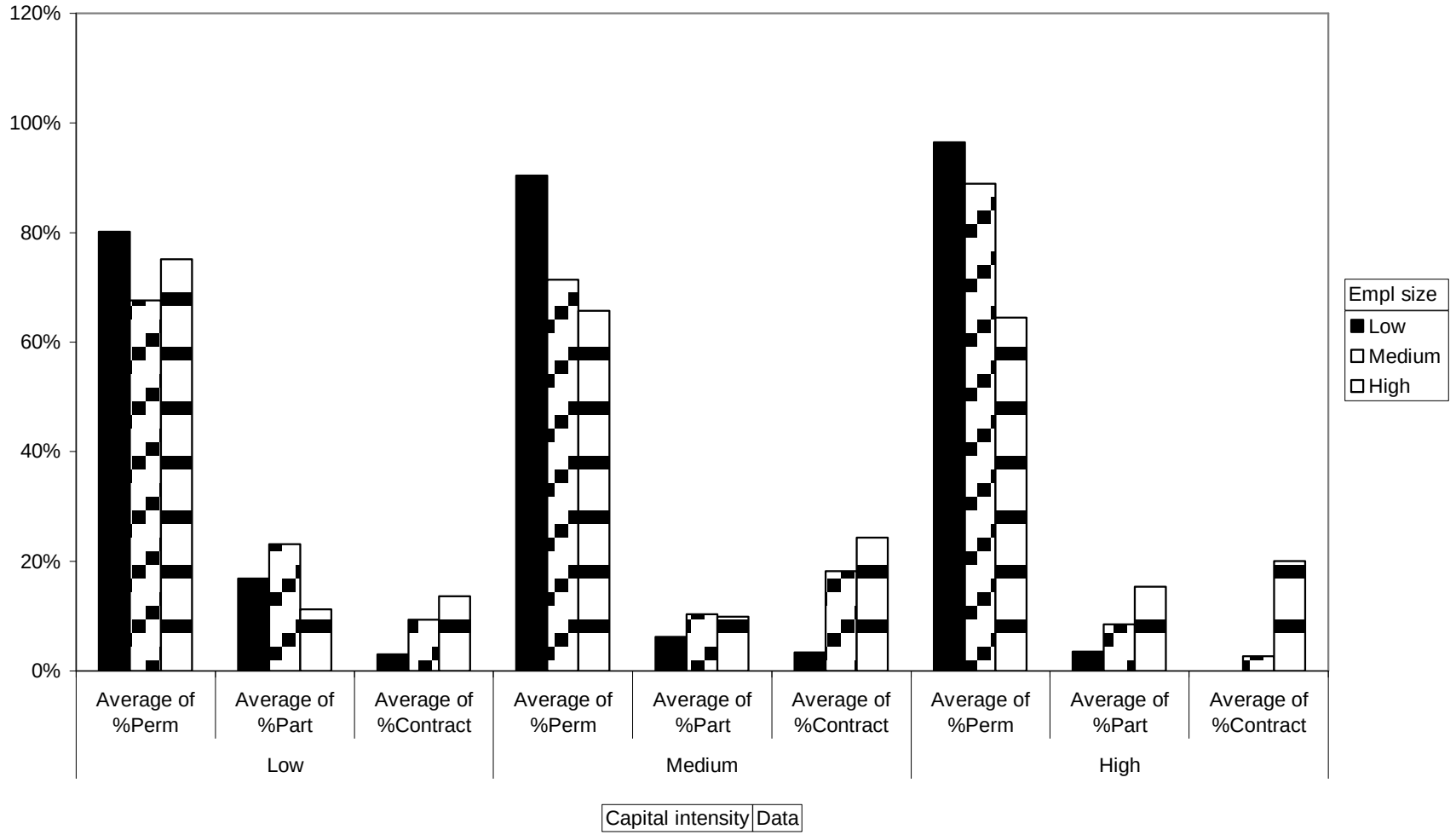
Table 3: Effect of capital intensity and firm size

Capital intensity	Employment forms	Total workforce size			Grand Total
		Low	Medium	High	
	%Permanent	80%	68%	75%	76%
Low	*%Part-time*	17%	23%	11%	15%
	%Contract	3%	9%	14%	9%
	%Permanent	90%	71%	66%	78%
Medium	*%Part-time*	6%	10%	10%	8%
	%Contract	3%	18%	24%	14%
	%Permanent	96%	89%	65%	76%
High	*%Part-time*	4%	8%	15%	11%
	%Contract	0%	3%	20%	12%
Total %Permanent		87%	75%	69%	76%
Total %Part-time		10%	16%	13%	12%
Total %Contract		2%	9%	18%	11%

Analysing Table 3 suggests the following:

- Increasing capital intensity seems to lead to greater use of full-timers when workforces are small or medium, but less use of full-time employees when workforces are large.
- Full-time employment is especially larger than average (90% vs. 78% on average) when capital intensity is medium and the workforce is small, with the opposite being true when the workforce is large (full time staff comprise only 66%). As the workforce grows in size in this group, a substitution is seen predominantly out of full-time and into contract labour (which is of the order of 24% when workforces are large).
- The same pattern is seen when capital intensity is high: as workforce size grows, the full-time force is replaced by contractors (20% in large workforces, complemented by 15% part-timers).

Figure 4: Capital intensity and total firm (workforce) size



5. Discussion

This preliminary analysis does appear to show some differential and potentially important patterns in employment trends across various creative industry firm groups.

General Use of Buffer Stock in Creative Industries Employment

The general use of buffer stock across the creative industries in South Africa is in the order of 25%, on average fairly equally split across part-time and contract labour. Data that is useful for comparison with international trends is more easily available for the labour supply side. For South Africa, Bhorat et al (2002) estimate on the basis of the 1999 October Household Survey (OHS) that 77.4% of the employed are permanent workers (this is likely to include those working full-time and part-time), 20.3% are in fixed-term, temporary, casual and seasonal employment, with 2.3% unspecified. Part-time employment rates vary substantially from country to country. In the US, 20% of workers are employed part-time, with this figure including both permanent and temporary employment (Kalleberg, 2000). For 2005, among developed economies, the lowest proportions of part-time labour (below 5%) are found in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, while Australia, Japan, the Netherlands and Switzerland are on the other end of the spectrum, with part-time employment rates above 25%. The Netherlands has by far the highest rate of part-time employment – above 35% (ILO, 2007).

However, the interesting part of the analysis is looking at possible discrepancies from average levels of part-time and contract employment and potential drivers associated with the deviations. These are discussed next.

Substitution Out of Full-Time Employment and Use of Buffer Stock

One of the primary findings of the analysis is that alternatives to full-time employment (buffer stock employment) are especially utilised under certain conditions. Generally, financial change (either growth or decline) appears to lead to substitution into buffer stock in different ways. In addition, a reduction in the workforce appears to be associated with greater part-time and contracting work. Therefore uncertainty and change do indeed to drive buffer stock use.

However, as expected, the pattern differs depending on the *extent* of workforce reduction, the associated financial state of the firm, and the age of the firm. Generally the following is found:

1) There are often large differences between firms that do smaller (<10%) as opposed to larger (>10%) reductions in employment. Some of these differences included the following:
    a) Smaller reductions in workforce size when associated with financial downturns tend firms towards contract labour. This effect is seemingly associated with younger firms. This may be due to experience and accumulated networks, a point that is discussed later;
    b) Large reductions in workforce but growth in financial turnover appear to be associated with large substitutions into part-time employment, and this effect is associated with younger (and therefore possibly less experienced) firms;
    c) These findings appear to support Propositions 3 and 4;

2) Large differences in employment trends seem to be associated with younger firms. Especially, younger firms appear to make more use of contract labour. This may provide some support for Proposition 2.

Why would the extent of labour force reductions be an important differentiator? One possible difference may lie in the use of reductions as a reaction to poor economic conditions (a passive response) versus as a strategic mechanism for productivity improvement or business-focus reorientation. As proposed earlier, the situation where firms are reducing workforces seemingly in response to a financial downturn would potentially be a reactionary response, and the commensurate increase in the use of contract labour may then be a response to the uncertainly of future financial and business conditions. The continued and stronger use of contract labour rather than part-time buffer stock in such cases may be due to the flexibility of contract labour in the face of uncertainty, with probably the ease of ending such contracts the key factor.

On the other hand, times of financial growth, which nonetheless are associated with large workforce reductions, may indicate strategic reorientation, for example into new work areas which require a workforce with different skills to the original group. This is a less uncertain scenario. Reduction to only the core workforce (possibly the owners and managers), allied with a strong complement of part-time labour, may then indicate the re-creation of longer-term and more permanent workforce and buffer stock.

Another substitution (into part-time) is seen when older firms are growing financially and numerically. Once again, such times are likely to be less purely uncertain, with

changes due to strategic considerations, requiring a more consistent workforce than contract labour, with lower coordination costs.

High Levels of Full-Time Employment

High levels of full-time contracting are particularly associated with financial downturns but where firms (especially older, more experienced firms) are nonetheless expanding their workforces. In addition, full-time employment is higher with greater capital intensity but smaller absolute workforce size.

Perhaps the most determinant aspect of this group of firms is their age. As stated earlier, older firms are likely to have a better understanding of industry conditions and opportunities, broader networks, greater chances of future work, and better foresight of potential future contracts. The hiring of large numbers of full-time employees may then be a measure to stock up for future contracts that are in the pipeline. In fact, a financial downturn in many of these businesses (e.g. film) might be precisely because they are mid-way through a large contract, having to have hired to fulfil the contract, but not yet fully paid for the work.

Contract Labour

Contract labour generally appears to be linked especially to times of financial instability, either good or bad times. Firms that are shrinking in both turnover and employment seem especially prone to use contract labour, however younger firms that are growing in turnover also use fairly high contracting levels. Higher capital intensity and larger workforces are also linked to greater use of contracting.

These findings may again be due to reactions to financial times. As stated earlier, financial downturns may lead to short-term wait-and-see reactions. In good times, younger, more inexperienced firms who are less able to foresee the duration of current contracts or predict future opportunities may also react with higher levels of contracting, as they may not know how long the current upturn will continue.

The link to capital intensity and workforce size may be due to the nature of the type of creative industries involved. These included industries such as tourism, performing arts and cultural heritage which are often seasonal in nature and therefore, despite large investment, require more numerical flexibility.

Limitations

The cross sectional nature of the preliminary dataset is a particular limitation that allows only for broad associations to be explored, with little basis for causative relationships. The lack of direct measures of environmental and transaction characteristics renders deductions about causes or patterns of buffer stock usage tenuous at best.

Future Research

Future research would be considerably enhanced by panel data studies, allowing for greater deductions about causative relationships. In addition, qualitative interviews of a sub-sample of firms should be undertaken to evaluate the reported underlying causes of the use of buffer stock types. Measurements that, if added to the study, would enhance it would include types of labour being used in various categories, aspects of the transaction

(frequency, specificity, etc.) and further environmental characteristics such as perceived actual level of uncertainty and skills shortages.

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