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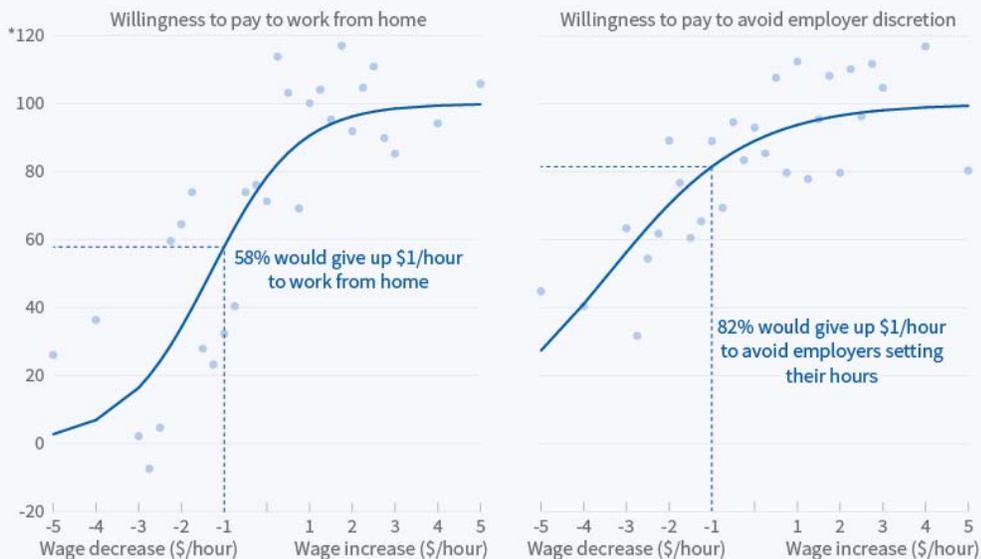
People

About

Putting Price Tags on Alternative Work Arrangements

How Much Do You Value Your 9-to-5?

Percentage of respondents choosing alternative work scenarios at different pay changes



Source: Authors' field experiment

Nearly 40 percent of applicants said that they would not take a job if its schedule fluctuated at the employer's will, even if it paid 25 percent more than the same job in a 9-to-5 schedule.

Workers are willing to accept lower pay in return for a standard Monday to Friday work week and for the opportunity to work from home, but not for the right to determine how many hours they will work. These are among the findings of **Valuing Alternative Work Arrangements** (NBER Working Paper No. 22708) by [Alexandre Mas](#) and [Amanda Pallais](#).

The researchers posted ads for telephone-interviewer positions on job boards in 68 metropolitan areas. Respondents were asked to choose between a traditional schedule of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, and a randomly assigned alternative arrangement. The jobs were otherwise identical, and applicants were assured their schedule preference would have no bearing on their hiring prospects.

The alternatives included employee-friendly options such as flexible schedules and working from home, and more restrictive options that gave employers the discretion to change schedules on short notice and to assign weekend and evening shifts. The researchers randomly varied the wage differences between the two options they offered as a way to assess the value workers placed on the various schedule structures.

The study analyzed data from 7,000 applicants. Of all the employee-friendly options, applicants valued the chance to work from home the most. On average, they were willing to accept 8 percent lower wages for this privilege.



The NBER Digest
NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH

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How Quantitative Easing Affected Mortgage Refinancing

Central banks seeking to stimulate economic activity in the aftermath of the Great Recession have purchased a range of financial assets, including mortgage and corporate bonds. How such purchase programs operate, and whether they produce the desired result, is the subject of ongoing debate.

In How Quantitative Easing Works: Evidence on the Refinancing Channel (NBER Working Paper 22610), Marco Di Maggio, Amir Sufi, and Christopher Whalen find that the Federal Reserve's purchase of \$1.25 trillion in qualifying mortgage loans between late 2009 and the first quarter of 2010 stimulated over 800 million in refinancing activity by making credit more readily available and by lowering interest rates. They estimate that the stimulation of lower interest payments and equity extraction by homeowners who refinanced their loans created \$76 billion in additional consumption.

Government-sponsored enterprises (GSEs) such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac guarantee mortgages that meet certain criteria for maximum loan-to-value (LTV) ratios. Loans that qualify for a guarantee are called conforming loans. US law restricts Federal Reserve mortgage purchases to guaranteed loans, which heightens the segmentation of the market for conforming and nonconforming mortgages that cannot conforming loan limits and other nonconforming loans that have over 90 percent LTV ratios during Federal Reserve market interventions. From 2008 through 2014, the study 2006–15 data from the credit bureau Equifax, mortgage processing data and credit data from over 30 million loans, on roughly 40 percent of the mortgage market.

The first phase of quantitative easing in the US, made credit more easily available, lowered interest rates, and stimulated over \$400 billion in refinancing activity and \$76 billion in additional consumption.

The researchers estimate differences in interest rates and mortgage origination rates in the conforming and nonconforming mortgage markets (including both "jumbo" mortgages when financial institutions are unable to enhance across segments).

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QE1 Spurred Refinancing for GSE-Guaranteed Mortgages, Q1-Q4 2009

Refinancing mortgage originations (in billions)

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The researchers were surprised to discover that a large majority of applicants placed little or no value on options that would have allowed them to decide how many hours they wanted to work and when. But while this was the case on average, a quarter of the applicants indicated they would trade at least 10 percent of their pay for the opportunity to make their own schedule.

Applicants were so strongly attached to the traditional 9-to-5, Monday-Friday work schedule that, on average, they indicated that they would take a pay cut of 20 percent to avoid jobs in which employers could change their schedules from week to week. Nearly 40 percent of applicants said that they would not take a job in which the schedule fluctuated at the employer's will even if it paid 25 percent more than the same work with a 9-to-5 schedule. The researchers determined that the applicants weren't so much averse to employer discretion as they were to the possibility of working evenings and weekends.

The results of the call-center study were affirmed by a survey of participants in the web-based Understanding America Study, which contacts a nationally representative sample of workers and job seekers. Survey participants subject to schedule changes at their employer's discretion

were willing to accept major pay cuts in return for a traditional 9-to-5 job; a quarter of them said that they would give up at least 44 percent of their pay to become 9-to-5ers.

Preferences over job attributes differed by gender. Women "have a higher valuation for worker-friendly work arrangements and a stronger distaste for employer discretion than do men." Women were willing to take substantially larger pay cuts than men for the opportunity to work from home and to avoid jobs scheduled at the employer's discretion.

The researchers estimate that "an employer could set the wage of a flexible-schedule job or a work-from-home job at 11 percent or 14 percent below the market wage of a fixed-schedule job, respectively, and still attract at least 25 percent of the applicants who would have applied to the fixed-schedule job at the higher wage."

—Steve Maas

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