

## **The Meanings of Work in ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Jobs**

Sukanya Sen-Gupta, Paul Edwards and Chin-Ju Tsai

Advanced Institute of Management Research  
and  
Industrial Relations Research Unit  
University of Warwick  
Coventry CV4 7AL

[Sukanya.Sen-Gupta@WBS.ac.uk](mailto:Sukanya.Sen-Gupta@WBS.ac.uk)

[P.K.Edwards@Warwick.ac.uk](mailto:P.K.Edwards@Warwick.ac.uk)

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There has been a polarization of jobs in the UK. Using the criterion of the average level of wages in a job, Goos and Manning (2003) show that, between 1979 and 1999, the numbers of jobs at the top and bottom of the hierarchy grew, while numbers in the middle shrank. Nolan and Wood (2003) stress that growing areas of employment include some very traditional sectors, such as hairdressing, as well as the supposedly new economy. Other writers have found some polarization of skills, though the evidence here is more ambiguous. Gallie et al. (2004) report a general trend towards declining task discretion with little evidence of polarization. This paper takes two sorts of job, which can reasonably be said to represent archetypal good and bad jobs, and addresses the experience of workers in them. Are good jobs as good as they are supposed to be, and is the reverse true of bad jobs?

The paper also controls for possible extraneous influences. In particular it addresses jobs in small firms within one region of the UK. Small firms in general act as a particularly useful test case, for they have been seen as reflecting good and bad features in a very sharp way. At least since the famous Bolton inquiry of 1970, debate on employment relations has turned on a contrast between the 'small is beautiful' and the 'sweatshop' models. Research has moved on a long way from these stereotypes (Ram and Edwards, 2003), but it remains the case that the small firm may be particularly likely to have either good or bad jobs. On the good side, influences include the absence of hierarchy and the freedom of employees to pursue their own careers. On the bad side are familiar features such as low wages.

McGovern et al. (2004) used four measures of job quality: pay, presence of a sick pay scheme, availability of a pension, and existence of a career structure. We addressed these, and several other characteristics. Some are familiar from recent debates on work relations, including skills, discretion, and work intensity (Gallie et al., 2004; Green, 2006). As explained below, we also gave particular attention to the extent of training and the breadth of job responsibilities.

For potentially good jobs, we studied the creative and media sector. Work is organized on the basis of projects rather than long-term employment. Employees are professionals with a high level of skill and creativity. There is little traditional hierarchy. And many people work on a freelance basis, in short as epitomes of the portfolio worker (Storey et al., 2005). Scase (2005: 73-5) captures the common picture of 'creative and professional small firms', highlighting four features:

- 'adaptiveness and job variety are the predominant characteristics';
- 'work roles tend to be broadly defined with high levels of discretion and responsibility'
- employees 'often expect to have a financial stake in the future of their businesses'
- and 'there is little need for [the] more direct forms of management control . . . [and] the management of work is built into the professional-client relationship. . . . Insofar as behaviour is regulated, it tends to be built into collegial relationships and expressed as professional ethics'.

The prevalence of freelance work raises the issue of whether to study freelancers or permanent employees. For our purposes, the latter are the more important, for they are more likely to have reasonably secure jobs and good pay; they are thus a better test of good jobs than freelancers.

We have in the past studied bad jobs in a variety of sectors. The sharpest example is the informal economy, where workers are paid off the books, often for extremely low wages (as low as £2 an hour in 2002). We will draw on the conclusions of this work (Edwards and Ram, 2006; Jones et al., 2004) but will focus on new data from the food manufacturing industry. This industry is characterized by low wages and other potentially bad characteristics. And among small firms there is a preponderance of ethnic minority businesses, it being well-known that minorities still suffer substantial labour market disadvantage.

Our argument is not that good and bad jobs are myths. On the contrary, we confirm, for example, low wages in the food firms. The badness of the employment experience for workers was also a lasting characteristic: these were not merely temporary jobs that workers were simply passing through on the way to something better. The argument is that there were some aspects of good and bad jobs that were, respectively, worse and better than a simple model of such jobs allows. These aspects include job autonomy and opportunities for training. In the experience of work, there is considerable similarity between the two extremes.

We first outline data and methods. Given that each sector is being used to test a different stereotype, we then discuss the sectors in turn, presenting evidence and explaining the results.

### **Data and methods**

We chose a relatively structured approach. This was partly to facilitate self-completion of questionnaires but more importantly to produce data in as comparable a format as possible. A questionnaire was designed drawing on the many previous general surveys of UK employees such as those used in the SCALI and Employment in Britain studies (Gallie et al., 1998). We also examined the US studies, including that by Appelbaum et al. (2000), which developed indicators of skill and opportunities and incentives to participate. New questions were devised on job responsibilities and sources of learning.

The constraints on research in small firms are considerable, and the questionnaire was thus kept short. It took around 15 minutes to complete in writing. It was successfully piloted in a food company (which had participated in earlier research but was not part of the present project). That said, we found, as explained below, situations where self-completion was not appropriate and where face-to-face interviewing was used. The questionnaires were also supplemented with less structured methods, as again explained below.

Companies were identified through a search of data bases and some prior contacts. In all cases, we restricted the analysis to the West and East Midlands of England. This was largely to permit study of relationships with regional support agencies (the focus of future papers), but it also meant that we controlled for labour market and other influences.

That part of the creative and media sector that adheres most closely to the definition of a knowledge based professional services organisation comprises audio visual media i.e. film, television, radio. Hence, we focused on independent production companies such as film production companies, corporate video production companies, TV production companies, radio stations and multimedia companies.

Firms that had at least one employee (freelance or full-time), and had an annual turnover of between £100,000 and £15million were considered for the study. We

found 80 firms in the Midlands which met these criteria. The firms eventually studied varied in size and specific market niches and were representative of the firms in the higher end as well as the lower end of the market. The sample has 100% representation of the firms that are identified as leaders by reliable sources such as the government support agencies, trade associations and other media firms within the region. The sample also embraced the majority of firms that have established some permanence, as indexed by turnover and the attainment of recognized quality standards.

The study embraced 38 media firms. Of these, 19 were visited, 17 were interviewed over the telephone and 2 completed a self completion postal survey. Of those firms that were visited 2 detailed face to face interviews were conducted with two different people or with the same person. Each interview lasted for approximately 3 to 4 hours. Shorter telephone interviews capturing similar information were conducted with 17 companies. The interviews lasted for 1-3 hours each. Of the companies visited, there has been continued contact with three over the period of a year in order to determine the changes in the organisation and to facilitate case study analysis. In addition to the interviews, self completion questionnaires were distributed to the full-time employees in 14 companies; as explained above, this group rather than freelancers suited the focus on good jobs. We received 105 questionnaires with an overall response rate of 58%. Information on 20 of these questionnaires was obtained through brief face to face interviews with the employees. In addition, brief chats were carried out with freelance employees and in depth interviews was conducted with a further 7 freelance employees who had worker with most of the companies considered in the sample.

The food industry is much more diverse, particularly when large numbers of very small catering companies are taken into account. Those that participated cannot be described as a random sample. Part of the investigation entailed a postal survey to about 80 companies listed on a key industry web site for the West Midlands; only six replies were received, a fact that confirms our expectation from previous research that firms in this sector are hard to access. The firms eventually studied were, however, varied in size and specific market niches, so that they permit links with product market conditions to be pursued. They can also be characterized as mainly towards the higher end of the business, in that they all complied with the National Minimum Wage and none used 'off-the-books' employment practices. Previous work has shown that compliance with the NMW was the modal response of small low-wage firms (Arrowsmith et al., 2003). The present sample can be seen as reflecting a similar context.

The study of the food sector embraced 28 firms; 22 were visited, 7 completed a short questionnaire, and 1 did both. Where visits were conducted, in 13 cases there was a single interview, usually with the managing director; in five cases, two interviews were conducted, with one focusing on strategy and one on employment issues; in four cases three or more interviews were conducted. Of the last four, three companies were visited on several occasions over a period of at least a year, and interviews were conducted with supervisors and managers. There was a small amount of shop floor observation in these three cases.

The questionnaire was used in eight companies, producing 98 returns. In four, they were distributed to random groups of staff. The response rate here was about 50 per cent. In the other three, workers were interviewed, and none of those approached declined; 48 interviews were conducted. The overall response rate is thus 66 per cent.

Where workers were interviewed, we asked follow-up questions to elaborate on replies, and interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. As we will see, the food industry has many ethnic minority firms, many of which are of Asian origin; and workers often lack English language fluency. A particular feature in two companies was interviewing by one of the researchers in one of two Indian languages. Apart from the questionnaire-based interviews, we also spoke more informally to workers in the three companies where detailed work was feasible.

### **Food manufacturing**

The food industry is extremely diverse, with large numbers of caterers as well as distributors and manufacturers. We focused as far as possible on manufacturers of specific products such as bread, snacks, and packaged foods. This excludes for example confectionery firms and those processing meat. The sample thus met our goal of comparing broadly similar firms, as opposed to the common practice in small firms research of including some very disparate types of firm.

The companies employed between 2 and 140 workers, with a mean employment size of 33. All were family-owned, with members of the owning family actively running the business. We have information on ethnic background in 22 cases: 12 were run by people from Asian backgrounds, 7 by white families, and three by people of Afro-Caribbean origin; from reviewing some leading web sites, this distribution would seem to be similar to that of small firms in this sector. The distribution of employees followed a similar pattern, in that most firms generally employed workers from the same ethnic group as the owners. In most firms, between 40 and 60 per cent of employees were women (who comprised 55 per cent of our work force sample).

#### *Pay and conditions: bad characteristics but secure jobs*

A feature of the food firms was that virtually all paid low wages. Data were available on 27 firms. In 13, the standard pay for core workers (that is, excluding temporary or casual staff) was at the National Minimum Wage or within 50p per hour of the prevailing NMW rate. In a further 12 companies, pay was between £1 and £2 above the NMW level. Two firms paid substantially more, and both were unusual. One was large (140 employees) and operated in a distinct and high value niche, which embraced growing operations abroad. The other was very small, with a very specific and profitable niche supplying a range of chilled foods to pubs and retail chains. These specific contexts apart, wages were driven mainly by the NMW. Yet very few firms reported recruited difficulties. In the main areas studied (the West Midlands conurbation and Leicester), there was a supply of labour from various sources. Several firms reported regular requests for jobs from people living nearby. Several others recruited from specific groups. Three in Leicester, for example, recruited people of Gujarati origin, and reported a ready supply of labour through kinship links; the poor state of other manufacturing industries in the city also generated recruits. Labour was also being increasingly found from eastern Europe.

One image of small firms is that low basic pay may be supplemented with various perks ranging from one-off bonuses to private use of the company van. Yet the majority of firms had no form of bonus at all. Some gave relatively small amounts, usually annually and linked to profits in some way. Only one had a systematic bonus related to achievements of targets. Eight did not pay overtime at premium rates, and several expected workers to work unsocial hours without extra payment. For example,

one of the larger firms operated seven days a week, and workers would work any five of the seven without extra pay.

Other clearly bad characteristic included very limited non-pay benefits. Though we did not investigate all possible benefits, sick pay more than the statutory minimum was largely absent, as were pension schemes.

The fourth bad characteristic identified by McGovern et al. (2004) is a lack of promotion opportunities. Almost half the respondents felt that there were none, with few specifying good opportunities. This perspective seems realistic, and perhaps rather optimistic. Hierarchies were short and simple. A typical structure was a controlling group at the top, a production manager or managers, supervisors, and shop floor staff. This last group might progress to the level of supervisor, but there were very few places above that, and these places needed technical skills; moreover, higher positions were often held by members of the owning family. As research in low-wage labour markets shows, low-wage jobs tend to be dead ends rather than stepping stones to better employment (Stewart and Swaffield, 1999).

Despite low pay, workers tended to stay with their firms for some time. As Table 1 shows, approaching a third had been with the present firm for five years or more, while most had not been led to think of leaving for reasons to with the firm (as opposed to family reasons for example) and the great majority considered their jobs to be secure. This last judgement would seem reasonably sound, in that most of the firms had been in existence several years and had established defensible market positions. Though managers stressed that competition was ever-present, there was also no major threat such as cheap foreign products which have put huge pressures on other low-wage sectors such as clothing (Ram et al., 2002).

It is also worth noting that trade unions were entirely absent. To the extent that unions promote good work conditions, this absence can be taken to underpin poor substantive outcomes. Whether or not unionization was at all feasible is another question; we certainly detected no commitment to unions among employees or indeed any sense of a major collective grievance that might activate unionization. We now turn to some reasons why this was so.

**Table 1: Labour market experience and attachment to the firm**

(per cent)	<b>Food</b>	<b>Media</b>
Length of service:		
<1 year	28	37
1-5 yrs	44	44
over 5 yrs	29	19
Ever thought of leaving for reasons to do with running of this firm:		
Yes	28	44
No	72	56
Job security:		
High	44	44
Fairly high	52	52
Not very high or low	4	4
Promotion opportunities for people in jobs like yours:		
considerable	8	17
some	39	48
none	48	35

*Responsibilities, training and skills, and demands of work: better than expected*

We begin with the reasonably objective features of a job: whether it contains certain elements. As shown in Table 2, more than half the employees said that they monitored the product using formal tools or processes. This formulation was used to stress structured methods as opposed to routine measurement. It is true that monitoring did not entail high-level diagnostic skills. Even relatively advanced monitoring involved standard processes. For example a firm with a very systematic approach here dealt with a wide range of products, each with distinct specifications. It had produced detailed operational rules for each product, and trained workers in their reading and application. This was certainly standardized, but it also meant that workers had the responsibility to identify the rules to be followed and to be familiar with them.

We also asked standard questions about the degree of influence over the pace of work, how work was performed, and the ability to choose tasks (Table 3). An issue here is what respondents mean by influence. Most jobs were normal factory tasks such as packing or the preparation of standard food products such as breads or samosas. In an absolute sense, workers had little choice over what they did. Recipes were devised by managers, and the workers' task was to produce goods to standard. It is also the case, however, that they commonly worked in groups and thus had some say in exactly what tasks each did. And they had influence in that the work flow was largely paced by their own actions and not directly by a machine: mechanization was relatively limited. A comparative statistic comes from the 1998 WERS, which used identical questions to those used here. The category of 'plant and machine operatives' corresponds most closely to the composition of the present sample. In WERS, 22% of this group had 'high' overall job influence, as against around 45% in the present sample (Cully et al., 1999: 142).

**Table 2: Job responsibilities and whether trained in them**

	<b>Food</b>		<b>Media</b>	
	Part of job	Of which trained in past yr	Part of job	Of which trained in past yr
Monitoring product using formal tools	63	60	45	8
Dealing with customers	30	37	63	17
Preparing written reports	26	31	50	5
Designing new products or processes	10	33	41	25

**Table 3: Job influence and roles**

	<b>Food</b>	<b>Media</b>
Influence over: (per cent saying fair amount or great deal)		
pace of work	50	66
how work is done	49	71
tasks performed	42	54
Supervisor has more influence than respondent in deciding what tasks to do (% strongly agree or agree)	67	33
Respondent has more influence than supervisor in deciding how to do tasks (% <b>strongly disagree or disagree</b> )	47	26
Work organized as a team <b>and</b> allocation of tasks mainly by team	11	62
Communication on work issues daily or weekly with:		
managers outside work group	36	55
technical experts	23	44

Awareness of the limited amount of control was apparent in the responses to a question on whether the supervisor had more influence than the respondent over how to do work tasks; two-thirds agreed that this was the case. Similarly, though many said that they worked in ‘teams’, only a minority felt that the team rather than managers was mainly responsible for the allocation of tasks. Finally here, there was a moderate amount of communication with managers and with technical experts, so that workers were not simply excluded from active engagement in the work process. In short, there was felt to be a fair amount of job influence and limits were recognized, but there was no sense of being powerless drudges.

Turning to training, Table 2 shows a fair level of training in job responsibilities, a point underlined by the first row of Table 4. Where we interviewed workers, we invited them to specify examples and to talk them through. At one firm where all 14 replies came through interviews, most workers specified particular training, as in hygiene standards, and generally considered this to have been useful. Two firms had developed a system of a skills matrix, whereby workers were evaluated on existing skills, which were documented, and future needs were identified. Others made a particular point of providing English language training, at their expense. As can be seen from the rest of Table 4, satisfaction with training was reasonably high.

**Table 4: Overall views on training**

	<b>Food</b>	<b>Media</b>
Formal training in past year other than in areas in Table 2	42	33
Own skills developed through learning from senior people (to a great or some extent)	80	81
Opportunities to develop skills (excellent or good)	56	69
Satisfied with quality of training & development (strongly agree / agree)	77	47

Measures of satisfaction of course raise the question, ‘compared to what?’ The workers might well be satisfied either because they had very limited aspirations or because they expected little from their firms, or both. But, first, it is still the case that they were indeed satisfied rather than down-trodden or resentful. Second, workers could specify particular activities that had benefited them.

A situation of low wages but some responsibilities might lead to a sense of work intensification. Yet, when asked whether the demands of the job meant that it was impossible to complete tasks properly, the majority of workers denied that this was at all common; even fewer said that they worried about work outside working hours (Table 5). Such observation as was feasible suggested that the pressure of work was not intense, and workers in one firm consistently reported that the pace of work was comfortable. Related to this, overtime was remarkably rare, with most firms using reasonably fixed schedules of work. On overall question on motivation to work found 80 per cent of respondents saying that they felt strongly or fairly strongly motivated.

**Table 5: Job pressures**

	<b>Food</b>	<b>Media</b>
Job never allows time to complete tasks properly:		
every day / most days	15	26
sometimes	21	37
occasionally	26	26
never	38	11
Worry about work outside working hours:		
every day / most days	10	33
sometimes	14	37
occasionally	15	21
never	62	10

### *Explaining the results*

The pattern in the food firms reflects three factors: limited expectations and opportunities; the generation of consent in any low-wage firm; and specific features of the firms studied that placed them above the bottom of the labour market. On the first, it might be argued that all that we observed was recognition by workers of their lot, and a process of making the most of it. It is true that opportunities were constrained. One-third of respondents had no educational qualifications of any kind, and a fair number had overseas qualifications and very limited English; we found in one Asian firm two warehouse workers with degrees achieved in India but with little opportunity of using their qualifications in England. Labour market mobility was also restricted by reliance on kin networks. Yet entrapment might be expected to provoke resentment, of which there was little. We have seen that workers felt motivated; a separate question asked about reasons for working hard, with replies focusing on personal satisfaction (60 per cent of those answering the question mentioned this) rather than pressure from managers or fear of penalties (16 per cent). Limited opportunities were only part of the story.

On the generation of consent, we can draw on an earlier study of illegal immigrants and their employment in clothing and catering firms (Edwards and Ram, 2006, Jones et al., 2004). Wages here were very low, sometimes as little as £2 an hour. And there

was resentment: in the words of one worker, his wage was ‘a pittance’. Yet there was a degree of negotiated consent, with workers feeling that day-to-day working relationships were reasonable. One, for example, was a devout Muslim who valued his ability to observe times for prayer. In such firms, moreover, employers are not distant managers but are engaged directly in the business and can be observed putting in long hours for little reward. Even at the very bottom of the labour market, forms of accommodation are developed (for more on the logic of this, see Edwards, 1986: 288-97).

The firms studied here were clearly above the bottom of the labour market. As mentioned above, they did not employ illegal labour, and most had documented procedures for recruitment, selection, and discipline and dismissal. Virtually all managers, except those in the very small firms, could identify some distinctive competitive advantage that kept them in business. A small bakery was beginning to diversify into related products, and there were plans for expansion. A larger bakery had over recent years built up business with supermarkets. We first studied this firm in 2001-2, since which time the layout of the production process has been improved; in addition, its managers were aware of a lack of managerial skills and were recruiting senior advisors to offer a more professional view of business development. Several of the Asian-owned firms stressed their distinctive competence in ‘authentic’ products, and a number of these were expanding and also moving into exporting.

There was an interesting contrast between business professionalism and shop floor informality. This was illustrated most sharply by a long-established Asian-owned firm with about 25 employees. It had doubled its sales in recent years, had developed strong relationships with supermarkets, and was about to open an advanced new facility. Yet it recruited from a specific Indian community, was very informal in its recruitment policy, and had no performance appraisal system. Personal relationships were stressed, by managers and workers. These embraced traditional reciprocities observed in other small Asian firms (Ram, 1994) with managers helping workers with paperwork on home loans and sometimes advancing money to help meet domestic obligations. There was also a sense of personal commitment, in that members of the owning family worked much longer hours than employees and could thus call on employees’ support. As one manager put it, workers stayed for the ‘family relations’, the support provided and the clear hours of work.

How far can we generalize from these firms? We have stressed that they are not at the very bottom of the labour market, but they were none the less low-paying and they offered limited promotion opportunities. As argued above, they also illustrate the very common picture of compliance with the National Minimum Wage. They represent firms with a reasonably stable position in their markets. Within that context, they also display variation in terms of size and the extent of their ability to shape the markets in which they operated. They are thus far from being unusual or extreme cases, and can reasonably be taken to illustrate the character of jobs in low-wage labour markets.

### **The media sector**

The 38 media companies had a mean employment size of 9 full-time employees. But employment levels fluctuated depending upon the workload. For example a TV production company having one full-time employee employed up to 30 freelance or contract staff when they won a commission to make a programme. Only 5 of the 38 companies were family-owned and most of the companies were partnership between work colleagues or professionals. A majority (35) of the independent production

companies were owned by people from a white middle class background. The only exceptions were two leading production companies both of which were owned by people from Asian backgrounds and the companies were located in Leicester. In most cases the owners were typically highly skilled professionals with extensive technical and creative experience in the industry prior to setting up of their own production company. A majority of the owners had worked as full-time professionals with the leading terrestrial broadcasting channels and had set up their independent production companies after being made redundant during downsizing exercises by these broadcasting corporations. From reviewing some leading websites this distribution would seem similar to that of small firms in this sector.

A similar pattern was observed amongst the workforce, where there was a predominance of people who were white professionals with varying degrees of experience in the media sector. A 'professional' in the media sector is an individual who is regarded as an expert in a specific area or a number of areas within the industry. He or she could have achieved this status by acquiring a set of specialist skills through extensive work experience as an apprentice to an established industry professional or by working as a regular employee in an independent production company. Practical work experience is valued more highly than the possession of a professional qualification and a professional is typically a person who has demonstrated their expertise through their work in the industry. A majority (57%) of the workforce in the sample was educated to a degree level. All the companies relied heavily on a common pool of highly skilled professionals.

*Pay and conditions: low pay and insecure jobs*

Understanding the pay rates in the media sector requires that we focus on the rates paid to the freelance professionals and full-time professional employees since they constitute the core of the workforce. Contrary to expectations, the media sector was not characterized by high pay rates for a majority of the workforce. The diversity in the rates of pay and the wide gap between the highest and the lowest daily rates paid to the professionals often create the illusion that the professionals in the media industry are very well paid. The reality is that very few professionals command a high rate of pay. For example a cameraman can charge anywhere in the range of £150 to £700 a day; however, with the advent of digital cameras and reality TV shows, a majority of the professionals charge £150 a day or £15 an hour. A full-time 'core employee' can earn anywhere between £5.50 per hour to £36 per hour, with a mean pay rate of £9 an hour. The rate of £9 an hour generally does not include overtime or sick leave even though the hours of work are very unpredictable and employees often had to work unsocial hours without any extra payment. A person working in routine clerical role or as a researcher received an average of £7 an hour. However, there were two companies that paid as low as £3 an hour for administrative tasks like that of a secretary or that of a runner.

An average rate for a freelance professional was £20 an hour excluding pension, national insurance and sick leave. This is equivalent to approximately £10 an hour for a regular employee who is entitled to the benefits of pension, national insurance and sick leave. This rate further varies depending upon whether the contract is in Film or Television, the length of contract and the individual negotiating skills of the professional. For example, TV crews get paid less than film crews. Furthermore, it is common practice to accept lower than average rates if the professionals are offered a long term contract. In a number of cases the freelancers agreed to work without pay.

The reasons for doing so ranged from wanting to take an opportunity to work on an interesting project, to increasing their utilization rate and gaining additional work experience. Often new entrants offered their services for free simply to gain an entry into the competitive market. There were other hidden costs in the pay structure. The freelancers were generally paid on a daily rate which involved a 10 to 12 hour day. Despite irregular working hours they were not paid overtime. Asking for overtime pay was perceived as being unprofessional. In addition, the freelancers had to contend with delay in receiving their pay. It was normal to expect at least a three month delay for payments and in a few cases a year's delay in payment was reported. Finally, payments were irregular because there was the uncertainty attached to not getting another contract. On an average, a freelancer could expect to be employed for 50% of the year.

Even though the payment conditions were not ideal, the companies stated that they rarely faced recruitment issues. Virtually all the companies claimed that they were inundated with curriculum vitae. The speculative applicants mainly consisted of a growing number of recent media studies graduates desperate for work experience, experienced freelance professionals and a large number of full-time professionals adversely affected by the continuous downsizing exercises by the large broadcasting corporations. Most of the television and film production companies relied on personal contacts and recommendations from their existing employees. It was common practice amongst the larger production companies located in and around Birmingham to share a common pool of reliable talent. The Leicester based companies also relied on personal contacts and drew mainly on the local Asian talent even if the recruits had no previous industry experience.

One expectation regarding the new economy was that the employees would have a financial stake in the future of their business. The results did not support this expectation. Only two out of the 38 companies in the media sector spoke of introducing some form of employee share ownership scheme. Both these companies market leaders. The only form of financial participation was a bonus scheme which was existent in 11 companies. Under these schemes, the employees received an annual bonus in cash if the company performed well in a particular year. However, there was no clear system for individual performance related bonuses; individuals were often rewarded on an ad hoc basis in terms of a cash reward or a celebration in their honour. Though the employees generally did not have a direct stake in the financial prosperity of the company, they were expected to share the burden of losses. For example, one of the larger firms specializing in organising corporate events lost 60% of their business after September 11 and was eventually declared insolvent. During this time, the employees took pay cuts.

Despite the poor payment conditions and lack of formal procedures an overwhelming majority (70%) of employees felt that they were being treated fairly and felt 'strongly' motivated to stay in the present job. On overall question on motivation to work found 76 per cent of respondents saying that they felt strongly or fairly strongly motivated. These responses were supported with the finding that workers tended to stay with the firm for some time and most had not been lead to think of leaving. Table 1 shows that a third of the employees had been with the firm for five years or more and more than half did not think of leaving. The most surprising response was that about a majority of the workers felt 'highly' or 'fairly' secure in their jobs. This response appears to be counter intuitive particularly since the media companies face a high degree of financial insecurity. It is possible that the low pay is the price that the core employees

pay for having a high degree of security in their jobs. Media companies cope with the uncertainties of the business by varying the number of free lance professional. This allows them to have a lean employment model thereby enabling them to provide security to the small number of full-time employees they have. In case of the media firms, the existence of informality supports a flexible structure thereby enabling these firms to survive. Therefore, the evidence on informality of structures questions the common perception that informality is a characteristic of a potentially bad job.

*Responsibilities, training and skills, and demands of work*

Jobs were characterised by variety as suggested by Scase (2005). For example, 66% of respondents had taken on jobs outside their normal job description in the past year. Furthermore, there was evidence to suggest that the firms encouraged multiskilling. Most of the company owners (73%) stated that the main reason for training was to encourage movement between jobs. The premium placed on multiskilling and multitasking was also evident from the responses of freelancers. On an average a freelance editor earned approximately £15 an hour and could expect a 50% utilisation rate in a year whereas a multiskilled freelancer could earn an average of £35 per hour and expect an 80% utilisation in a given year.

According to Scase (2005) 'creative and professional' small firms are characterized by high levels of job responsibility and broadly defined work roles. There was evidence to support this proposition. The use of skills relating to interaction with customers and writing written reports was very evident. Table 2 reveals that two-thirds of the employees dealt with customers as part of the job and half of them were involved in preparing written reports. Of these, only a small proportion received formal training in the past year. Interviews with the company owners revealed that they worked in close collaboration with the customers at various stages of the production process for the purposes of quality control. For example, an employee of a company specialising in documentary films stated that the employees had weekly meetings about various aspects of the programme with a customer representative. The media companies also spent a considerable amount of time sending out written proposals to their customers to pitch for business and in justifying the budget for the programme. In comparison, a limited use of skills was reported in relation to job responsibilities such as monitoring the quality of the product and the design of products and processes. Less than half the employees claimed to have used formal tools for monitoring products and a similar proportion were involved in the creative design.

There is also support for Scase's (2005) view that there is little need for direct forms of management control. Most of the employees reported having a 'great deal' or 'fair amount' of influence over the pace of work, and how work is done and a little over half said that this influence extends to the tasks performed (Table 3). Awareness of a certain degree of influence was further apparent in the responses to a question on whether the supervisor had more influence than the respondent over how to do work tasks; only a third agreed that this was the case. Similarly, most said that they worked in teams and the allocation of the tasks was carried out mainly by the team. Most of the employees stated that they were in this industry because they did not have a supervisor constantly monitoring their every action. Researchers and writers often had the option of working from home. In the case of a video production company there was a virtual office and the owner operated from home. All the employees were in touch with him via e-mail. There would be occasional meetings at the owner's home,

but generally the tasks were allocated by phone or e-mail and a mutual agreement would be reached regarding a time for the output.

However, the degree of freedom was not absolute and there existed some evidence of management control in a number of dimensions. First, there was a clear divide between the owners and the non-owners of capital. This was apparent from the wide range of pay rates that existed. The owners were the only people who had a regular salary and a direct share of the profits. Second, existence of an informal system of performance appraisal as well as non-payment benefits allowed the owners to have the ultimate decision making authority. This was especially evident in the case of non-pay benefits. These were non-existent for a majority of the companies; at best they had some informal provisions. For example, sick pay was assessed on an individual basis. This was true of even the relatively large production companies. For example, a particularly successful television production company acknowledged that they had an informal sickness benefit scheme whereby each case was assessed by the line manager in conjunction with the financial controller and the final decision rested in the hands of the owner. Decisions were made based on the importance of the employee to the company.

Third, none of the companies appeared to have a formal career development plan for the individual employees. There were informal processes offering opportunities for promotion with decisions resting with the top management/owners. The system was largely ad hoc. Many of the senior professionals were people who had risen through the ranks. It was more common to see people join as a researcher or a runner and progress to the position of an associate producer/director and move onto becoming a director/writer/producer or a project manager. However, the transition from a senior professional to that of becoming a managing director or shareholder of the company was very rare. The tendency was for senior professionals to move onto a larger company or to start a company of their own, or become free lancers.

Fourth, the media industry is characterized by inflexible deadlines and very stringent standards of control. This is particularly the case for TV production companies since there are tight budgets and strict deadlines. Some TV corporations set out very clear guidelines as to what they are looking for in terms of format of programme, length, which allows little room for creative licence or room for manoeuvre for individual employees. For example, ITV has a 100 page booklet stating exactly what they want. One employee stated that, 'they had programme meetings with the customer representative every week during the making of a programme. The meetings were tracking every aspect of the production, in order to make sure that the programme met with the very clear specifications provided by the customer'.

The TV broadcasters are equally inflexible about the deadlines because they commit to airing a programme at a particular date and time. More than half of the workers stated that the supervisors attach importance to attendance of work on time. Consequently, the pressure of work was very intense. Indeed, when asked whether the demands of the job meant that it was impossible to complete tasks properly, the majority of workers agreed that this was common; a similar proportion of workers said that they worried about work outside working hours (Table 5). All the media owners admitted that the work schedules were very variable. Several of the employees admitted that they were often expected to complete the equivalent of two days' work in a single day.

### *Explaining the results*

Jobs in the media sector do not conform entirely to the characteristics attributed to them by Scase (2005). There was certainly autonomy, but it existed only within limits. There existed a clear labour-management divide, with the ultimate decision making authority resting with the owners. The media firms were a bundle of contradictions. On the one hand, they were populated by highly skilled professionals who had broadly defined job roles requiring high levels of discretion and responsibility. On the other hand, these professionals were victims of poor pay and intense work pressures, and they rarely had a financial stake in the companies. However, the unfavourable conditions of pay do not appear to have an adverse effect on motivation levels, effort, or the length of employment with a particular firm. The employee respondents were highly motivated individuals who demonstrated the willingness to exert efforts well above the requirements of the jobs. Their attachment to the firms was also evident from the low levels of employee turnover and willingness to continue long term employment with the firm.

The low pay in these firms can be mainly attributed to the fact that the supply of people seeking employment in this sector far exceeds the availability of jobs. The continuous influx of thousands of media studies graduates contributes to the imbalance between the demand for and supply of labour. In addition, several experienced media industry professionals have been made redundant in recent years as part of a downsizing strategy by the large broadcasting corporations. Furthermore, this industry is popularly perceived as being exciting and glamorous and the entry requirements are not very specific. Therefore, people with various backgrounds are lured into this industry in the hope of replicating the few but well publicised 'rags' to 'riches' success stories. Others join because they are genuinely interested in pursuing their creative aspirations. One employee articulated the problem of pay: 'even though a union exists, it is ineffective, no one is willing to ask for more pay because they know that if they refuse, there are ten other people waiting to do the job for nothing'. Indeed, people were so desperate to enter that they were often willing to work without any pay, just so that they could get some job experience. Nearly all the freelance professionals and the full-time employees that we spoke to said that they had worked without pay at some point of their career in the media industry.

Despite this, long term employment relationships were common. This was partly because of the presence of positive aspects of the job such as variety, flexible working time arrangements, close personal ties and a degree of autonomy. Indeed, most of the respondents (93%) claimed that they put in more effort because it gave them personal satisfaction. Many of the respondents insisted that the satisfaction received from doing job well far exceeded the frustration caused by the adverse effects on the work life balance. In addition, the informal system of promotion and non-payment benefits encouraged longer term employment relationships. It was common for employees to move up the ranks, thus providing an incentive for employees to continue long term employment with the firm. Overall a majority (65%) of the employees felt that they had 'some' or considerable opportunities for promotion within a company. Furthermore, the non-payment benefits tended to be generous for the longer serving employees. Even free lance professionals who enjoyed long term relationships through repeat contracts got higher non-pay benefits than those who had a short term relationship with the media companies. Finally, labour market mobility was restricted because of the non-transferability of the skills to other sectors.

The existence of job autonomy within the boundaries of control could be attributed to the fact that the independent production companies have a strong dependency relationship on the customers. This is particularly the case for TV production companies. At present, there are a large number of production companies competing for a small and fixed market offered by the main terrestrial channels. For example the BBC and Channel 4 offer 25% of their business to the independent production companies but lay down very clear guidelines regarding the output they expect from the production companies. Control is exerted in the form of payment. For example, even when an independent production company got a commission for making a programme, the payment to the production company was made in stages. The production company was expected to send detailed monthly progress reports providing details of the expenditure at every stage of the production. The customer had the right to withhold further payments if they were dissatisfied with the progress or the quality of output. At times customers also exerted control by insisting that the commissioning editor should oversee every bit of the production process. Finally, the scheduling of the programmes is decided in advance and widely publicised thereby resulting in inflexible time lines for the production companies.

### **Conclusions**

There are certainly good and bad jobs, but job characteristics are not wholly polarized. Jobs in the food firms were bad in terms of pay and benefits. But they allowed for a certain amount of discretion, which reflected low levels of mechanization and something of a family atmosphere. Work effort was not intense, and the working day was predictable or orderly. Employers, moreover, had some concerns with job quality and training. Reasons for this include the need to retain staff. Consent rested to some degree on the fact that employers are directly involved in the work process: small is not necessarily beautiful, but it is a direct personal engagement. As for good jobs, the media firms offered high levels of discretion, but pay was remarkably low, and clear hierarchies bespoke any idea of a post-bureaucratic model. These hierarchies, moreover, reflected demands of customers. Market dependency rather than freedom was the prevailing picture.

A key issue here is employee expectations. We have shown that workers in bad jobs had quite high levels of job satisfaction. This reflects in part the absence of alternatives, and hence satisfaction in relation to what they knew they could reasonably expect, and not in some more absolute sense. Yet this was not simply a matter of making the best of (literally) a bad job. There were aspects of work experience, such as the pace of work and training opportunities, that were genuinely good, or not bad.

As for similarities between the two sectors, our results are consistent with those of Gallie et al. (2004), who demonstrate an absence of polarization in relation to job discretion. There are many trends, notably in relation to discretion and pressures to perform, that are common across many types of job. Patterns of reward differ, but jobs are jobs, and they retain important similarities.

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“Bad” bosses may be highly competent in the latest theories regarding their field of work, but it is the skill to manage personnel, to inspire rather than to enforce, which makes yet another difference between the good and the bad boss (Developing People). And even though it is important for a manager to care about the tasks his or her team must accomplish, a good manager will always consider the capabilities and skills of his or her team, instead of blatantly demanding results without regarding how people in the team feel. The relationships between bosses and their employees greatly affect the productivity and the quality of work within any company—this is why it is important that these relationships are, if not friendly, then at least constructive and respectful. do a good/bad job definition: 1. to do something well/badly: 2. to do something well/badly: . Learn more. Essential American English. Grammar and thesaurus. Usage explanations of natural written and spoken English. Grammar. Thesaurus. Translation. Click on the arrows to change the translation direction. Bilingual Dictionaries. English–French French–English. Review information on the best jobs, cool jobs, worst jobs, jobs that companies are hiring for, work for moms, and jobs in specific occupations. Do you want to travel or work at a job that's a strong match for your personal passion? Want to work in the great outdoors? Here's an overview of cool jobs in different fields, as well as information how to land one of these gigs, and inside information about what each job is really like. Best Jobs for Aspiring Entrepreneurs. Gary Burchell / Getty Images. The best jobs for aspiring entrepreneurs, which career paths to consider, how to get started, and where to gain the experience you need to start your own business. Best Jobs for Women Over 50. RgStudio / Getty Images. What are the critical qualities of a good employee and candidate? Teamwork? Values? Here's our list of qualities and how to evaluate them during interviews. The exact meaning of “culture fit” changes with every organization. But it’s not as simple as being about who you want to have lunch or an after-work drink with; it’s much more about who understands and embraces the workplace and mode of work, from the open-space layout to the dress code. Culture fit might even change among different teams. We had frequent meetings and worked in pairs with our leader checking in with us every week. We had some organizational issues at the beginning, but after we implemented a structured agenda in our daily standups, we clarified things and got on faster. "Good job" would generally refer more to the successful outcome of the task, although it could also refer to the quality of the effort. "Good work" would refer more to the quality of the work that went into it, but would normally be said (at least without qualifications), about a successful endeavor. If someone was doing a task for the first time and did high quality work to achieve just an acceptable but unimpressive result, someone would probably tell them "good work" rather than "good job". Share. Improve this answer.