Real Business Cycle Theory

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Outline

- Introduction: Lucas’ methodological proposal
- The application to the analysis of business cycle fluctuations: The Real Business Cycle Theory
  1. Data: measuring the business cycle (Table 1)
  2. The model economy: a rigorous description
  3. The solution of DSGE models: the Blanchard-Khan method
  4. Table 2: matching moments
  5. Evaluation of the RBC approach
Lucas (’76,’77,’80,’87). Two important references:


1. **The Lucas’ critique**: Macroeconomists should build so-called structural models, i.e. models where the agents’ behavior is invariant with respect to policy

   - Microeconomic foundations
   - General Equilibrium
   - No distinction between micro and macro: Economic theory
2. **Explicitly dynamic models** from the outset:
   - Dynamic optimization
   - Need for a theory of expectations formation $\Rightarrow$ The Rational Expectations Revolution of the 1970s is the logical outcome of Lucas’ research program

3. **The Methodological Proposal**
   - New analytical and computational instruments (Lucas/Stokey and Prescott, Kydland and Prescott)
   - A new equilibrium concept: recursive equilibrium and "from a point to a path"
   - Importance of expectations in the design of policy experiments
   - Welfare analysis
CONCLUSIONS

- Modern macroeconomics should employ dynamic general equilibrium models (DSGE), that is, a macroeconomic model should be the results of the solution of dynamic optimization problems under uncertainty by optimizing agents populating the model economy.
- Build a "laboratory economy": much more difficult task than old Keynesian theorizing
- Kydland & Prescott (1982) accepted the challenge posed by Lucas: they built the first Real Business Cycle (RBC) model.
Outline of the RBC methodology:

A discrete-time stochastic model of the economy populated by maximizing households and firms

MAIN SOURCE OF FLUCTUATIONS:

- The erratic nature of technological progress
The Ramsey model of growth $\Rightarrow$ integrating growth and cycle

- All prices are flexible
- All markets are walrasian
- Rational expectations
- No money

Endogenous labour

Technology shocks (and possibly other shocks) $\Rightarrow$ stochastic steady state
There is only one final good in the economy which is produced according to a constant return to scale (CRS) production function

\[ Y_t = A_t F(K_{t-1}, N_t) \]

where \( \ln(A_t/A) = a_t \) is an exogenous process of technological progress (or total factor productivity TFP), which evolves according to:

\[ a_t = \rho_a a_{t-1} + \hat{a}_t, \quad \hat{a}_t \sim N(0, \sigma_a^2) \quad i.i.d. \]

A positive shock to the TFP shifts firms’ labor demand and the AS curve.

Movements in employment and economic activity are seen as the efficient responses of a perfectly competitive economy to a productivity shock. \( \implies \) Stochastic path of Walrasian equilibria.
THE PLANNER PROBLEM
RBC models do not consider any distortion or market imperfection, therefore the welfare theorems apply to these models:

1) the competitive equilibrium is pareto-optimal
2) a pareto-optimal allocation can be decentralized as a competitive equilibrium

The social planner equilibrium and the competitive equilibrium are identical and admit a unique solution
TRADITIONAL BUSINESS CYCLE THEORY: output trend \( \bar{Y}_t \) evolves smoothly over time, \( \bar{Y}_t = a + bt \). Cycles are viewed as deviation from trends, i.e. \( Y_t - \bar{Y}_t \)

RBC THEORY: cycles can be explained also assuming that \( \bar{Y}_t \) evolves according to a random walk, i.e., \( \bar{Y}_t = b + \bar{Y}_{t-1} + u_t \). In this case much of the movements in \( Y_t \) are due to movements in \( \bar{Y}_t \) rather then to trend deviations \( Y_t - \bar{Y}_t \) => Integrating growth and business cycle theory
Data: Measuring the Business Cycle

H-P Filter

\[ \min \left\{ y_t^g \right\}_{t=0}^{\infty} \sum_{t=1}^{\infty} \left\{ (y_t - y_t^g)^2 + \lambda \left[ (y_{t+1}^g - y_t^g) - (y_t^g - y_{t-1}^g) \right]^2 \right\} \]

H-P filter suppresses the really low frequency fluctuations \( \approx 8 \) years
quarterly data \( \lambda = 1600 \)
linear trend \( \lambda - > \infty \)
original series \( \lambda = 0 \)

This makes the trend component a weighted average of past, present and future values \( \Rightarrow \) and the cyclical component is defined as

\[ y_t^c = y_t - y_t^g = y_t - \sum_{j=-J}^{J} a_j y_{t-j} \]
Business cycles are all alike
Table 1
Business Cycle Statistics for the U.S. Economy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Relative Standard Deviation</th>
<th>First Order Auto-correlation</th>
<th>Contemporaneous Correlation with Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y/N</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All variables are in logarithms (with the exception of the real interest rate) and have been detrended with the HP filter. Data sources are described in Stock and Watson [1998], who created the real rate using VAR inflation expectations. Our notation in this table corresponds to that in the text, so that Y is per capita output, C is per capita consumption, I is per capita investment, N is per capita hours, w is the real wage (compensation per hour), r is the real interest rate, and A is total factor productivity.
Some stylized facts about growth

Labor's Share of Output

Investment - Output Ratio
The Basic Structure of the RBC model

1. Endowment, initial condition and ownership
2. Preferences
3. Technology
4. Law of motions of endogenous/exogenous state variables
5. Individual resource constraints
6. Aggregate resource constraints
7. Markets equilibrium condition
8. Definition of equilibrium
1. Find all the first order necessary conditions
2. Calculate the economy steady state
3. Log-linearize the model around the steady state
4. Solve for the recursive law of motion
5. Calculate the IRFs in response to different shocks
6. Calculate the moments: correlations, and standard deviations for the different variables both for the artificial economy and for the actual economy.
7. Compare how well the model economy matches the actual economy’s characteristics
Go to files:

- notesRBC.pdf
- detailmodel_matlab.pdf
Prescott did not think such a simple model could be of any use \( \Rightarrow \) surprising result!

**Main policy conclusion**: fluctuations of all variable (output, consumption, employment, investment...) are the optimal responses to technology shocks exogenous changes in the economic environment.

Shocks are not always desirable. But once they occur, this is the best possible outcome: business cycle fluctuations are the optimal response to technology shocks \( \Rightarrow \) no need for government interventions: it can be only deleterious
Furious response from the "people from the Oceans" ⇒ Rogoff: "brilliant theories first look ridiculous then they become obvious".

From mid’80s to mid’90s: ten years lost in useless ideological debates between the Oceans and the Lakes

From mid'90s: convergence on methodology: "the RBC approach as the new orthodoxy in macroeconomics"
Criticism

- **Empirical philosophy**: calibration vs. estimation
  - Too many parameters?
  - Too much flexibility in choosing parameters? "The book of Ed"
  - No possible statistical testing against alternatives
  - is matching moments a desirable feature? econometrician are suspicious of correlations
Criticism

- **Solow residual and technology shocks**
- Need for highly persistent technological shocks: why? and above all: what are they?
- Solow residual is highly correlated with output
RBC View:

- RBC theory argue that the strong correlation between output growth and Solow residuals is the evidence that productivity shocks are an important source of economic fluctuations.

Critics:

- Are economic fluctuations really caused by productivity shocks?

Expansions arise because of increases in productivity!

... What does that mean about recessions? (Summers 1986)

- It means that recessions are periods of technical regress! Burnside et al. estimates the probability of technological regress implied by SR to be 37%!
- Less implausible if supply shock considered more broadly (OPEC, strikes etc.)
Real Achille’s heel: "measure of our ignorance"

- Hall (1988): SR is useful to forecast military spending or other variables that should not be affected by technological shocks
- Hall (1990): SR is mis-measured if there is imperfect competition, IRTS, or labour hoarding, or variable capacity utilization
- Evans (1992):
  - money, interest rates and public spending Granger-cause SR
  - a substantial component of $\sigma_{SR}$ seems to be cause by aggregate demand shocks

Bottom line: SR as measured out from a simple C-D production function is very spurious
Early criticism

The Labour Market

- Need for an highly elastic labour supply $\Rightarrow$ labour market problems
  The increase in productivity translates to an increase in hours worked and to an increase in real wages. The effect on the real wage is relatively stronger the lower is the elasticity of labor supply $\frac{1}{\phi}$. In the extreme case of fixed labor supply all the increase in labor demand would translate into an increase in the real wage.

- CRITICS:
  - labor supply does not depend that much on the intertemporal real wage;
  - high unemployment is mainly involuntary
Hansen and Wright (FRBMQR, 1992)

Two problems:

- $\sigma_h > \sigma_w$ in the data, but not in the model
  - Fixer: Need for an highly elastic labour supply (Hansen, JME, 85)
- $\text{corr}(H, w) \simeq 0$ in the data, close to 1 in the model
  - Fixer: single shock problem (Christiano and Eichenbaum, AER, 92)
Table 3
Cyclical Properties of U.S. and Model-Generated Time Series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Data or Model</th>
<th>% S.D. of Output $\sigma_y$</th>
<th>Consumption $\sigma_c/\sigma_y$</th>
<th>Investment $\sigma_i/\sigma_y$</th>
<th>Hours $\sigma_h/\sigma_y$</th>
<th>Productivity $\sigma_w/\sigma_y$</th>
<th>Hours vs. Productivity $\sigma_h/\sigma_w$</th>
<th>$\text{cor}(h,w)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Time Series*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hours Worked:</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Household Survey (All Industries)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Establishment Survey (Nonag. Industries)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>-.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Models**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nons separable Leisure</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indivisible Labor</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Spending</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Production</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*U.S. data here are the same as those in Table 2; they are for the longer time period: 1947:1–1991:3.
**The standard deviations and correlations computed from the models' artificial data are the sample means of statistics computed for each of 100 simulations. Each simulation has 179 periods, the number of quarters in the U.S. data.
Source: Citicorp's Clifbar data bank.
Fixing the first problem
Modelling the extensive margin

Most of movements in unemployment hours comes from movements from in and out of unemployment
Assume workers either work 0 hours or work $h_0$
Given total labour demand $H_t$, the numbers of workers needed are $E_t = \frac{H_t}{h_0}$
Rogerson’s lotteries $\Rightarrow$ Given the labour force $N_t$, the probability of getting a job is $\frac{E_t}{N_t} = \frac{H_t}{h_0} \frac{N_t}{N_t}$
Expected utility from leisure

$$E(U) = \frac{H_t}{h_0} \frac{N_t}{N_t} U(c, 1 - h_0) + \frac{N_t - H_t}{N_t} \frac{N_t}{N_t} U(c, 1) =$$

$$= \frac{H_t}{h_0} \frac{N_t}{N_t} [U(c, 1 - h_0) - U(c, 1)] + U(c, 1)$$

**LINEAR IN $H_t$!! $\Rightarrow$ infinite elasticity**
Fixing the second problem

Government spending shock

Charts 1–5
Hours Worked vs. Productivity in the Data and the Models
Percentage Deviations From Trend

Chart 1  The U.S. Data, 1947:1–1991:3
Based on the Household Survey

Chart 2  The Standard Model

Chart 3  The Nonseparable Leisure Model
Chart 4  The Government Spending Model Without Technology Shocks...

Chart 5  ...And With Technology Shocks

Source of basic data: Clicicorp's Cilisee data bank.
Are wages and prices flexible?

- RBC theory assumes that wages and prices are completely flexible, so markets always clear.
- RBC proponents argue that the degree of price stickiness occurring in the real world is not important for understanding economic fluctuations.
- They also assume flexible prices to be consistent with microeconomic theory.

Critics:

- Wage and price stickiness explains involuntary unemployment and the non-neutrality of money.
SUMMING UP

- Empirical significance of intertemporal labor substitution mechanism is doubtful.
- RBC theory implies that recessions are periods of technical regress!
- Money is neutral so does not explain positive correlation between prices and output; and that this can be rectified by endogenizing the money supply (Cooley and Hansen, AER, 1989)
- Wage and price rigidity can help to explain involuntary unemployment and non-neutrality of money