

SORTING, INCENTIVES AND PERFORMANCE

Figures and Tables only

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Abstract

In this paper we provide controlled experimental evidence on the interaction of incentive schemes, sorting decisions, and performance. In a first sequence of the experiment, all subjects perform a real effort task under a piece rate regime. They can then choose to work either under a fixed payment scheme or, depending on the treatment, under a piece rate scheme (piece rate treatment), under a tournament incentives (tournament treatment), or team compensation (team treatment). In all three treatments, subjects are then going through a series of other treatments to elicit social preferences and risk attitudes. In addition, we collect questionnaire data on effort, self-assessment, risk attitudes, IQ, socioeconomic characteristics, and personality. Our main findings are as follows: First, output is much higher in the variable pay schemes (piece rate, tournament, and team) compared to the fixed wage schemes. Second, this difference is only in part driven by changes in effort in response to incentives. More important for the output differences is the sorting of subjects: the higher individual-specific productivity is, the more likely a subject is to self-select into a variable pay schemes. Third, reported effort is significantly higher in all variable pay conditions than in the fixed wage condition. Moreover, subjects report that they are more stressed if they work in a variable pay scheme. Fourth, in addition to productivity, risk attitudes and self-assessment play an important role in the sorting decision, in particular for the decision to work under tournament incentives. As a consequence, subjects in the tournament are less risk averse and think they perform relatively better than others, compared to the subjects who selected themselves into the fixed wage condition. Fifth, there is some weak evidence that women as well as people endowed with social preferences have a tendency to choose the fixed wage scheme. Subjects also differ with respect to their personality and work attitudes. Our results demonstrate that the choice of an incentive scheme exhibits not only particular incentive effects but also attracts particular types of workers, e.g., with respect to their productivity, risk attitudes or self-confidence. The data also show that assessing the incentive effects without taking self-selection into account leads to utterly wrong conclusions. Methodologically the paper shows that experiments cannot only be used to rule out selection via random assignment but also to study selection in a controlled way.

Keywords: Sorting, Incentives, Productivity, Ability, Piece-Rates,
Tournament, Team Compensation, Risk Preferences,
Gender, Overconfidence, Experiment

JEL codes: M52, M55, J33, J31, J16, J24 C91, D81

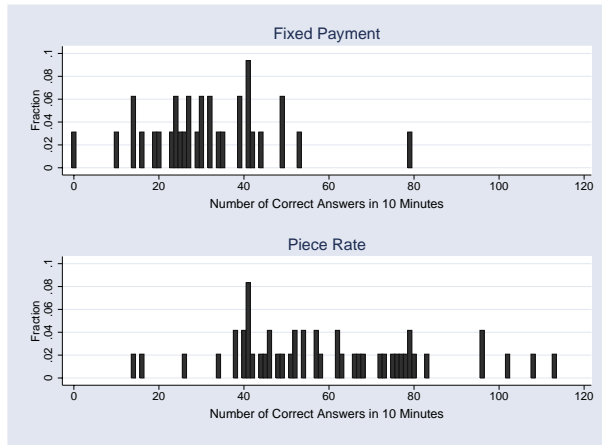
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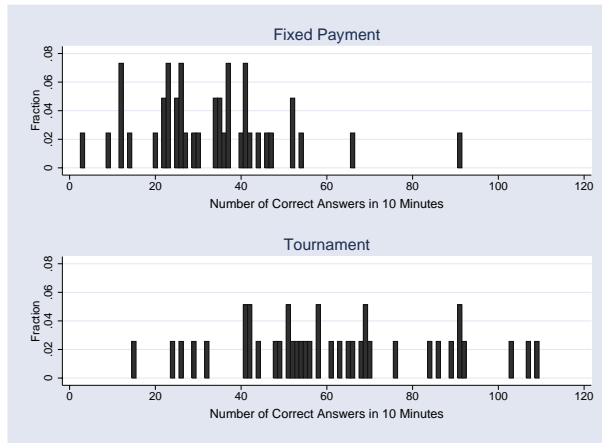
Figure 1: Design of the Experiment

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Productivity	Productivity	Productivity	Effort questions	Relative self-assessment	Sorting decision	Sorting with different fixed payment alternatives	Working time	Effort questions	Social preferences	Risk preferences	Questionnaires
Calculate one problem of difficulty level 4 as fast as possible <i>Productivity₁</i>	Calculate one problem of difficulty level 4 as fast as possible (paid) <i>Productivity₂</i>	Piece-Rate with 10 P per correct answer 5 minutes <i>Productivity₃</i>	How much effort have you exerted? How stressed did you feel? How exhausted did you get?	How many people (out of 20) solved more question better than you did? Paid correct: 100 P +/-1: 50 P	a) Piece-Rate: 10 P per correct answer b) Tournament: Winner is who has more correct answers Winner gets 1300P Loser gets 0P c) Team: (Sum of output) *10 divided by 2 vs. Fixed Payment: 400 P independent of output	Varying the fixed payment alternatives	10 minutes Piece-Rate, Tournament, Team or Fixed Payment	How much effort have you exerted? How stressed did you feel? How exhausted did you get?	2-player, sequential trust game Endowment of 120 Transfer of 1st mover tripled Contingent response method for 2nd mover Role reversal No information	Choice between L(400, 0; 0.5) and 15 safe options 25, 50, ..., 375 One alternative randomly chosen	Socioeconomics Math and high-school grades Risk-preference questions Verbal IQ-test Attitudes "Big Five" "Machiavelli"

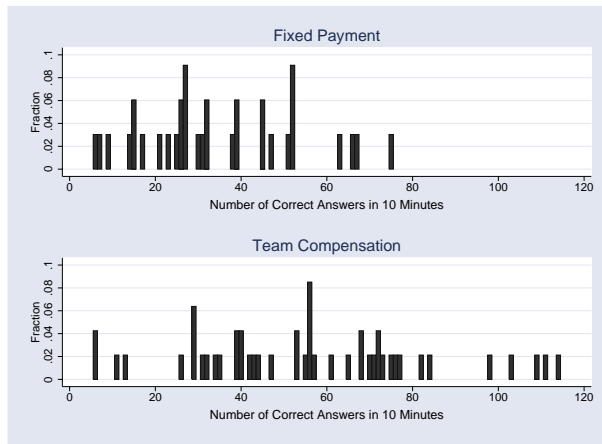
Figure 2: Output of Self-Selected Subjects in Different Compensation Schemes



(a) Piece Rate Treatment



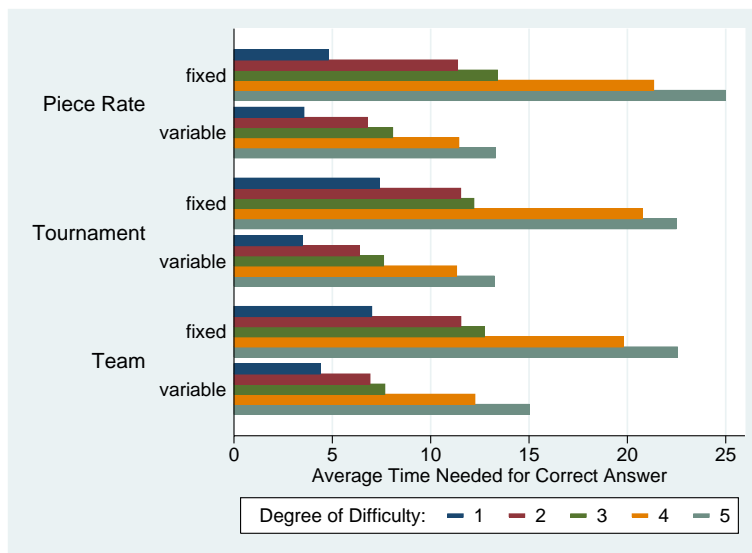
(b) Tournament Treatment



(c) Team Treatment

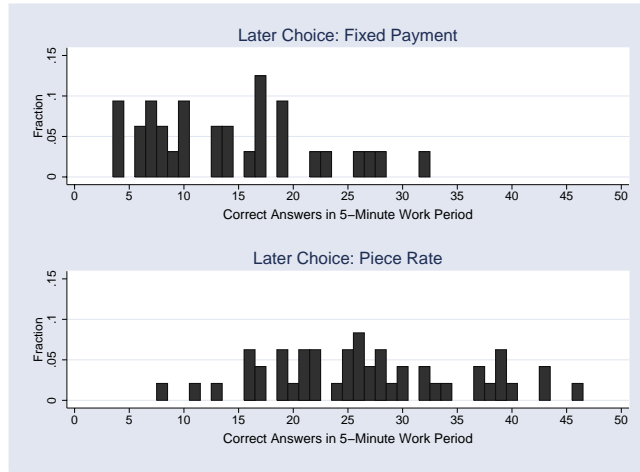
Notes: Each panel of the figure plots, for a particular treatment, two histograms of individual output (measured as the number of correct answers during the total working time of ten minutes), one for each of the self-selected groups of subjects: The upper histogram shows the output distribution of workers who selected into the fixed payment contract, and the lower histogram of a panel shows the output distribution of workers who selected into the variable payment contract. Panel (a) shows output histograms for the piece rate treatment, Panel (b) those that arose in the of the tournament treatment, and Panel (c) plots output histograms from the team treatment.

Figure 3: Performance and Task Difficulty

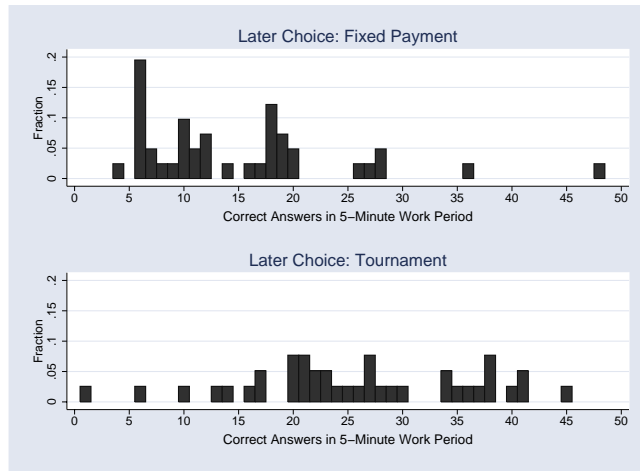


Notes: The figure shows, for each treatment, how much time (in seconds) subjects working in a particular self-selected regime need on average to solve a question of a given degree of difficulty.

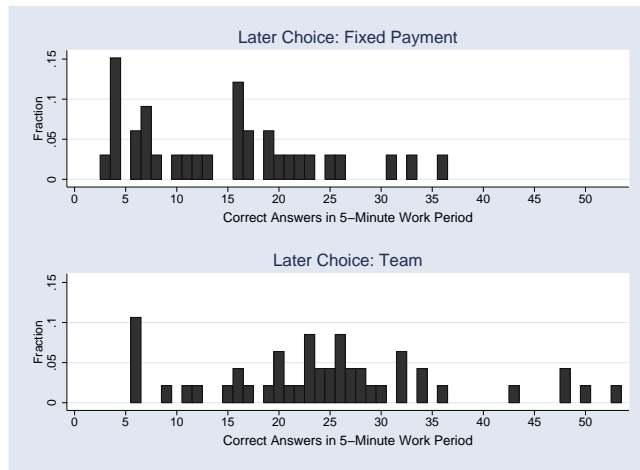
Figure 4: Productivity of Subjects before Self-Selection Into Incentive Contract



(a) Piece Rate Treatment



(b) Tournament Treatment



(c) Team Treatment

Notes: Each panel of the figure plots histograms of Productivity Indicator 3, which was elicited in step 3 of the experiment and which measures the number of correct answers during a 5-minute work period. The upper histogram always shows the distribution of individual productivity for subjects who subsequently chose for the fixed payment alternative, while the lower histogram of a panel always shows the productivity distribution among subjects who subsequently preferred the variable payment alternative. Panel (a) refers to the piece rate treatment, and Panel (b) and Panel (c) to the tournament treatment and team treatment respectively.

Table 1: Productivity Differences

	Piece rate treatment			Tournament treatment			Team treatment		
	Piece rate (Median)	Fixed pay (Median)	Median test (p-value)	Tournament (Median)	Fixed pay (Median)	Median test (p-value)	Team (Median)	Fixed pay (Median)	Median test (p-value)
Productivity:									
Indicator 1 (time needed in seconds)	8.00	28.50	0.003	11.00	26.00	0.002	13.00	24.00	0.173
Indicator 2 (time needed in seconds)	7.00	20.50	0.000	6.00	18.00	0.000	9.00	22.00	0.002
Indicator 3 (correct answers)	26.00	13.50	0.000	25.00	12.00	0.000	24.00	16.00	0.001

(a) Median Productivity

	Piece rate treatment			Tournament treatment			Team treatment		
	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3
Productivity:									
Fraction answering in									
0 to 10 sec.	60.42	18.75	70.83	28.12	48.72	17.07	79.49	21.95	36.17
11 to 20 sec.	18.75	21.88	12.5	21.88	23.08	19.51	2.56	31.71	25.53
21 to 30 sec.	12.5	18.75	4.17	18.75	12.82	19.51	10.26	9.76	10.64
more than 30 sec.	8.33	40.62	12.5	31.25	15.38	43.9	7.69	36.59	27.66

(b) Distribution of Productivity Measured by Indicator 1 and Indicator 2

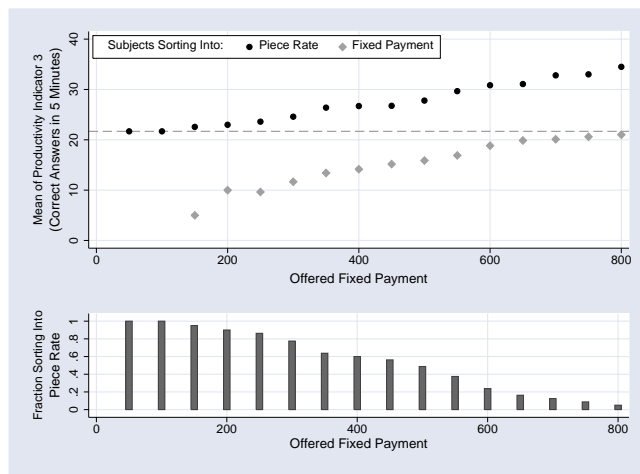
Notes: Panel (a) of the table shows the median of each productivity indicator for both subgroups in all three treatments. Productivity Indicators 1 and 2 are elicited in steps 1 and 2 respectively and measure the amount of time that a person needed to solve a question with degree of difficulty 4. No monetary incentives were offered in step 1, while subjects were paid for speed in step 2 (see text for details on payment mode). Productivity Indicator 2 is censored for subjects who failed to answer the question within 30 seconds. Indicator 3 is elicited in step 3 of the experiment and measures the number of correct answers that subjects produced during a 5-minute work period in a piece rate scheme.

Table 2: Productivity Sorting

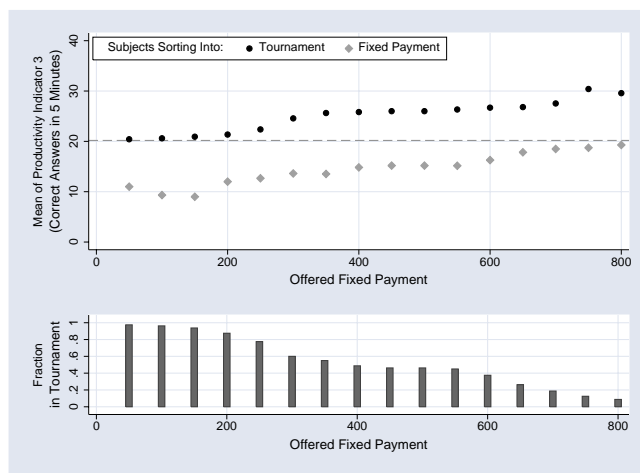
Dependent variable	Piece rate treatment 1 if piece rate chosen			Tournament treatment 1 if tournament chosen			Team treatment 1 if team chosen					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Productivity Indicator 1	-0.019*** [0.006]				-0.011** [0.004]				-0.001 [0.002]			
Productivity Indicator 2		-0.083*** [0.024]				-0.062*** [0.022]				-0.112*** [0.033]		
1 if Prod. Ind. 2 censored		0.936 [0.595]				0.119 [0.601]				1.753** [0.741]		
Productivity Indicator 3			0.107*** [0.022]	0.107*** [0.023]			0.064*** [0.015]	0.064*** [0.015]			0.057*** [0.016]	0.060*** [0.016]
Effort in 5 minutes				0.047 [0.119]				0.017 [0.139]				0.099 [0.111]
Constant	0.712*** [0.194]	1.306*** [0.314]	-1.908*** [0.465]	-2.179*** [0.833]	0.276 [0.188]	0.826*** [0.279]	-1.316*** [0.332]	-1.401* [0.791]	0.276* [0.166]	1.605*** [0.407]	-0.884*** [0.328]	-1.465** [0.735]
Number of observations	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80

Notes: The table shows Probit estimates of the propensity to sort into the variable payment scheme in the three different treatments. Standard errors are reported in brackets and the implied marginal effects, evaluated the mean of observable characteristics, are shown in parentheses below the coefficient estimates. One asterisk denotes significance at the 10% level, two or three asterisks denote statistical significance at the 5% and at the 1% level respectively.

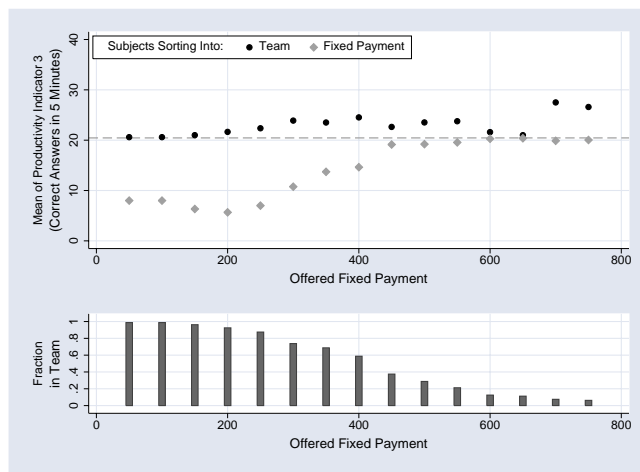
Figure 5: Fraction of Subjects Opting for Variable Pay and Average Productivity of Sorted Subjects



(a) Piece Rate Treatment



(b) Tournament Treatment



(c) Team Treatment

Notes: The upper graph of each sub-figure shows average productivity, measure by Productivity Indicator 3, among subjects who would sort into the respective variable payment scheme at a particular fixed payment alternative. The lower graph of each sub-figure displays the number of subjects who would opt for variable compensation at a given offered fixed payment alternative. Panel (a) refers to the piece rate treatment, Panel (b) to the tournament treatment and Panel (c) to the team treatment.

Table 3: Productivity and the Choice between Variable Payment Contracts and Alternative Fixed Compensation Contracts

	Dependent variable: Lowest fixed payment to which the variable compensation contract is preferred								
	Piece rate treatment			Tournament treatment			Team treatment		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Productivity Indicator 3	13.684*** [1.667]			12.468*** [2.242]			5.793*** [1.783]		
Effort in 5 minutes	-6.236 [13.189]			1.631 [22.945]			-18.381 [14.952]		
Productivity Indicator 1		-2.381*** [0.563]			-1.557* [0.848]			-0.437 [0.366]	
Productivity Indicator 2			-11.313*** [3.129]			-13.325*** [3.851]			-9.716*** [3.620]
1 if Prod. Ind. 2 censored			72.503 [83.043]			81.413 [102.347]			87.002 [86.126]
Constant	236.117*** [82.134]	559.483*** [25.685]	646.961*** [39.724]	231.279* [131.105]	536.542*** [37.488]	667.765*** [47.794]	442.836*** [91.573]	478.409*** [25.641]	598.277*** [46.334]
Number of observations	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
R-squared	0.47	0.19	0.23	0.29	0.04	0.23	0.14	0.02	0.14

Notes: The table shows OLS estimates for the lowest fixed payment alternative that is preferred to the variable compensation contract. Standard errors are reported in brackets below the coefficient estimates. One asterisk denotes significance at the 10% level, two or three asterisks denote statistical significance at the 5% and at the 1% level respectively.

Table 4: Effort, Stress, and Exhaustion

	Before sorting decision			After sorting decision		
	Piece rate	Fixed	M-W test	Piece rate	Fixed	M-W test
	(Mean)	(Mean)	(p-value)	(Mean)	(Mean)	(p-value)
Effort	5.63	5.50	0.559	6.00	4.25	0.000
Stress	5.44	5.53	0.757	5.60	3.56	0.000
Exhaustion	2.96	2.59	0.448	4.00	2.59	0.001
Number of observations	48	32		48	32	

(a) Effort, Stress and Exhaustion in Piece Rate Treatment

	Before sorting decision			After sorting decision		
	Tournament	Fixed	M-W test	Tournament	Fixed	M-W test
	(Mean)	(Mean)	(p-value)	(Mean)	(Mean)	(p-value)
Effort	5.54	5.39	0.442	6.15	4.76	0.000
Stress	5.54	5.41	0.854	5.74	3.98	0.000
Exhaustion	2.90	2.85	0.749	3.36	3.29	0.773
Number of observations	39	41		39	41	

(b) Effort, Stress and Exhaustion in Tournament Treatment

	Before sorting decision			After sorting decision		
	Team	Fixed	M-W test	Team	Fixed	M-W test
	(Mean)	(Mean)	(p-value)	(Mean)	(Mean)	(p-value)
Effort	5.43	5.30	0.703	5.43	4.45	0.001
Stress	5.36	5.45	0.500	5.40	3.79	0.000
Exhaustion	2.43	2.18	0.518	3.60	2.52	0.006
Number of observations	47	33		47	33	

(c) Effort, Stress and Exhaustion in Team Treatment

Table 5: Effort and Incentive Contracts

	Dependent variable: Self-reported effort in 10 minutes											
	Piece rate treatment			Tournament treatment			Team treatment					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
1 if piece rate	1.249*** [0.259]	1.253*** [0.281]	1.230*** [0.286]	1.398*** [0.327]	1.126*** [0.253]	1.067*** [0.259]	1.166*** [0.283]	1.225*** [0.290]	0.747*** [0.245]	0.771*** [0.246]	0.688** [0.269]	0.767*** [0.275]
1 if tournament												
1 if team												
Productivity Indicator 1		0.000 [0.003]				-0.004 [0.004]				0.002 [0.002]		
Productivity Indicator 2			-0.006 [0.019]				-0.008 [0.019]				-0.007 [0.022]	
1 if Prod. Ind. 2 censored			0.000 [0.385]				0.154 [0.375]				-0.240 [0.376]	
Productivity Indicator 3				0.009 [0.015]				-0.003 [0.012]				0.016 [0.012]
Effort in 5 minutes				0.554*** [0.106]				0.462*** [0.117]				0.573*** [0.098]
Number of observations	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
Pseudo R-squared	0.088	0.088	0.088	0.199	0.077	0.081	0.08	0.137	0.033	0.037	0.035	0.163

Notes: Ordered Probit estimates. Standard errors are reported in brackets below the coefficients; * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 6: Relative Self-Assessment and Sorting

Dependent variable	Piece rate treatment		Tournament treatment		Team treatment	
	1 if piece rate		1 if tournament		1 if team	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Relative self-assessment	-0.150*** [0.036] (-0.057)	-0.037 [0.052] (-0.014)	-0.142*** [0.034] (-0.057)	-0.081* [0.046] (-0.032)	-0.099*** [0.032] (-0.038)	-0.040 [0.039] (-0.015)
Productivity Indicator 3		0.094*** [0.029] (0.035)		0.039** [0.020] (0.016)		0.050*** [0.019] (0.019)
Effort in 5 minutes		0.069 [0.124] (-0.025)		-0.006 [0.140] (-0.002)		0.085 [0.112] (-0.032)
Constant	1.616*** [0.363]	-1.697 [1.071]	1.170*** [0.320]	-0.099 [1.070]	1.229*** [0.359]	-0.786 [0.988]
Number of observations	80	80	80	80	80	80
Pseudo R-squared	0.194	0.329	0.183	0.220	0.096	0.166

Notes: Probit estimates. Standard errors are reported in brackets below the coefficients. Marginal effects in parentheses; * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%

Table 7: Overconfidence and Sorting

	Dependent variable: 1 if piece rate				
	unweighted	weighted	trimmed 1-18	trimmed 3-16	trimmed 5-14
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Relative overassessment	0.036 [0.050]	0.047 [0.046]	0.033 [0.051]	0.025 [0.052]	0.033 [0.059]
True rank	-0.193*** [0.042]	-0.179*** [0.050]	-0.184*** [0.044]	-0.152*** [0.050]	-0.170** [0.077]
Constant	2.069*** [0.427]	1.985*** [0.504]	1.987*** [0.442]	1.677*** [0.498]	1.926** [0.765]
Number of observations	80	74	74	61	42

(a) Piece Rate Treatment

	Dependent variable: 1 if tournament				
	unweighted	weighted	trimmed 1-18	trimmed 3-16	trimmed 5-14
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Relative overassessment	0.068 [0.046]	0.109** [0.051]	0.102** [0.051]	0.105* [0.061]	0.137** [0.067]
True rank	-0.160*** [0.035]	-0.223*** [0.053]	-0.208*** [0.045]	-0.198*** [0.057]	-0.234** [0.095]
Constant	1.446*** [0.354]	2.050*** [0.521]	1.854*** [0.434]	1.782*** [0.571]	2.276** [0.938]
Number of observations	80	74	74	53	37

(b) Tournament Treatment

	Dependent variable: 1 if team				
	unweighted	weighted	trimmed 1-18	trimmed 3-16	trimmed 5-14
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Relative overassessment	0.045 [0.038]	-0.002 [0.040]	0.027 [0.040]	0.048 [0.045]	-0.039 [0.056]
True rank	-0.129*** [0.035]	-0.105** [0.051]	-0.100** [0.042]	-0.176*** [0.064]	-0.141* [0.080]
Constant	1.536*** [0.399]	1.274** [0.522]	1.252*** [0.451]	2.017*** [0.658]	1.591** [0.810]
Number of observations	80	68	68	54	41

(c) Team Treatment

Notes: Probit estimates. Standard errors are reported in brackets and marginal effects are in parentheses below the coefficients; * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%. Column (1) shows estimates when observations are not weighted by the probability of relative overassessment. The worst subject can never under-assess his relative rank, while the best subject can never over-assess her relative rank. Column (2) shows estimates of models in which observations are weighted by the probability of over- and under-assessment possibilities. In models reported in columns (3) to (5), the sample was trimmed to deal with the problem that some individuals have more opportunity to overestimate or underestimate their rank. Panels (a), (b) and (c) of the table shows Probit coefficient estimates for the piece rate treatment, the tournament treatment and the team treatment, respectively.

Table 8: Risk Preferences and Sorting

Dependent variable	Piece rate treatment 1 if piece rate		Tournament treatment 1 if tournament		Team treatment 1 if team	
	untrimmed	trimmed	untrimmed	trimmed	untrimmed	trimmed
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Risk attitude	0.164* [0.089] (0.059)*	0.264** [0.113] (0.096)**	0.331*** [0.092] (0.132)***	0.312*** [0.100] (0.124)***	0.031 [0.085] (0.012)	-0.062 [0.109] (-0.022)
Productivity Indicator 3	0.106*** [0.023] (0.038)***	0.116*** [0.038] (0.042)***	0.074*** [0.016] (0.029)***	0.097*** [0.036] (0.039)***	0.061*** [0.017] (0.023)***	0.154*** [0.049] (0.056)***
Effort in 5 minutes	0.064 [0.120] (0.023)	0.045 [0.132] (0.017)	0.024 [0.145] (0.010)	0.109 [0.180] (0.043)	0.096 [0.112] (0.037)	0.272* [0.163] (0.099)*
Constant	-3.096*** [0.996]	-3.573*** [1.363]	-3.408*** [1.018]	-4.139*** [1.370]	-1.626* [0.861]	-3.803** [1.580]
Number of observations	80	53	80	51	80	48
Pseudo R-squared	0.356	0.231	0.33	0.286	0.158	0.199

Notes: Probit Estimates. Standard errors are reported in brackets and marginal effects in parentheses below coefficients; * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%. Coefficient estimates for models in columns titled “trimmed” are based on observations of subjects who produced more than 9 but less than 31 answers in the 5-minute work period

Table 9: Gender and Sorting

Dependent variable:	1 if fixed pay chosen		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
1 if male	-0.243*** [0.062]	-0.156** [0.070]	-0.079 [0.077]
Productivity Indicator 3		-0.026*** [0.004]	-0.028*** [0.004]
Effort in 5 minutes		-0.030 [0.027]	-0.027 [0.027]
Risk attitude			-0.064*** [0.020]
Number of observations	240	240	240
Pseudo-R-squared	0.044	0.224	0.257

Notes: Probit Estimates. Marginal effects reported. Standard errors in brackets; ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%

Table 10: Social Preferences and Sorting

Dependent variable	Piece rate (1)	Tournament (2)	Team (3)
1 if selfish	-0.2 [0.397]	-0.23 [0.292]	-0.43* [0.069]
1 if reciprocal	-0.04 [0.820]	-0.35** [0.017]	-0.03 [0.818]
Productivity Indicator 3	0.04*** [0.000]	0.03*** [0.000]	0.02*** [0.000]
Effort in 5 minutes	0.02 [0.734]	-0.01 [0.919]	0.06 [0.199]
Number of observations	80	80	80
Pseudo R-squared	0.332	0.245	0.192

Notes: Probit estimates. Standard errors in brackets. Marginal effects reported; * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%