Modern Management Science & Engineering
ISSN ISSN 2052-2576
Vol. 8, No. 2, 2026
www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/mmse

Original Paper

New Quality Productive Forces and the Development of New Flexible Employment Models Constraints and Pathways

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Project Funding

Guangdong Provincial Philosophy and Social Sciences Basic General Project "Guangdong Low-income Population Main Industry Survey and New Elastic Industry Research under the Condition of New Quality Productivity" Grant No. GD25CSH13

Received: January 19, 2026 Accepted: February 28, 2026 Online Published: March 28, 2026

doi:10.22158/mmse.v8n2p94 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/mmse.v8n2p94

Abstract

Based on the developmental context of the era of New Quality Productive Forces, this paper systematically analyzes the connotations, theoretical mechanisms, and developmental constraints of new flexible employment models, proposing a multi-dimensional collaborative development pathway. The study indicates that new flexible employment models are characterized by technological embeddedness, platform-based collaboration, and diversified value exchange. Their development requires overcoming the structural contradictions between traditional labor institutions and skills supply. By constructing a safeguard system through institutional innovation and policy synergy, strengthening technology empowerment and the application of data elements, deepening the reform of the education system, promoting the synergistic development of the platform economy ecosystem and social value, and improving the social security and risk-sharing mechanisms, the current constraints can be effectively addressed. Driven by New Quality Productive Forces, flexible employment models are not only an inevitable choice for the labor market to adapt to technological change but also a crucial pathway to achieve the "free and comprehensive development of individuals" and high-quality economic development.

Keywords

New Quality Productive Forces, New Flexible Employment Models, Constraints; Pathways

1. The Connotation and Theoretical Mechanism of New Flexible Employment Models

1.1 The Connotation of New Flexible Employment Models

New flexible employment models represent a new form of employment evolving from traditional flexible employment against the backdrop of the digital economy and platform economy. Their connotation not only continues the flexibility of traditional flexible employment in terms of working hours, location, labor relations, and remuneration distribution but also exhibits significant characteristics driven by technology, platform-based operations, and task orientation. New flexible employment relies on internet platforms as infrastructure, achieving efficient allocation of labor resources and work tasks through algorithmic matching, thereby breaking the fixed temporal and spatial boundaries inherent in traditional employment relationships. Some scholars have found that remote work, project-based collaboration, and the "platform + individual" organizational model have become typical manifestations of this phenomenon (Liu, Qi, & Ding, 2022). Compared to traditional flexible employment, which relies on short-term contracts and temporary labor, new flexible employment places greater emphasis on the fragmentation and task-oriented nature of the labor process. Workers undertake order-based tasks through digital platforms, exercising autonomy in choosing their working hours and locations while adapting to more complex skill sets and performance evaluation systems (Yang, Yang, & Li, 2019).

The core characteristics of new flexible employment include: first, technological embeddedness, supported by technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence, enabling precise matching of supply and demand through platform algorithms; second, platform-based collaboration, where workers and enterprises form decentralized, networked labor relationships through platforms, with the labor process driven by tasks rather than fixed positions; third, diversified value exchange, where income distribution mechanisms shift from fixed salaries to task-based remuneration and performance-linked profit-sharing, requiring workers to enhance their skills to achieve multi-dimensional value exchange.

Moreover, the practical forms of new flexible employment have penetrated into knowledge-intensive and service-oriented industries, demonstrating significantly higher inclusiveness and flexibility compared to traditional models. However, existing research has largely focused on the characteristics, problems, and development pathways of traditional flexible employment models, with limited systematic exploration of the "new" attributes. This study aims to systematically analyze the constraints and breakthrough pathways in the current development of new flexible employment models.

1.2 The Theoretical Mechanism of New Flexible Employment Models

The formation and evolution of new flexible employment models are rooted in the interplay of multiple theoretical logics. Their theoretical mechanisms can be analyzed from the following three dimensions. First, as a practical extension of Marx's theory of "all-round development of human beings," these models grant workers greater autonomy, breaking free from the constraints of traditional employment

relationships on individual time and space, thus providing a practical pathway for realizing the "free and comprehensive development of individuals." Second, the coupling effect of technological revolution and changes in production modes: the development of new quality productive forces has reconfigured the combination of production factors, driving the transformation of labor organizations from "hierarchical systems" to "networked structures." Liu and Qi et al. (2022) pointed out that the proliferation of internet technology has made flexible employment arrangements possible, enabling workers and enterprises to achieve "on-demand matching" through platforms, thereby optimizing resource allocation efficiency (Liu, Qi, & Ding, 2022). In this process, technology not only empowers workers as a tool but also reshapes the standardization and flexibility of labor processes through algorithmic logic. For instance, gig economy platforms, through task decomposition and real-time feedback mechanisms, convert fragmented labor into quantifiable products or services. Third, the rebalancing of social division of labor and value creation: flexible employment models break the rigid boundaries of traditional professional roles, leading to the coexistence of "de-specialization" and "re-specialization" in the labor market. On one hand, individuals integrate fragmented time and skills through flexible employment to create value; on the other hand, enterprises reduce labor costs and enhance market responsiveness through flexible employment. This two-way adaptation mechanism reflects the core logic of "mutual benefit between organizations and workers" in new forms of employment.

This study argues that the core breakthroughs of new flexible employment lie in its technological embeddedness and ecological synergy. On one hand, digital technologies not only optimize resource allocation efficiency but also reshape the logic of value exchange between workers and enterprises, such as achieving precise matching of skills and demands through platform algorithms. On the other hand, its development has given rise to a new interactive ecology of "platform–worker–society," which requires the social security system to shift from "institutional guarantees" to a hybrid model of "individual accounts + platform responsibilities" while compelling the transformation of labor rights protection from "contract-based" to "data-driven" approaches. This flexible employment form, with technology at its core and platforms as its carrier, is not only an inevitable choice for the labor market in the era of new quality productive forces but also provides an innovative pathway to address the rigid constraints of traditional employment models.

2. Constraints on the Development of New Flexible Employment Models from the Perspective of New Quality Productive Forces

2.1 Insufficient Alignment between Institutional Safeguards and the Developmental Demands of New Quality Productive Forces

New Quality Productive Forces, characterized by digitalization and intelligence, are driving a shift in production factors from traditional labor towards new elements such as data, algorithms, and platforms. However, the current labor system remains fundamentally structured around the employment

relationships of the industrial era, struggling to adapt to new forms of work driven by artificial intelligence and big data. New flexible employment models emphasize flexibility in working hours, location, and form—such as remote collaboration, virtual teams, and algorithm-based management—leading to decentralized and fragmented trends in the relationship between workers and enterprises. Consequently, traditional labor law's criteria for identifying "labor relations," primarily based on personal subordination and temporal-spatial constraints, often fail to address the actual needs of flexible workers concerning working time management, wage payment, and dismissal protection. In the platform economy, workers may face income volatility and uncontrollable work intensity due to the dynamic scheduling of platform algorithms, yet existing laws lack specific provisions addressing algorithmic discrimination or platform responsibility, creating an institutional void in protecting workers' rights and interests.

Furthermore, the reorganization of production factors driven by New Quality Productive Forces imposes higher demands on the social security system. Traditional social security is structured around the "enterprise–individual" nexus. In contrast, under New Quality Productive Forces, workers may simultaneously participate in multiple platform projects and collaboration, exhibiting high mobility in income sources and occupational identity. The existing social security system struggles to cover these non-standardized forms of employment, leaving flexible workers with institutional blind spots in pensions, healthcare, and unemployment insurance. For instance, in the data-driven gig economy, workers may take orders from multiple platforms, yet the absence of a traditional employment relationship blurs the responsibility for social security contributions, making contribution thresholds and standards ill-suited to the realities of flexible employment. This institutional rigidity not only diminishes workers' willingness to participate in employment models driven by New Quality Productive Forces but also constrains enterprises' ability to optimize resource allocation through data elements, creating a cyclical dilemma of "technological progress – institutional lag – developmental obstruction."

2.2 Structural Contradiction between the Pace of Technological Iteration and Workers' Capacity for Skill Upgrading

The rapid development of New Quality Productive Forces imposes continuous and dynamic demands on workers' skills (Wang, & Zhang, 2025). However, the current education system and vocational training mechanisms have yet to establish adaptive mechanisms synchronized with technological change, resulting in a significant disconnect between skill supply and demand. Against a backdrop of accelerating technological penetration in areas like AI, blockchain, and the Internet of Things, new flexible employment models set higher standards for workers' digital literacy, cross-disciplinary collaboration capabilities, and algorithmic application skills. For example, content creators in the platform economy need to master composite skills such as data analysis, user profiling, and multi-channel operations. Yet, existing training systems often remain siloed within single technical domains, lacking systematic integration. This lag in skill supply traps many workers in a vicious cycle

of "skills obsolescence – employment constraints – retraining difficulties" when facing technological change, further exacerbating the structural shortage of talent during the development of New Quality Productive Forces.

Simultaneously, the platform-based nature of New Quality Productive Forces amplifies the screening effect of technological barriers on employment. In data-driven employment scenarios, platforms use algorithmic models for precise worker matching. However, the "black box" nature of algorithms and inherent data biases can systematically exclude low-skilled workers (Zhu, Wang, & Zhang, 2025). Recommendation algorithms on hiring platforms, trained on historical data, may over-rely on traditional indicators like educational background and work experience, overlooking the practical competencies flexible workers accumulate through project-based work. This "double-edged sword" effect of technological empowerment, while enhancing employment efficiency, also exacerbates labor market polarization, forming a binary structure where "high-skilled workers are empowered by technology, while low-skilled workers are excluded by it." Moreover, the uncertainty of technological iteration heightens workers' occupational risks. When a particular technological trajectory is rapidly phased out due to market or policy changes, affected workers may face skills obsolescence obsolescence. The fast pace of New Quality Productive Forces simultaneously compresses their adaptation window, making this dynamic imbalance a critical obstacle to the sustainable development of new flexible employment models.

2.3 Mismatch between Data Element Allocation and Market Responsiveness

The core driving force of New Quality Productive Forces lies in the deep exploitation and efficient allocation of data elements. However, a significant disconnect currently exists between the distribution of data resources and the market's responsiveness to flexible employment models. In sectors dominated by New Quality Productive Forces, such as the platform and sharing economies, data serves as a core production factor. The ability to collect, analyze, and utilize data directly impacts the flexibility and efficiency of employment models. Yet, the contradiction between the monopolistic tendencies and openness of data resources hinders some enterprises from optimizing labor decisions through data. For instance, large platform enterprises leverage vast amounts of user data to build precise supply-demand matching models, whereas small and medium-sized enterprises or individual workers, limited by their capacity to access data, cannot participate in data-driven employment opportunity allocation. This uneven distribution of data resources not only limits the inclusiveness of New Quality Productive Forces in the job market but also exacerbates disparities in the penetration rate of flexible employment models across enterprises of different sizes (Guo, 2025).

Furthermore, the market's insufficient responsiveness to data elements further weakens the adaptability of new flexible employment models. The market environment driven by New Quality Productive Forces is highly dynamic, requiring enterprises to adjust employment strategies based on real-time data analysis. However, most enterprises have yet to develop systemic advantages in data governance capabilities and agile decision-making mechanisms. In service industries like tourism and healthcare,

failing to predict demand fluctuations and flexibly adjust the scale of flexible employment through data analysis exposes enterprises to the dual risks of resource wastage or insufficient service supply. Concurrently, workers in data-empowered employment scenarios often lack the ability to perceive market trends. Freelancers, lacking access to industry data, may struggle to identify which skill areas hold growth potential, thereby missing employment opportunities. This mismatch between data element allocation and market responsiveness prevents the flexible employment models driven by New Quality Productive Forces from achieving efficient supply-demand matching, becoming a key bottleneck limiting their expansion.

2.4 Insufficient Synergy between the Platform Economy Ecosystem and Policies/Regulations

In the context of New Quality Productive Forces, the platform economy, as the primary carrie for new flexible employment models, requires dynamic policy and regulatory adaptation for the healthy development of its ecosystem. However, current policy frameworks for regulating the platform economy remain largely based on traditional industry rules, struggling to cover the complex ecosystem constituted by data, algorithms, network effects, and other elements (Cao & Liu, 2025). For example, while platform enterprises enhance labor efficiency through algorithms, they may also trigger disputes over workers' rights due to algorithmic discrimination or data misuse. Yet, current laws lack clear norms on critical issues like algorithmic transparency and the boundaries of platform responsibility. This regulatory lag creates a difficult balance between innovation and compliance for the platform economy: on one hand, enterprises delay technological investment due to policy uncertainty; on the other hand, workers' trust in platform employment diminishes, forming a contradictory pattern of "technological empowerment – institutional constraint – developmental obstruction."

The regional heterogeneity of policies and regulations further exacerbates the fragmentation of the platform economy ecosystem. Employment models driven by New Quality Productive Forces are highly cross-regional, but inconsistencies in the enforcement of labor standards, data security, tax policies, etc., across different regions create compliance cost challenges for platform enterprises promoting flexible employment models nationwide. Some regions adopt lenient regulatory policies to attract digital economy enterprises, while others strengthen platform scrutiny due to data security concerns. This fragmented policy environment undermines the economies of scale associated with New Quality Productive Forces. Additionally, the frequency of policy adjustments amplifies institutional risks. Amidst the rapid evolution of the platform economy, local governments may occasionally introduce regulatory measures targeting specific employment forms. However, the short-term and localized nature of these measures fails to establish long-term, stable expectations, leading both enterprises and workers to adopt conservative decision-making approaches (Shen & Zhang, 2024). This insufficient synergy between policies/regulations and the platform economy ecosystem constitutes a significant institutional barrier to the deepening development of new flexible employment models driven by New Quality Productive Forces.

3. Pathways for the Development of New Flexible Employment Models

3.1 Constructing a Safeguard System through Institutional Innovation and Policy Synergy

The development of new flexible employment models driven by New Quality Productive Forces relies not only on technological innovation but also necessitates a systemic reconstruction of the institutional environment. Currently, a significant disconnect exists between the traditional labor legal system and new forms of employment, requiring institutional innovation to fill policy gaps. First, the dynamic adjustment of the labor legal system should be promoted, clarifying the boundaries of rights and responsibilities for non-standard forms of employment. A legal framework for "incomplete labor relations" should be established through legislation to balance the protection of workers' rights and interests with the need for employment flexibility, thereby avoiding a vacuum in rights and interests caused by institutional lag. Second, the social security system needs to be restructured to accommodate the diverse characteristics of flexible employment. Flexible social security mechanisms, such as contributions calculated based on workload points or a percentage of income, should be explored to achieve the transferability and continuity of social security entitlements [9]. Concurrently, cross-platform social security accounts should be established to transcend the limitations of the traditional "enterprise–individual" structure and enhance the inclusiveness of social security. At the policy level, a unified national policy framework for flexible employment should be promoted to eliminate regional barriers. Incentives such as tax breaks and subsidies for job retention should be used to encourage enterprises to create more flexible positions. Incorporating flexible employment into local economic performance indicators can foster a positive interaction between policy direction and market mechanisms. Furthermore, an inter-departmental collaboration mechanism needs to be established, integrating data resources from labor security, taxation, statistics, and other departments to construct a dynamic monitoring system for flexible workers, thereby providing a precise basis for policy formulation.

3.2 Strengthening Technological Empowerment and the Deep Application of Data Elements

Technology-driven development constitutes the core impetus for new flexible employment models, whose evolution depends upon the efficient allocation of data elements and the innovative application of technological tools. First, an employment ecosystem centered on data elements should be established to enhance the efficiency of supply-demand matching. Through artificial intelligence algorithms and big data analytics, the alignment between workers' skill endowments and market demands can be accurately identified, thereby optimizing the allocation of labor resources. In labor-intensive sectors such as manufacturing and services, real-time data-based intelligent dispatching systems can be developed to dynamically adjust workforce scale and structure, reducing enterprises' labor costs and workers' unemployment risks. Second, technological empowerment should be leveraged to upgrade workers' capabilities through the establishment of lifelong learning-oriented training mechanisms. Modular and personalized skill training programs should be developed to address composite skill requirements encompassing digital literacy and cross-domain collaboration. Concurrently, the digital

transformation of vocational skill certification systems should be promoted, enabling flexible workers' accumulated competencies to be quantified and traced. Furthermore, open sharing mechanisms for data elements need to be improved, facilitating the construction of public data platforms and enabling small and medium-sized enterprises as well as individual practitioners to access industry data resources, thereby enhancing their market responsiveness. In terms of data privacy protection, safeguard mechanisms for workers' right to know and autonomy should be established to prevent technological abuse from eroding their rights and interests. By formulating data usage specifications, the boundaries of platform enterprises' responsibilities in data collection, analysis, and application should be clarified, ensuring fairness and transparency in technological empowerment.

3.3 Deepening Educational System Reform and Innovating Talent Cultivation Models

Driven by New Quality Productive Forces, new flexible employment models, as significant formations through which the labor market adapts to technological change and economic transformation, necessitate synergistic advancement across multiple dimensions including institutional innovation, technological empowerment, educational reform, platform ecosystem optimization, and social security (Jiang & Pang, 2025). This entails reconstructing the labor legal system and social security mechanisms to fill institutional gaps in new employment forms, establishing an "incomplete labor relations" framework alongside flexible social security mechanisms, and promoting the construction of a unified national policy framework. It requires leveraging data elements and artificial intelligence technologies to optimize supply-demand matching efficiency, developing intelligent dispatching systems while strengthening workers' skill upgrading to enhance individual adaptability to technological change. Furthermore, it involves deepening the dynamic alignment between vocational education and industrial demands, constructing a tripartite cultivation system integrating "skills, competencies, and literacies," while compensating for deficiencies in traditional education through multi-level provision within the social training system. Additionally, it necessitates regulating platform economy operational rules, enhancing algorithmic transparency and platform responsibility boundaries, cultivating diverse forms of autonomous organizations, and promoting a societal conceptual shift from "stability" toward "flexibility." Finally, it requires improving the risk protection system for flexible workers, mitigating individual employment risks through specialized insurance, flexible unemployment benefits, and multi-stakeholder safety-net mechanisms. Through the dual drivers of institutional innovation and technological empowerment, a virtuous interactive ecology encompassing "platforms, workers, and society" can be constructed, providing theoretical support and practical pathways for achieving the goal of high-quality and full employment.

3.4 Promoting Synergistic Development between the Platform Economy Ecosystem and Social Value

The platform economy serves as the primary carrier for new flexible employment models, and its healthy development necessitates sustainability through ecological construction and value orientation (Tan & Zhou, 2025). First, operational rules within the platform economy should be standardized to elevate industry standardization levels. Concerning critical issues such as algorithmic transparency and

platform responsibility boundaries, third-party evaluation and regulatory mechanisms should be established to mitigate the adverse effects of technological abuse on workers. For instance, through formulating algorithmic ethics guidelines, platforms could be required to disclose core algorithmic rules and undergo compliance reviews by independent institutions, ensuring fairness and interpretability in employment decisions. Second, diversified forms of platform organizations should be cultivated to enhance flexible workers' sense of belonging. Through autonomous platform organizations undertaking functions such as professional qualification certification, rights protection, and skill training, deficiencies in individual workers' bargaining power could be addressed. Concurrently, social value orientation should reshape employment conceptions, diminishing singular pursuit of "stability" while reinforcing recognition of flexibility and autonomy. For example, through media campaigns and policy advocacy, the diverse values of flexible employment could be disseminated, helping the public understand its role in promoting employment equity and stimulating individual potential. Furthermore, deep integration between the platform economy and traditional industries should be promoted, encouraging enterprises to incorporate flexible employment into strategic planning, thereby achieving transformation and upgrading of employment models through technological empowerment and managerial innovation.

3.5 Improving Social Security and Risk-Sharing Mechanisms

The proliferation of new flexible employment models requires robust risk-sharing mechanisms as safeguards, ensuring that workers enjoy fundamental rights and security protections within flexible employment arrangements (Zhang, 2020). First, an occupational risk response system for flexible workers should be established, designing specialized insurance schemes for aspects such as work injury identification and occupational disease prevention to mitigate employment risks. Through mandating platform enterprises to purchase occupational liability insurance and introducing commercial insurance products, a multi-tiered protection network could be constructed, covering potential risks including accidental injuries, occupational diseases, and sudden illnesses. Second, unemployment insurance mechanisms should be improved, allowing flexible workers to accumulate benefits based on workload to ensure basic living needs during income fluctuations. Concurrently, exploration of a "flexible unemployment benefits" system should be pursued, dynamically adjusting disbursement standards according to workers' working hours and income levels to enhance the precision and flexibility of social security. Finally, multi-stakeholder safety-net mechanisms should be constructed, jointly establishing flexible employment protection funds through government, enterprise, and social forces to provide job retention subsidies during economic downturns, thereby averting large-scale unemployment. The strengthening of legal aid services should also not be overlooked, reducing the costs of rights defense for flexible workers through simplifying dispute mediation procedures and establishing specialized arbitration institutions.

5. Conclusion

Driven by New Quality Productive Forces, new flexible employment models, as significant formations through which the labor market adapts to technological change and economic transformation, require synergistic advancement across multiple dimensions including institutions, technology, education, platform ecosystem, and social security. This entails reconstructing the labor legal system and social security mechanisms to fill institutional gaps in new employment forms, establishing an "incomplete labor relations" framework alongside flexible social security mechanisms, promoting the construction of a unified national policy framework, and strengthening cross-departmental collaboration and dynamic monitoring. Concurrently, through the deep application of data elements, supply-demand matching efficiency should be optimized via artificial intelligence algorithms, intelligent dispatching systems should be developed to mitigate employment risks, and the digital transformation of workers' skill upgrading and training systems should be promoted to enhance individual adaptability to technological change. Furthermore, the dynamic alignment between vocational education and industrial demands should be deepened, constructing a tripartite cultivation system integrating "skills, competencies, and literacies," while providing sustained human capital support for flexible employment through school-enterprise collaboration and lifelong learning systems. The operational rules of the platform economy should be standardized, algorithmic transparency and platform responsibility boundaries should be enhanced, diverse forms of autonomous organizations should be cultivated, societal conceptual shifts from "stability" toward "flexibility" should be promoted, and deep integration between the platform economy and traditional industries should be achieved. Finally, the risk protection system for flexible workers should be improved, mitigating individual employment risks through specialized insurance, flexible unemployment benefits, and multi-stakeholder safety-net mechanisms, thereby enhancing the inclusiveness and precision of social security. This study contends that the sustainable development of new flexible employment models necessitates New Quality Productive Forces as the core, driven by the dual engines of institutional innovation and technological empowerment, to construct a virtuous interactive ecology encompassing "platforms, workers, and society," thereby providing theoretical support and practical pathways for achieving the goal of high-quality and full employment.

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