

The Reshaping and New Trends of Labor Relations in the Development of Digital Economy

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Abstract: In the wave of digitalization, the digital economy has emerged as the primary driver of global economic growth. With its development, significant transformations have occurred in enterprises' production and operational models, bringing forth numerous new characteristics and trends. This paper expounds on how the development of the digital economy reshapes labor relations and the emerging new trends. It also discusses strategies to address labor relation changes in the digital economy era from perspectives such as improving legal frameworks, policy systems, and strengthening corporate management and social responsibility, aiming to provide theoretical foundations and guidance for labor relation transformation in the digital economy context.

Keywords: Digital economy; Labor relations; Reshaping; New trends

The digital economy, an emerging economic form rooted in digital technologies with data as the core production factor, has grown rapidly. According to China's Digital Economy Development Report (2024) by the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, China's digital economy reached 53.9 trillion RMB in 2023, accounting for 42.8% of GDP and becoming the main engine driving national economic development. With the rapid advancement of the digital economy, traditional employment relations are undergoing profound changes and reshaping. Labor relations, as a unique social relationship, directly impact workers' interests, as well as the development of enterprises and social stability and prosperity.

1. Reshaping of Labor Relations by Digital Economy Development

1.1 Diversification of Labor Organization Forms

With the development and popularization of technologies such as cloud computing and artificial intelligence, the relationship between labor and production materials has taken on new characteristics, giving rise to diverse labor forms. Digital labor models like platform employment and remote work have emerged, breaking through the temporal and spatial constraints of traditional labor. For example, food delivery couriers achieve flexible employment through online platforms, with relatively autonomous working hours and locations, establishing a new type of labor relationship with platforms. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics shows that by the end of 2023, China's flexible employment workforce will exceed 200 million, with a significant proportion engaged in new employment forms driven by the digital economy. While this allows workers to better balance work and life, it also poses new challenges for identifying and managing labor relations.

1.2 Adjustment of Employment Structure

The rapid development of the digital economy has driven the upgrading of China's industrial structure and triggered a profound adjustment of its employment structure. On one hand, in traditional industries, repetitive and rule-based jobs—such as assembly line workers in manufacturing—are being replaced by automated equipment and artificial intelligence, leading to a gradual reduction or even disappearance of these positions. For example, with the promotion of intelligent production, some automotive manufacturers have adopted fully automated assembly lines, significantly reducing the demand for assembly workers on the production line. On the other hand, with the growth of the digital economy, new industries and positions such as data analysts and e-commerce operation specialists have emerged, demanding higher skill levels and knowledge from workers. According to forecasts by relevant authorities, the global digital economy will create 20 million new job opportunities by 2025.

2. New Trends in Labor Relations in the Context of the Digital Economy

2.1 Labor Relations with the Coexistence of Flexibility and Stability

In the context of the digital economy, enterprises need more flexible human resources to meet the needs of rapidly changing markets and continuous innovation. They reduce costs and improve efficiency through means such as flexible employment. This allows workers to freely arrange their work and determine working hours and content according to their actual situations. On the other hand, while seeking flexibility, workers also require a certain degree of job security and work stability. Therefore, in future labor relations, a model with the coexistence of flexibility and stability will emerge.

Enterprises can form more diverse forms of cooperation with employees. For some important positions or key businesses, they can offer stable contracts and good career development opportunities to attract and retain outstanding talents; for non-core and temporary work, flexible employment models can be adopted. In addition, workers can also appropriately choose flexible or stable work methods according to their career development stages and professional situations to maximize their benefits.

2.2 High-level and Diversified Technical Requirements

The widespread application of digital technologies in social life has put forward higher requirements for the quality of workers. In the field of high-end technologies, the demand for talents in cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain is constantly increasing, and higher requirements are placed on technical levels and innovation capabilities. For example, according to a report from LinkedIn, worldwide demand for AI engineers increased by 75% in 2023 compared to the same period of the previous year.

In addition to professional skills, abilities such as communication skills, creative thinking, and digital literacy have become increasingly important. Since work in the digital economy often requires cross-disciplinary collaboration, workers must be able to communicate and cooperate effectively with people from different backgrounds and quickly adapt to new ways of working. At the same time, with the rapid development of the digital economy, various new industries and business models are constantly emerging, and there is an urgent need for interdisciplinary talents with knowledge and skills in multiple fields, such as medical big data analysts.

2.3 Enhancement of Workers' Status and Strengthened Rights Protection

In the digital economy, workers are placing increasing emphasis on their legitimate rights, and their status in labor relations is gradually rising. On one hand, digital technology provides workers with communication channels, enabling them to complete tasks more efficiently and safeguard their rights through collective action. For example, some delivery riders have formed mutual aid associations to negotiate with platforms for better working conditions. Meanwhile, China's government and all sectors of society have paid growing attention to labor rights protection in the digital economy, strengthening legislation and supervision. In recent years, policy documents such as the Guidelines on Safeguarding the Labor Security Rights and Interests of Workers in New Employment Forms have defined the rights and obligations of workers in new employment forms, providing a policy foundation for protecting their legitimate rights. In the future, with workers' enhanced awareness of rights protection and the improvement of the legal system, the status of workers in labor relations will inevitably rise, and their legitimate rights will be more effectively protected.

3. Strategies for Coping with Labor Relation Transformations in the Digital Economy Era

3.1 Improving Legal, Regulatory, and Policy Systems

Governments should urgently formulate and improve labor laws adapted to the digital economy, defining labor relations in new employment forms and standardizing the rights and obligations between platforms and workers. For platform employment, hierarchical labor relation identification criteria could be established based on factors such as workers' dependence on platforms. China should further improve the labor remuneration, rest-leave, and social insurance systems for digital workers to ensure full protection of their rights. Meanwhile, the state should introduce corresponding policies to encourage enterprises to adopt a combination of flexible and stable employment models to achieve stability and development. Increase investment in vocational training and education, and formulate training programs according to the needs of the digital economy to enhance workers' employability and adaptability.

For example, in response to new changes in labor relations under the digital economy, Guangdong Province has taken proactive measures. In June 2022, Guangdong's Department of Human Resources and Social Security and other agencies jointly issued the Implementation Opinions on Safeguarding the Labor Security Rights and Interests of Workers in New Employment Forms,

clarifying the responsibilities of employers and providing a legal basis for workers in new employment forms. The Opinions specify comprehensive protection of workers' rights, requiring full consideration of factors such as workers' dependence on platforms when determining employment relationships to make ambiguous employment relationships clearer. Regarding wages, platforms are required to define wage calculation methods and timelines to protect workers' basic wage rights. According to the Opinions, the calculation method for delivery fees was revised to comprehensively consider factors such as distance and time, increasing couriers' monthly salaries by approximately 15% compared to the past. In terms of working hours and rest periods, platforms need to reasonably set work schedules and rest patterns.

3.2 Strengthening Corporate Management and Fulfilling Social Responsibilities

In the digital economy environment, enterprises need to adopt new human resource management approaches. In labor organization, flexible employment and other methods should be used according to actual needs to improve the efficiency of human resource utilization. In labor process management, algorithms should be optimized to prevent violations of workers' rights while considering their work safety and physical and mental health. Enterprises should also assume social responsibilities, actively creating career development opportunities for employees and increasing training efforts to enhance their technical capabilities and comprehensive quality. To build stable labor relations, a sound labor dispute resolution mechanism must be established. Some internet companies provide internal career transition and promotion opportunities to help employees adapt to business development.

For instance, SF Express has actively transformed its operations in the digital era and fully demonstrated its social responsibilities. According to the employment characteristics of the courier industry, SF adopts a model combining flexible and fixed employment. By using its SF Same-City food delivery platform, it absorbs a large amount of idle labor during peak business hours, reducing employment pressure and improving delivery efficiency. During the 2023 Double 11 period alone, the company employed 35% of flexible workers to ensure logistics timeliness. In terms of process management, SF optimized its intelligent dispatching algorithm, taking into account logistics safety and employees' physical conditions, thereby reducing pressure from delivery delays and decreasing complaints about driver fatigue by the same period last year. At the same time, the company has established a complete training system and launched online education platforms for logistics technology and professional literacy, investing substantial funds annually to extend each employee's learning time.

Conclusion

In summary, with the rapid development of the digital economy, labor relations have undergone profound changes, exhibiting new characteristics such as diversified labor forms and transformed labor processes. Meanwhile, new trends have emerged, including the coexistence of flexibility and stability in labor relations, the elevation of workers' status, and the strengthened protection of their rights. To adapt to these changes in the digital economy, it is essential to improve legal and policy frameworks, strengthen corporate management and social responsibility, enhance workers' competencies and self-protection abilities, and leverage trade unions and social support. By doing so, we can establish a new type of harmonious and stable labor relations compatible with the digital economy, safeguarding both economic growth and workers' rights while promoting sustainable social development.

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