

# Research on New-generation Migrant Workers' Employability

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**Abstract.** Based on prior researches and literature, we studied the employability of new-generation migrant workers. The study finds that the upgrading of employability of new-generation migrant workers is restricted by multiple factors such as individual factors, environmental factors and policies. It should be a systematic process, which is based on multiple dynamic supports, in cultivating and promoting their employability, and the public service and supporting policy are particularly important.

## Introduction

Under the background of fierce competition in the labor market, migrant workers are the important human resources in the rapid urban development. Their employability is of great significance to optimize the national industrial structure. At the same time, it is also key factor to realize upward mobility and integration into the city.

The concept of employability was widely explored and used in the late 20th century. The focus of research turned from the labor attitude, labor market intervention policies and human resources development to factors determining demand and supply in the 90 years. Employability is the ability of workers to find and maintain existing jobs by acquiring skills and motivation, and to change jobs with environmental changes. The new generation migrant workers refer to people who born after 1980 and 16-30 years of age. Moreover, they mainly engaged in the second and third industry labor, but the household registration status is migrant workers. At present, there are more than 100 million new-generation migrant workers, has become the main body of migrant workers groups, as an important part of contemporary Chinese industrial workers. Compared with the parent, there are many positive changes in the characteristics of new-generation migrant workers, such as higher educational level and longer career planning, but there are also many problems in skills, quality of employment and public service accessibility.

## Literature Review and Research Framework

**Literature Review.** Due to differences in the perspective and focus of research, there has not yet a unified theoretical framework for employability in the academy. Hillary & Pollard (1998), Gazier (2001), Forrier & Sels (2003) had different interpretations of the theoretical models of employability, but they all emphasized the external environment [1, 2, 3]. Different from this view, Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth (2004) argued that employability was a psychosocial construct, including 'occupational identification, individual adaptability, and human and social capital' [4].

Opposed to the previous scholars, Ronald & Colin Lindsay proposed the concept of 'comprehensive employability' in 2005, which suggested that from such a perspective, researchers are more likely to identify the panoptic factors that influencing individual employment [5]. Correspondingly, they thought that employability includes three interrelated components: individual factors, personal environmental factors and external policies. In general, they provided an analytical framework for employability beyond the traditional supply-demand side argument.

There are few studies on employability in China. Some scholars have introduced the research results in the West. Most of the scholars have targeted the research group as college graduates. However, the analytical framework of research lacked of reference for not summarizing results related to the West. Zhang (2008) made a preliminary analysis of the employability of migrant

workers referring from Fugate's research framework. But for 'new-generation migrant workers', we need a framework in line with national conditions and the specific nature of subjects [6].

**Research Framework.** The dual system in economy and society in China determines the study on employability of new generation migrant workers needs a comprehensive analysis, including micro-individual factors, environment and macro demands and policies. When introducing the concept of 'employability', there are two issues which needed to be taken into consideration. The first is difference in national condition. Once making research on new-generation migrant workers' employability, we should pay more attention to the "lack of basic equality right" in public service and policy. Second issue is the applicability of the group itself. For example, it is questionable to use the 'happiness state' as an indicator to measure the employability of new generation migrant workers.

Based on this, we constructed a comprehensive theoretical framework for analyzing the employability of new-generation migrant workers (see Fig. 1). It enables us to identify the complex factors influencing the employability of this group from the level of microscopic, environmental and macroscopic factors.

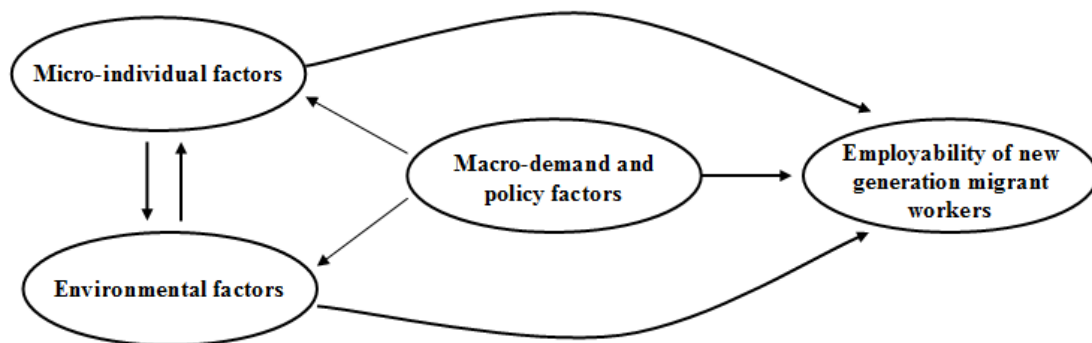


Figure 1. The framework on analyzing the employability of new-generation migrant workers

### Factors Influencing the Employability of New-generation Migrant Workers

**Micro-individual Factors.** The individual factors that affect the employability of new-generation migrant workers mainly include work skills, demographic characteristics, job search and adaptive capacity. Specifically, the work skills and characteristics mainly include character, education, professional knowledge and qualifications of new-generation migrant workers. Factors such as age, gender, physiology and mental health will influence the motivations and abilities of new-generation migrant workers in specific work. Thirdly, it is job search that shows the status of new-generation migrant workers' personal identification and search, including the effective use of formal search services or information resources and technology. The last is the ability to adapt. It is the key to achieving success in the current era of job insecurity. Adaptable jobseekers are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and have a strong tolerance for uncertainty about the workplace. In short, the micro-individual factors provide the endogenous impetus for new-generation migrant workers to obtain employment, maintain jobs in a changing market environment and strive for better career development opportunities.

**Medium-environmental Factors.** The environmental factors include family environment, work culture and accessibility resources. The family environment refers to responsibilities that new-generation migrant workers directly take. Work culture shows social factors influencing new-generation migrant workers' working attitudes, aspirations and motivations. It includes family background, cohabitation effect and working environment. In the final, accessibility resources include household income, formal and informal financial support resources. These environmental factors affect the possibility of new-generation migrant workers' capturing employment opportunities and realizing job mobility.

**Macro Demands and Policies.** External factors affecting the employability of new-generation migrant workers include market demand, enabling public services and policies. When discussing

the market demand, it is the status of the labor market, job vacancy and so on. The labor market is composed of the level of labor demand and competition. To a certain extent, the market demand determines the quality and quantity of the jobs acquired by new-generation migrant workers and opportunities for job mobility. In addition, enabling public services and policies refer to public services aimed at promoting the job fit of new-generation migrant workers. It consisted of information and support for finding work, such as tax incentives, training and other related policies. External factors, particularly policy factors, to a large extent, determine the starting point to improve their employability and fairness of the right to acquire endowment resources.

### **The Dilemma in Improving the Employability of New-generation Migrant Workers**

**The Individual Level.** Employment ability can be reflected directly by indicators of work skills, demographic characteristics, the efficiency of job search and social adaptation. On the whole, new-generation migrant workers are still in a weak position in the skills and health in society. Compared with their parents, there is an improvement in their education. They also have high job expectations and urban integration willingness. However, majority of new-generation migrant workers are lack of skills and have not received technical training as high as 76.4% [7]. The work is concentrated on labor-intensive industries with low technical requirements, namely, the sub-labor market. In health, new-generation migrant workers are often engaged in dirty, tired and dangerous work, which is easy to produce security incidents. Due to cultural adaptation and other issues, there is high risk in mental health. What's more, the way of their access to work is relatively simple and primitive, mainly on the basis of 'relationship', which leads to information delay and insufficiency. In adaptation, new-generation migrant workers have certain advantages in adapting to new skills compared with their parents. But the contradiction between physical and mental adaptation is a bottleneck in their career.

**The Environmental Level.** Individual environmental factors influenced the employability of new-generation migrant workers by interacting with individual factors. The first is family environment. It is the source of multiple pressures. On the one hand, they should take responsibility in supporting their parents. On the other hand, the upbringing and education of their children were greater concern for them. At the same time, the general separation of two places brought pressure to new-generation migrant workers' psychological, marriage and life [8]. Secondly, whether it is the family or workplace is difficult to provide chance for them enhancing skills and ability. Moreover, they were faced with dual lack in tangible and intangible resources. Funds were mainly obtained through informal channels, borrowing from relatives or relying on the underground financial market. In the social support network, the original support of 'affinity' was weaken after new-generation migrant workers entering into the city.

**The Macro Level.** There are two aspects in the macro level. In the market demand, demand for new-generation migrant workers with low level of culture and skills was mainly from the sub-labor market with poor working conditions and unstable employment, which tends to form a "low-level equilibrium" of career development. In addition, changes in the unemployment rate of youth groups are generally in line with the overall economic cycle and are significantly higher than other working age groups. Secondly, it is the enabling public service and policy. In the current household registration system framework, supportive employment policies still have a strong exclusion for new-generation migrant workers. The possibility for their access to employment guidance, training and other public services was still very low. The existence of dual segmentation of the labor market and dual economic and social system kept new-generation migrant workers in a weak position in enjoying public services. To some extent, it exacerbated their disadvantage in individual's initial endowment resources, leading to the vicious circle in the development of their employability.

### **Promotion in the Employability of New-generation Migrant Workers**

The employability of new-generation migrant workers is restricted by multiple factors such as the individual, environmental and public service. Thus, it should be a system propulsion process based

on multiple dynamic supports, in which the macro policy intervention from the government is particularly important.

**Micro-Individual Level.** New-generation migrant workers themselves are the main carrier of employability and inherent driving force to enhance it. Although they have advantages in age and learning ability, low-level vocational skills and other endowment conditions turn them into the sub-labor market, reducing the possibility of a higher level occupational mobility. Therefore, new-generation migrant workers should enhance the initiative to improve employability and promote self-awareness [9]. On the one hand, they can use service facilities opened to the public, such as public libraries to take education and training opportunities for enhancing their human capital. On the other hand, they should also be more actively adapted to the information age, improving the efficiency of job search on the Internet. What's more, cultivating urban civilization habits and strengthening character training are attached to great importance during the growth of new-generation migrant workers, in order to better integrate into the city and achieve upward mobility.

**The Environment Level.** Due to the heavy burden of family, poor living and working environment, it will result in poor cohabitation and weak financial and social network support. In this way, new-generation migrant workers' occupational mobility is subject to varying degrees of restrictions. It may even exacerbate isolation of the dual labor market and stratification of the local. At present, we should focus on building a social network, supporting by community, social organizations and enterprises, to enhance the employability of new-generation migrant workers. In the first, the input and output of community and NGO or other social organizations may play an important role in reducing the burden of new-generation migrant workers and expanding the social network [10]. Secondly, it is a reciprocal system arrangement for enterprises to develop internal human resources to promote the same group effect among new-generation migrant workers. In the last, financial enterprises should take responsibility in supporting the employment and entrepreneurship of vulnerable groups, including new-generation migrant workers.

**The Macro Policies.** The lack of public service and rights seriously restricts the improvement in employability of new-generation migrant workers. First of all, discriminatory policies, such as public service and labor welfare attached to the household registration, should be stripped away. The government ought to make a clear understanding of the responsibility for providing equal rights for this group in the labor market. In the operation, the government can set up a national strategic framework, based on 'system development and comprehensive empowerment', to promote the employability of new-generation migrant workers and take policy intervention to the three factors influencing their employability. Ultimately, it will form a panoramic support system from the individual and environmental endowment to the system level [11]. Specific interventions are as follows:

First of all, it is enhancing the human capital. The government provides compensatory basic training for new-generation migrant workers by issuing training vouchers or giving incentives such as subsidies and tax incentives. The second is to enrich the resources available for them. The government provides support for new-generation migrant workers by guiding financial enterprises with subsidies to offer more opportunity in the labor market. In addition, the chance of job search should be expanded. The government can improve new-generation migrant workers' efficiency of job search and employment by opening the labor market information as well as building an information platform in line with the characteristics of new-generation migrant workers. Moreover, offering a social support network is of great important. The government should provide financial support and coordination for migrant workers participating in community and social organization activities. In addition, the problem of free compulsory education for migrant workers' children also needs to be solved so as to alleviate the burden of their urban life. Eventually, the labor protection ought to be strengthened. The government may stipulate enterprise to set up the minimum standard migrant workers to live and training time standard.

New-generation migrant workers have become an important force in economic and social development in China. The employability of them determines the country's future economic

competitiveness. This study constructs a theoretical framework, based on national conditions and the particularity of this group, for analyzing new-generation migrant workers and hoping to obtain a ‘panoramic picture’ of the state of their employability and discuss how to enhance their employability. This article is still an exploratory research and the test of factors influencing new-generation migrant workers’ employability needs to take further study in the future.

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