

Innovation and Practice of Professional Talent Cultivation Models for Online Public Opinion in Local Universities in the Digital Intelligence Era: Post-print

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Abstract

[Objective] In the digital intelligence era, where trends of multimodal information dissemination, human-machine collaborative decision-making, and risk materialization are increasingly prominent, the online public opinion ecosystem is undergoing reconstruction. Talent cultivation for public opinion in local universities must not only overcome the predicaments of outdated curricula, theoretical overemphasis, and lack of simulation-based practice, but also construct innovative training models that align with societal needs and adapt to the new public opinion ecosystem.

[Method] Grounded in the practice of online public opinion talent cultivation at the School of Journalism and Communication of Hebei Normal University, this paper employs case analysis methodology to deconstruct the practical bottlenecks in local university training systems and distill a replicable framework for path innovation.

[Results] The study reveals that local universities can achieve bidirectional empowerment between theory and practice, as well as between technology and humanities, through a public opinion talent training model featuring theoretical foundation, comprehensive-dimensional practice, digital intelligence empowerment, and humanistic cultivation.

[Conclusion] The evolving online public opinion ecosystem in the digital intelligence era has imposed heightened requirements on professional talent cultivation in local universities. Local universities should empower public opinion practice through digital intelligence, innovate the orientation of professional talent training, serve local public opinion response, construct a new paradigm for online public opinion talent cultivation, and provide a theoretical framework and prac-

tical paradigm for the digital transformation of journalism and communication education.

Full Text

Preamble

Innovation and Practice in the Talent Cultivation Model for Online Public Opinion Professionals in Local Universities in the Digital Intelligence Era

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Abstract

[Objective] The digital intelligence era has highlighted trends of multimodal information dissemination, human-machine collaborative decision-making, and risk materialization, fundamentally reconstructing the online public opinion ecology. Local universities face the dual challenge of overcoming outdated curricula, theory-heavy instruction, and the absence of simulation-based practice, while simultaneously constructing an innovative talent cultivation model that aligns with societal needs and adapts to this new public opinion ecosystem. **[Method]** This paper draws on the practical experience of cultivating online public opinion professionals at the School of Journalism and Communication, Hebei Normal University, employing case analysis to deconstruct the practical bottlenecks in local university training systems and extract a replicable framework for path innovation. **[Result]** The study reveals that local universities can achieve bidirectional empowerment between theory and practice as well as technology and humanities through a talent cultivation model grounded in theoretical foundations, comprehensive practice, digital intelligence enablement, and humanistic cultivation. **[Conclusion]** The new changes in the online public opinion ecology in the digital intelligence era impose higher demands on professional talent cultivation in local universities. Local universities should empower public opinion practice with digital intelligence, reform professional talent cultivation directions, serve local public opinion response needs, and construct a new model for cultivating online public opinion professionals, thereby providing a theoretical framework and practical paradigm for the digital transformation of journalism and communication education.

Keywords: Digital Intelligence Era; Local Universities; Online Public Opinion Professionals; Talent Cultivation Model; Paradigm Innovation

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As digital intelligence technology rapidly iterates, the generation, evolution, and impact of online public opinion in a deeply mediatized society are undergoing unprecedented changes. On one hand, the formation and diffusion mechanisms of online public opinion are becoming increasingly complex amid the interplay of multimodal information; on the other hand, the characteristics of “shifting from single-point outbreaks to systematic 失控 (loss of control), from linear diffusion to fission-type growth, and from focused discussion to topic generalization and even opinion reversal” have become prominent. Consequently, cultivating public opinion professionals adapted to this new communication environment is both a societal and an epochal imperative.

1. The Reshaping of Online Public Opinion Ecology in the Digital Intelligence Era and the Lag in Professional Talent Cultivation

1.1 The Landscape and Evolution Mechanisms of China’s Online Public Opinion Ecology in the Digital Intelligence Era

Walter Lippmann defined public opinion as “the pictures inside the heads of other people—the pictures of themselves, of others, of their needs, purposes, and relationships” [3]. Public opinion refers to the publicly expressed, substantially consistent views or attitudes of the public toward specific social public affairs within a particular time and space, essentially reflecting social conditions and popular sentiment. Online public opinion represents the extension and manifestation of this environment in cyberspace, comprising the sum of opinions, emotions, attitudes, and demands expressed by the public via internet platforms regarding various social events, topics, and policies. With the nodal decentralization of communication rights, the noisy online public space has gradually become a “distribution center” for discussing and disseminating social conditions and popular sentiment. Public opinion spaces dominated by social media, short-video platforms, online media, and forums have made online public opinion a crucial component of social discourse. Against the backdrop of “everyone having a microphone,” public opinions on public affairs ride accessible mobile media into broader social horizons while simultaneously evolving through complex, massive information interactions and oscillations on social media. Public opinion expression exhibits characteristics of viewpoint pluralization, fragmented expression, and even emotionalized feedback, with social sentiment swept up in group opinions to form surging online public opinion.

Online public opinion serves as both a “regulator” of social stability and a potential “amplifier” of social unrest. In cyberspace, as an internet expression of real-world social conditions and popular sentiment, its generation, fermentation, and diffusion paths authentically reflect microcosms of public discussions on social issues through online public spaces, converging public attention focal points and mapping popular sentiment tendencies. The deep mediatization of digital intelligence communication and society has reshaped the generation and evolution logic of online public opinion. With updates and iterations in digital technology and network transmission technology, information dissemination speed and breadth have reached unprecedented levels, significantly shortening the cycle of online public opinion generation, fermentation, and impact while increasing its complexity and influence. Public opinion exists everywhere and at all times. Digital intelligence technologies, represented by generative artificial intelligence, exert unique influences on the emergence, aggregation, and outbreak of public opinion through precise natural language understanding capabilities and efficient multimodal content production, as well as intelligent algorithmic recommendations and automatic emotional triggering mechanisms. Platform scenarios supported by intelligent algorithms have become important arenas for public opinion fermentation. The evolution patterns and basic manifestations of online public opinion risk present features of “shifting from single-point outbreaks to systematic loss of control, from linear diffusion to fission-type growth, and from focused discussion to topic generalization and even opinion reversal.” Without effective guidance and supervision, false information and extreme speech can easily exploit these vulnerabilities, further exacerbating fluctuations in social sentiment. Therefore, analysis of public opinion event transmission paths in the digital intelligence era must begin at the occurrence stage, which mainly includes triggering factors and initial manifestations—decisive aspects for the entire development trajectory and ultimate impact of public opinion events [4].

1.2 Current Demand for Online Public Opinion Professionals in China in the Digital Intelligence Era

Online public opinion has produced significant and far-reaching impacts on economic operations, political decision-making, and social stability. The 55th Statistical Report on China’s Internet Development by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) shows that as of January 2025, China’s internet user base reached 1.108 billion, with an internet penetration rate of 78.6% [5]. In terms of public opinion volume, between January and October 2024, “Beijing News” and “Sina Hotspot” on the Weibo platform alone released 368 “situation announcement” type messages, representing a 73.6% increase from the same period in 2023 (212 messages) [6]. Faced with this massive online population, the high incidence of online public opinion, and the complex public opinion ecosystem, monitoring and governance of online public opinion have become an imperative of the times. The 19th Party Congress report proposed “strengthening internet content construction, establishing a comprehensive network governance system, and creating a clear and bright cyberspace” [7]. In responding to the new chal-

allenges posed by digitalized and intelligent public opinion, governance in the digital intelligence era requires professionals who understand both theory and practice and can master new technologies. The ultimate goal is to cultivate high-quality talents who can accurately grasp public opinion trends, deeply understand social psychology, and effectively respond to online public opinion challenges, thereby serving as a bridge between government and citizens, and between rationality and sensibility.

Effective strategies for online public opinion response hold significant value for social stability, public decision-making, and opinion guidance. In the current climate of frequent online public opinion crises, enterprises, party and government organs, and professional companies have universally recognized the importance and necessity of online public opinion analysis, monitoring, early warning, and management. Proactively analyzing public opinion, responding to demands, and managing image have become essential working methods. Changes in communication technology, public opinion ecology, and media landscape in the digital intelligence era are calling for public opinion professionals adapted to the times. Online public opinion professionals refer to applied talents specializing in internet public opinion information capture, monitoring, early warning, and analysis. With the rise of the online public opinion analyst profession, on September 5, 2013, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security's Employment Training Technical Guidance Center and People's Daily Online jointly launched a vocational training program for online public opinion analysts [8]. Currently, most public opinion professionals in China come from traditional media backgrounds, with talent cultivation concentrated in journalism and communication majors and their sub-disciplines, such as public opinion studies, internet and new media. Some management, computer network space governance, and network security programs also cultivate relevant professionals. However, compared with the complex online public opinion ecosystem, the supply side of professional talent clearly lags behind. Particularly with the development of the digital economy, the application of public opinion and big data has expanded to finance, health-care, education, agriculture, and other industries, causing demand for public opinion professionals to surge while existing talent reserves fall far short. Moreover, public opinion talent cultivation primarily occurs in application-oriented institutions at the undergraduate level, with scarce high-end talent, and minimal composite talent possessing both journalism and communication knowledge and capabilities in big data processing, artificial intelligence application, and crisis public relations practice.

2. Core Competency Structure and Cultivation of Online Public Opinion Professionals in the Digital Intelligence Era

2.1 Core Competency Structure for Online Public Opinion Professionals in the Digital Intelligence Era

The transformation of the online public opinion ecosystem in the digital intelligence era forces public opinion professionals to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical skills, effectively enhancing independent thinking and practical combat capabilities in online public opinion analysis [9]. The core competencies include:

First, professional skills in public opinion cognition and research. Professionals must grasp online communication patterns, master complex trends in various online public opinions, and deeply understand the social psychology, cultural factors, and potential impacts behind them. In a rapidly changing online environment, they must keenly capture public opinion dynamics and possess excellent report-writing abilities to compile complex information into clear, accurate, and in-depth reports that support scientific decision-making.

Second, intelligent data capture, analysis, and processing capabilities. Public opinion professionals need acute hotspot capture abilities to rapidly identify and track trending public opinion events, grasp dynamics in real-time, and skillfully employ large model technologies for in-depth analysis of key information points. They must construct logical chains of public opinion evolution, including event origins, development contexts, and public sentiment changes, to uncover inherent patterns and trends from massive data.

Third, public opinion communication and response capabilities. When confronting complex online public opinion environments, professionals must ensure accurate and rapid information transmission and formulate and execute response strategies swiftly. This requires rich practical experience to effectively guide online discourse and safeguard social stability and public interests using professional knowledge and skills. Additionally, professional crisis management knowledge, excellent communication skills, and social coordination abilities are indispensable, as public opinion monitoring and analysis simultaneously involve risk management. Professionals must possess strong risk management awareness to provide early warnings and response strategy recommendations for decision-makers. In digital intelligence environments, enhancing public opinion professionals' digital skills and universal data literacy constitutes not only a key measure for improving online public opinion governance efficiency but also a necessary step for advancing modernization of social governance [11].

Fourth, deep social cognition and insight into complex social psychology. Public opinion professionals must focus not only on online speech and behavior itself but also deeply explore the psychological mechanisms and emotional drivers behind them to accurately grasp the social psychological motivations reflected in online public opinion and precisely position public social demands.

2.2 Deficiencies in Current Online Public Opinion Talent Cultivation

China's current public opinion talent cultivation exhibits a structural imbalance between supply and demand, with four main shortcomings:

First, courses primarily involve one-way lectures from instructors, emphasizing theory and case analysis. Currently, most online public opinion courses are electives for undergraduates and graduate students, focusing on traditional public opinion theories and hot event analysis with limited student participation. While cases are representative, they often fail to keep pace with the rapid changes in the public opinion world of the digital intelligence era, causing teaching content to lag behind real-world public opinion ecology and technological iteration speed and making it difficult to fully demonstrate the complex diversity of digital intelligence era public opinion.

Second, curriculum content tends toward theoretical construction with insufficient simulation-based practice and a lack of platforms and scenarios for full-process monitoring and analysis. Since research in specialized fields such as public opinion theory and online public opinion theory started relatively late in China, academia is still working to construct independent knowledge systems for these disciplines. Teaching practice focuses on theoretical framework construction, academic concept analysis, and in-depth exploration of public opinion patterns from social science perspectives. Practical components mostly adopt case analysis methods through laboratories and free monitoring software for simulation training. However, the ultimate goal of public opinion research is serving practical applications, and an overly theory-focused teaching model may result in students' insufficient practical operational capabilities. Students lack opportunities for real or simulated public opinion practice, making them more susceptible to the dilemma of theory-practice disconnection.

Third, weak digital intelligence thinking and cutting-edge technology application capabilities, with insufficient interdisciplinary integration. Online public opinion involves multidisciplinary knowledge spanning sociology, psychology, political science, computer science, and statistics. The digital intelligence era demands practitioners possess interdisciplinary perspectives and digital intelligence technology application capabilities. However, the current teaching reality shows that journalism and communication students lack data science foundations, while computer science students neglect communication ethics, leading to a structural imbalance where "those who understand data don't understand communication, and those who understand communication don't understand algorithms." From the student perspective, there is ineffective integration of different disciplinary knowledge and methods, particularly regarding cutting-edge technology enablement. Most university public opinion courses have not incorporated frontier content such as multimodal analysis and large model applications. Insufficient interdisciplinary fusion makes it difficult to drive online public opinion research to meet current complex and changing academic and practical demands.

Fourth, a singular faculty structure and insufficient construction of “dual-qualification” teaching teams. Current instruction lacks composite talent who understand both public opinion and digital intelligence technologies. Many courses are taught by instructors with purely liberal arts backgrounds who lack practical experience in the latest public opinion monitoring and analysis technologies driven by digital intelligence and have insufficient industry expert representation. This makes it difficult to integrate the latest public opinion dynamics and technological developments into teaching, causing what students learn to diverge from actual needs.

3. Innovation and Practice in Local University Online Public Opinion Talent Cultivation—The Case of Hebei Normal University

Against the backdrop of digital intelligence technology reshaping the online public opinion communication ecology, local universities urgently need to explore talent cultivation models that adapt to era development and practical demands, providing theoretical frameworks and practical paradigms for the digital transformation of journalism and communication education and the cultivation of interdisciplinary composite talent. Taking the School of Journalism and Communication at Hebei Normal University as an example, the college has explored an integrated talent cultivation model for online public opinion professionals that is “theory-based, practice-oriented, technology-enabled, and humanistic-core,” achieving bidirectional empowerment between theory and practice as well as technology and humanities to cultivate professionals adapted to the needs of the times and society.

The college breaks disciplinary barriers by selecting outstanding undergraduate and graduate students from four majors—journalism, advertising, radio and television editing and directing, and broadcasting and hosting art—to enter the Hebei Big Data Communication and Online Public Opinion Research Base for learning and practice. Based on this, it has established a panoramic public opinion practice platform covering “public opinion theory teaching, public opinion information monitoring and capture, public opinion trend analysis and judgment, public opinion guidance and response strategies, and public opinion research,” enabling students to complete the entire process of online public opinion practice, training, and internships within the campus.

3.1 Theory as Foundation: Building a Theoretical Teaching Matrix and Strengthening Interdisciplinary Integration

Theoretical learning and research remain the cornerstone of public opinion analysis, and teaching content innovation is key to leading students in deeply studying online public opinion patterns. Therefore, in curriculum design, the college uses theoretical deepening and AI empowerment as dual drivers to build a curriculum matrix integrating multidisciplinary resources from journalism and communica-

tion, information science, sociology, and psychology, constructing a diversified and three-dimensional theoretical teaching system. On one hand, the college introduces advanced online public opinion theories from home and abroad, combined with the actual conditions of China's internet society, offering core courses such as "Public Opinion Studies," "Online Public Opinion Studies," "Introduction to Online Communication," and "Communication Psychology" for third-year undergraduates and second-year graduate students to build a solid theoretical foundation. On the other hand, the college emphasizes integrating artificial intelligence technology into theoretical teaching, offering courses like "AI and Data Journalism Production," "Intelligent Media Communication," and "Intelligent Media Operation," and is building cross-college courses such as "Big Data Capture and Information Mining" and "Digital Intelligence Public Opinion Monitoring" to strengthen students' mastery of fundamental theoretical knowledge about online public opinion communication mechanisms, intelligent recommendation algorithm principles, and their impacts, providing a cutting-edge, in-depth, and interdisciplinary theoretical learning framework. Additionally, the college emphasizes integration of production, teaching, research, and study, encouraging students to participate in research projects in courses and base practice, collaborate with supervisors on public opinion-related academic research, enhance research capabilities and theoretical literacy, and apply theoretical knowledge to solving practical problems. The college regularly invites industry experts and scholars for lectures, providing students with cutting-edge academic developments and industry trends through the latest research findings and industry dynamics to broaden academic horizons. Only by applying theoretical knowledge to practical problem-solving can theoretical understanding be deepened in future practice, forming a virtuous cycle of mutual promotion between theory and practice. Through deepening the theoretical foundation of online public opinion and building a comprehensive, systematic, and forward-looking knowledge system, the college empowers professional public opinion talent cultivation in all-dimensional research and relies on this to achieve transformation of public opinion research into curriculum construction, project applications, paper output, and think tank recommendations.

3.2 Practice as Application: Full-Process Public Opinion Practice Enhancing Comprehensive Competencies

Through the platform of the Hebei Big Data Communication and Online Public Opinion Research Base, the college has achieved methodological innovation in cultivating public opinion talent's practical abilities by integrating online public opinion practice throughout the entire talent cultivation process. Centered on "monitoring, analysis, and judgment," the process covers key steps including public opinion monitoring, data capture, pattern research, trend prediction, and research recommendations. After entering the public opinion base, students learn online public opinion monitoring system operations through preliminary coursework and professional training, then follow teacher demonstrations. Subsequently, they are assigned to different groups such as "Public Opinion

Monitoring and Data Capture,” “Hotspot Public Opinion Special Research,” “In-Depth Public Opinion Analysis,” “Public Opinion Trend Judgment,” and “Public Opinion Response,” rotating periodically to continuously conduct public opinion monitoring and research under the guidance of professional teachers.

3.2.1 Full-Process Public Opinion Monitoring Operations The base conducts daily work using “Sina Public Opinion Monitoring” as its primary platform. Through precise capture of information across the entire network and continuous attention to high-heat and high-sensitivity events, it accurately locks onto public opinion pulse points, cultivating students’ abilities to process information and data across disciplines and act as data detectives, social investigators, and trend analysts. Through continuous monitoring of hotspot public opinion, students can track the entire process from a single trending topic emerging in local forums to its explosion as a Weibo topic, thereby training their ability to research social issues and develop crisis early warning thinking. This cultivates students’ attention to hotspot information, news sensitivity, and acute sense of social sentiment formation.

3.2.2 Data Acquisition and Analytical Judgment Students regularly conduct public opinion monitoring and research at the base. After completing four steps— “public opinion monitoring, hotspot capture, data collection, and public opinion judgment” —students further simulate the actual work content of “public opinion analysts” by completing public opinion research report writing. Using digital intelligence technology to integrate information and produce visualized public opinion path maps, they simulate the entire process of public opinion event handling.

3.2.3 Scenario Simulation for Public Opinion Response and Review The base regularly organizes activities such as simulated press conferences and public opinion response drills, enabling students to practice public opinion response and crisis public relations abilities in practical settings. By enriching practical components and expanding public opinion-related content, students not only master core skills in public opinion analysis but also lay foundations for enhancing comprehensive qualities such as teamwork and communication coordination.

3.2.4 Professional Public Opinion Report Output Currently, relying on systematic public opinion simulation practice, the college has established the first multimedia laboratory in Hebei Province equipped with public opinion monitoring, evaluation, and automatic report generation functions. It regularly produces weekly public opinion reports, monthly reports, higher education special reports, and online hotspot public opinion briefs, focusing on providing in-depth research on online public opinion. By paying attention to public opinion explosion points and key communication nodes, and relying on analysis of communication patterns to provide pre-event predictions, the college achieves

public opinion trend monitoring and judgment of public opinion patterns. These public opinion reports directly serve public opinion response and think tank recommendations.

3.3 Digital Intelligence Enablement: Empowering Public Opinion Research Practice with Digital Intelligence Technology

Rapidly iterating digital intelligence technology has reconstructed the transmission mechanisms and potential risks of online public opinion, while also bringing new opportunities for online public opinion governance. In intelligent communication environments, public opinion data has reached the hundred-million level, and embedding intelligent technology into online public opinion monitoring and governance is both necessary and inevitable.

Leveraging the platform of the Hebei Big Data Communication and Online Public Opinion Research Base, the college applies new digital intelligence technologies to public opinion judgment, sentiment quantification, real-time data capture, information verification, and AI intelligent public opinion report generation. It has already cooperated with commercial public opinion data companies to establish digital intelligence public opinion analysis scenarios ranging from “information retrieval” to “multimodal content recognition” and from “passive response” to “precise prediction.” Taking AI intelligent public opinion report generation as an example, students use the V-analysis robot of the public opinion system to complete keyword optimization, semantic clustering, and report generation through designed instructions. With layered precise instructions, they can quickly form event summaries and complete public opinion report writing around keywords, enabling teams to rapidly build research frameworks, clarify public opinion focal points, and serve subsequent in-depth analysis. However, existing research mostly focuses on micro-level performance analysis of public opinion under single-technology support, such as sentiment analysis and natural language processing, with insufficient discussion on how technology fusion systematically reconstructs public opinion evolution mechanisms and risk transmission paths.

3.4 Humanistic Core: Focusing on Social Conditions and Public Sentiment, Attending to Social Governance, and Strengthening Humanistic Values

The ultimate direction of public opinion monitoring and research is serving the resolution of real-world social problems and implementing scientific and effective social governance. Therefore, in cultivating online public opinion professionals in the digital intelligence era, the “humanistic core” represents the anchor of core values beyond instrumental technological rationality. Its academic essence manifests as deep insight into social conditions and public sentiment, value reconstruction of social governance, and ethical consciousness of realistic concern.

The college’s public opinion talent cultivation is oriented toward linking with

society, serving localities, and enhancing governance. First, it focuses on the structured expression of public social psychology behind public opinion, clarifying that its value lies not only in “monitoring” but also in serving as emotional infrastructure for social governance, enabling talent to identify underlying social cruxes in practice. Second, it serves think tank reports and government decision-making, empowering improvements in social governance capabilities. By participating in government decision-making consultation and writing think tank reports, the college transforms public opinion monitoring and research results into scientific foundations for government decision-making, providing early warnings, risk assessments, and strategic recommendations to help local social governance paradigms shift from “blocking” to “channeling” and from “technical governance” to “value governance,” assisting governments in enhancing the intelligence and precision of social governance. Third, it enhances realistic concern among professionals. The college guides students to deeply contemplate issues such as social justice and public interest, cultivates their ability to correctly understand and respond to public opinion, develops their sensitivity and critical thinking toward social phenomena, and focuses on netizens’ social psychology in public opinion transmission paths and network community structures, enabling professionals to accurately grasp public opinion dynamics while being guided by humanistic concern in practice. Fourth, it enables comprehensive transformation of industry-academia-research integration. From full-dimensional public opinion monitoring to public opinion research outputting policy recommendations, the base uses public opinion monitoring practice as its characteristic to build a “government-industry-academia-research-application” integrated platform. Leveraging the distinctive regional advantage of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei coordinated development, it integrates public opinion research with talent cultivation, curriculum construction, scientific research, think tank recommendations, and government services, achieving deep integration of knowledge innovation and social service in public opinion research and talent cultivation. By building this platform, the college not only promotes the transformation of public opinion research results into government decisions and social governance but also drives the close integration of public opinion education with industrial development, providing strong talent support and intellectual backing for local economic and social development.

The fission-type development of digital intelligence technology has profoundly reshaped the online public opinion ecology, with multimodal communication, interwoven virtual-real risks, and algorithmic power reconstruction fundamentally challenging traditional public opinion governance paradigms. As the digital intelligence era deepens, the importance of online public opinion in social governance and public decision-making becomes increasingly prominent. Local universities, as crucial bases for talent cultivation, bear the heavy responsibility of delivering high-quality online public opinion professionals to society. By constructing diversified cultivation models—including building theoretical teaching matrices, strengthening full-process practical assistance, enabling digital intelligence technology, and focusing on social conditions and public sentiment and

social governance—universities can progressively deconstruct the structural contradiction between technological leaps and talent cultivation lags. Centered on the tripartite integration of “technological foundation-humanistic cultivation-governance coordination,” they can achieve a paradigm leap in talent capabilities from data collectors to decision-making intelligence brains.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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