



**Institutional Culture in Generational Thinking:  
An Economic–Anthropological Approach**  
*(University Students' Perceptions of Entrepreneurial Thought at the  
University of Oran 2)*

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**Abstract:**

This study seeks to shed light on institutional culture and on what institutions should consider and actively engage with rather than rely on expectations detached from a scientific strategy. This is manifested in how institutions interact with and adapt to the internal and external conditions in which they operate. Our focus is specifically on university students, whose perceptions of entrepreneurial thought in general are examined from an economic-anthropological perspective. This choice is grounded in several considerations, foremost among them the view of the university as an academic space that fosters an open-minded outlook among students, enabling them to establish their own ventures. The integration of the economic and anthropological fields does not merely concern production and the resolution of economic problems; rather, by bringing these two fields together, it becomes possible to uncover the processes of production, exchange, and patterns of consumption within their social contexts. Among the principal findings of our study are that institutions rely on scientific methods and approaches and establish incentive systems to encourage Algerian youth to move beyond fear and hesitation to build their own projects. In other words, institutions must foster a culture that nurtures creativity and an entrepreneurial spirit among young people. In this sense, the institution is a cultural-economic entity that reproduces the structure of society in accordance with its customs and traditions. The success of any institution is therefore closely linked to effective communication among individuals.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurial culture; business incubators; start-ups; youth; university students.

**1. The Problematic**

The world is experiencing profound transformations across social organisations, modes of production, and professional relations, among other aspects. Within this context, we invoke



“generational thinking” as a framework that combines the economic system and the organisational culture of institutions through an economic-anthropological approach that combines institutional culture as a symbolic system reflecting the representations of the society in which we live, with the dictates of modes of production and economic organisation. Therefore, institutional culture is not merely an administrative system; rather, it constitutes social spaces through which values, beliefs, and social symbolisms are understood. Pierre Bourdieu analyses this through his conception of symbolic capital, arguing that institutional culture does not rely solely on material profit but may derive its legitimacy from social and cultural structures shaped by prevailing values, customs, and patterns of thought.

The subject of “institutional culture in generational thinking” is among the profound and contemporary topics present within work environments. If the title is deconstructed, “institutional culture” refers to the set of values and beliefs that characterise the institution’s working environment. Among the behaviours and beliefs that distinguish the work environment are, for example, leadership style, effective communication methods, and an orientation toward innovation and creativity.

“Generated thinking” refers to the differences in patterns of thought among the various generations within the work environment. Each generation emerges under distinct social, economic, and technological conditions, which are reflected in its mode of thinking and in its way of life and work within the institution. Generational thinking is therefore strategic, determining decisions according to the long term. It is not confined to youth alone but encompasses members of society as a whole. This concept is also linked to sustainability and social responsibility, which strongly encourage institutions to consider practical strategies that positively affect them in the long term. For effective strategies to consolidate institutional culture in the context of generational thinking to exist, a set of conditions must be met, which constitute the fundamental principles of every institution. These include prioritising sustainability rather than the rapid profit often sought by youth, thereby contributing to the development of competencies and innovation, alongside flexibility, manifested in adaptation to the technological and cultural changes that underpin society.

Approaches to addressing institutional culture in Algeria vary according to the diversity of existing scientific disciplines. Some address it from an economic perspective, others address it from a political perspective, and so forth. However, as anthropological researchers, we have focused on the social dimension of these institutions. Our emphasis on this dimension stems from the daily discourse we observed within the university environment, in which a group of students expressed their viewpoints on start-up institutions, which were often perceived as spaces where individuals could not place trust, given that the concept of start-ups remains relatively recent in the collective consciousness.



Accordingly, how can we analyse the discourses of university students as a youth segment capable of supporting the national economy through its innovations?

- Can we identify solutions to build trust with university students, particularly within the institution, and with Algerian youth in general, and direct this segment toward start-ups?

The institution requires certain conditions for its existence, including those related to the nature of promotional policies, which are often conducted through the media, as well as the alignment of educational institutions that promote its culture, such as universities, institutes, and training centers where youth are strongly present.

Not only this but also any institution requires elements such as its institutional culture, which constitutes an interconnected, intangible fabric of values and customs that emerges and develop over time, shaping how employees operate within it and the principles that govern it, which differ from those of other institutions. When we speak of the culture of an institution, we focus on how it performs its mission and how it interacts with employees and society; research into the institution is research into the culture that governs its employees.

Institutional culture, in the view of many researchers, is defined as “a pattern of basic assumptions which has been discovered, invented, and developed by a group in dealing with problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive and think in relation to those problems” (Ali, 2020, p. 62).

Thus, engaging closely with young people, understanding their needs and aspirations, and providing services to them renders them more receptive to the idea of establishing an institution. The use of diversification strategies by institutions in their activities can foster a new mindset among young people, expanding their perceptions. Young people require more tangible elements (such as facilitation and support centres) than approaches based solely on digitalisation policies, which have come to govern all systems of society and which, despite the facilities they provide to social actors, are at times insufficiently qualified to gain the trust of individuals.

We do not deny the policy of digitalisation; rather, we prefer that it serves as a complementary mechanism to the institution's tangible activities, as it helps disseminate information and reach the widest segment of society. A digital society represents one of the best available means, if properly utilised, to preserve the intrinsic value of information. In this context, compared with others, start-ups are pioneering in this field.

Hence, how can institutional culture serve as a practical reference for directing and guiding the capacities and ideas of young people in general, and how may university students be transferred from an academic mode of thinking to entrepreneurial activity? That is, how may an idea be transformed into a project?



## 2. Hypotheses

To assert that institutional culture can constitute a practical referential framework that guides the creative ideas of Algerian youth and supports and advances the national economy, it is necessary, first and foremost, that an entrepreneurial spirit be present in the personality of the young individual. Such a spirit can only emerge if institutions pay attention to a cognitive dimension grounded in specialists in the field and if they function as social spaces that express society's values, customs, and traditions through social symbolism.

This is in addition to the organisational dimension, which enhances individuals' awareness of how to benefit from these institutions beyond what is stipulated by systems based solely on digitalisation policies. We do not reject digitalisation in principle; rather, this policy should follow or complement tangible activity, given the multiplicity of institutional models (such as start-ups and business incubators).

## 3. Why Select University Students?

Our selection of the university environment and university students as a specific social category is based on three points:

- Today, Algerian universities are replete with discussions revolving around the context of entrepreneurial thought. As lecturers within the university, we have observed among students a form of self-searching manifested in their pursuit of establishing their own projects. Their questions frequently centred on "What can I do with my studies?" or "What activity should I pursue after graduating from university?" This prompted us to consider a form of anthropologically grounded perplexity and deep research concerning the content of entrepreneurial thought and the set of conditions and principles it carried that enhanced the spirit of a student capable of generating an innovative project idea that subsequently developed his or her life skills.
- Entrepreneurial thought is taught at universities more than at any other educational institution. Consequently, university students are considered more knowledgeable regarding the meaning of entrepreneurial thought and the concepts associated with it. This opens the field for them, as a youth segment, to invest in and generate numerous discussions around it. Such measures may also create in the student's mind a degree of hesitation about establishing a start-up and initiating an economic project, yet one that aligns with society's requirements (that is, in accordance with its customs and traditions).
- University students possess an open mindset and a primarily academic formation. For this reason, the student is most suited to establishing a personal project, which may subsequently be developed into a start-up. This social actor is also capable of



ensuring the success of such an institution through the knowledge and acquisitions gained from the university environment and from society as a whole.

#### **4. Definition of Concepts**

##### **4.1. Entrepreneurial culture**

Entrepreneurial culture consists of the added value within a specific field and in working toward the construction of a project, defined as “a set of interrelated activities carried out in an organised manner, with a clearly defined starting point and end point, in order to achieve specific required outcomes that meet the current strategic needs of the institution” (Ali, 2020, p. 105).

Thus, the process of project construction requires a set of operations and activities from which revenues are anticipated. This reflects what entrepreneurial culture advocates, “which to some extent consciously directs the behaviour of individuals, institutions, and populations towards project organisation (...) In this sense, the culture of project organisation may be integrated into a favourable environment for the emergence of its organisational values, as well as for the recognition of the contribution of its organisers within their environment” (Ali, 2020, pp. 50–53). Therefore, entrepreneurial culture brings together a set of values, ideas, and convictions under the designation of project organisation. It is not possible to proceed to the establishment of a company without first passing through the project idea and its respective stages. In addition, the presentation of an idea must align with society's requirements, that is, its customs and traditions.

##### **4.2. Business Incubators**

Business incubators focus on the study of individuals' projects, beginning with the preincubation stage (la pré incubation), followed by the development of the initial idea and its market presentation. The subsequent incubation phase (la phase d'incubation) includes training in the relevant field. Finally, the acceleration phase (la phase d'accélération) helps save time.

Business incubators, therefore, pass through a series of stages to adopt and develop the project. Thus, “they are institutions that assist new and emerging enterprises in developing by providing shared operational space for such enterprises. In doing so, entrepreneurs benefit from a collaborative working environment with invaluable opportunities for mentoring and networking, financial support, and shared equipment. In short, they provide start-ups with a warm and secure place to grow and prosper during the first months or years. They usually offer adequate space, offices, shared services, practical management training, marketing support, and often access to certain forms of funding” (Thouria, 2021, p. 59).



### **4.3. Start-up Ups**

A start-up is an independent institution or a set of business activities. Some regard it as an initial stage in the formation of a particular project and are also defined as “young innovative enterprises in the sector of modern technologies” (Ismail, 2021, p. 70), while others maintain that such enterprises do not need to be active in the field of technology, as they may encompass multiple contexts.

Definitions of start-ups vary according to the multiplicity of scientific disciplines. Some associate them with modern technologies, others with commercial activities, and others with the legal dimension, among others. In addition to the social dimension and the multiple meanings and symbolisms it has, depending on the society in which it exists, this divergence is attributable to differences in disciplinary perspectives and to the fact that the concept of start-ups remains new and emerging within our society.

### **4.4. University Student**

A university student is defined as “the individual who pursues his or her studies and attends courses at a university or higher school” (Toubal, 2019, p. 50). He or she is also the individual who receives academic training at the university, enabling the subsequent acquisition of a wide range of knowledge and skills that “develop his or her personality in all aspects and prepare him or her for future work through the acquisition and retention of knowledge, the formation of positive attitudes through dialogue and interaction, the generation of knowledge, and the advancement thereof” (Ibrahimi, 2023, p. 46).

We now move from the presentation of concepts to what any institution contemplates about society, which we have summarised in fundamental points (expectations, flexibility, and promotion) as elements deemed necessary by any institution for the success of its activity and its expansion to encompass the widest possible scope. Moreover, these points constitute the point of departure for any institution, assisting it in establishing and advancing a future capable of ensuring its success, whether it is a social, economic, or other type of institution.

## **5. Expectations**

The expectations we refer to in this research context manifest in two aspects: first, what the young person expects from the institution, and second, what the institution expects from the young person. The process of expectations thus has a dual meaning.

Young people’s expectations may be reflected in the fear of the theft of the idea and in a lack of trust in the institution because of insufficient funding for the innovative project. This may lead the young person, in some instances, to retreat from initiating his or her project and to retain ideas privately without disclosing them or working on their development.

With respect to the institution’s expectations, these may manifest as apprehension about the young person’s limited experience and field expertise, which may hinder the innovative



project and leave it incomplete. Thus, expectations are defined as “an unwritten psychological contract, determined or anticipated by the individual or the organisation, each from the other, during the individual’s period of work within the organisation” (Salem, 2013, p. 176). This explains our previous view that expectations are not confined solely to the young person or the institution; rather, both may harbor negative expectations toward the other, owing to the novelty of this thinking within our society. Individuals still approach entrepreneurial thought with reservation, since, according to societal customs and traditions, economic dealings are generally based on direct, explicit exchanges and systems of production.

In this context, Sami Mahyaoui indicated to Sky News Arabia that “during the past few years, the Algerian state has begun to attach great importance to start-ups, but the reality of the market is shaped by the mentality of managers of small and medium-sized enterprises, while founders of start-ups have observed a real lack of trust. Managers of small and medium-sized enterprises do not trust the quality of the services provided by start-ups and do not fully recognise the importance of technology. He also considers that start-ups in Algeria fear not receiving their payments from institutions, as the latter possess the power” (Thouria, 2021, p. 62). Fear is not limited to the nonreceipt of payment; it may extend to the idea presented to these institutions.

## 6. Flexibility

The factor of flexibility within the institution is among the important elements in confronting the challenges that individuals may encounter, as it “refers to adaptation to changing circumstances and unforeseen crises” (Salem, 2013, p. 178) and to the prompt handling of emerging problems and the provision of solutions in place of routine procedures. This enhances the principle of flexibility in handling tasks and performing duties and enables individuals to establish social relations characterised by high levels of interaction and coexistence within the institution.

It is also necessary to “call upon those responsible for these start-ups to change mentalities and to create an appropriate environment for the establishment of these institutions upon which the state relies heavily to serve as an effective contributor to the national economy and to create employment opportunities for youth and to emerge from the isolation they experienced during previous years (...) and that they possess a more social than economic character. Abdelrahman Aya called upon the owners of these institutions to change their performance and the services they provide, which, according to him, stems from changing mentalities” (Mona, 2020, pp. 416–417). Accordingly, the social character of any institution enhances the economic factor, which cannot exist without harmony and significant interaction among individuals working within institutions.



In this sense, approaches to engaging with start-ups differ according to the researchers' specialisations. From our perspective as anthropological researchers, the social dimension of relations among individuals is the principal driver of increased productivity within any institution, regardless of its nature.

## **7. Promotion**

“Enabling start-ups to become acquainted with their environment and to integrate into it, assisting them in obtaining funding through the relationships that link them to capital owners, and subsequently introducing the incubated institutions through the media and participation in various exhibitions, as well as enabling them to benefit from communication networks that bring together incubated institutions, in addition to assisting them in organising events at their workplace” (Thouria, 2021, pp. 60–61).

In the promotional process, before accompanying institutions in the preparation of their business plans, it is necessary to conduct fieldwork and interview the target group regarding institutions in general and start-ups and business incubators in particular, given variations in educational levels and differing mentalities. The discourses of this target group must then be taken into consideration and analysed before engaging society through promotional campaigns and by relying on media that communicate at their level and align with their intentions. In this manner, the objective of establishing the greatest possible number of projects at the national level may be achieved.

Thus, the promotional process at present is no longer confined to what television dictated in the past; rather, it has assumed multiple forms. Social media and virtual social networks have become among the principal means of supporting any commercial activity. Moreover, engaging directly with the public, promoting specific goods, and speaking before audiences about intended initiatives also constitute promotional activities. The organisation of training sessions by trainers and specialists in various fields may serve as publicity and promotion for all that is intended.

Following the presentation of these research points, we may now turn to what institutions ought to undertake and what they should consider, practically and scientifically, simultaneously, on the basis of our continuous engagement within the university space and our examination of the discourses of certain university students.

## **8. The Algerian Youth: Between the Creation of Entrepreneurial Spirit and Economic Exchanges**

The creation of an entrepreneurial spirit among Algerian youth refers to encouraging the individual to transform his or her creative idea into a successful project and to foster a spirit of initiative, that is, generating an idea and working on it. This enhances creativity and



innovation among young people in general and among students in particular, given that entrepreneurial projects are characterised by “the foresight possessed by individuals, enabling them to select available market opportunities in order to activate their ideas and establish their projects, or to develop already existing projects through responding to new general opportunities” (Chouki, 2000, p. 466).

Moreover, the entrepreneurial spirit does not require solely economic competence; rather, its creation and reinforcement within the individual also require social knowledge to resolve the problems it encounters. This may be termed “social entrepreneurship” by some thinkers, that is, the provision of services to segments of society in a manner that benefits both the idea-holder and the members of society. This type of pragmatic relationship is notably present within our society and culture. Social relations here are not confined to the profit dimension alone; rather, they demonstrate the modes of thinking of individuals, their values, and their customs, among other aspects.

Here, we recall what anthropological studies in the economic field discuss, linking the cultural dimension to all that is economic, including production, organisation, and the ways individuals contribute to resolving economic problems, which translate into behaviours and actions. Economic anthropology is not merely concerned with rational acts aimed at achieving material profit; rather, it addresses how production, distribution, exchange, and consumption occur within the social contexts to which individuals belong and which are governed by societal values, customs, and traditions.

“It may be stated that economic anthropology is the product of fruitful cooperation between anthropologists on the one hand and economists on the other. The studies and research conducted by anthropologists in primitive and traditional societies have assisted economists in understanding the economic system, which consists of several subsystems, such as systems of ownership and tenure, systems of labour and production, and systems of exchange and distribution in those societies and their relationships with other social systems. It also led them to reconsider many views and ideas concerning the nature of the economy in general” (Dahmani Suleiman, 2022, p. 51). Hence, we emphasise that the entrepreneurial spirit, as previously indicated, does not depend solely on economic competence; rather, it encompasses social knowledge and the values, customs, and traditions that accompany it, which influence the individual's mindset. From our perspective as researchers, the entrepreneurial spirit requires two fundamental dimensions: a cognitive dimension and an organisational (structural) dimension. The cognitive dimension involves appointing specialists in the field to address entrepreneurship in general. The organisational or structural dimension, which enables the project holder to become acquainted with their environment, will be addressed in detail.

### **8.1. The Cognitive Dimension**



Can every university student realise a project? What criteria may be employed to classify students?

There are no fixed criteria for classifying students. Our function consists of preparing the student psychologically and pedagogically, equipping him or her with skills, and developing his or her objectives to achieve them. This dimension includes specialists in the field whose role is to focus on the proposed projects and discuss them using scientific methods.

The role of specialists is also manifested in guiding and directing the proposed ideas and in indicating how the individual may work on and develop his or her idea until it becomes a substantial research project capable of bringing together a considerable number of partners working collaboratively.

The university contributes significantly to strengthening entrepreneurial thought, as it is an educational institution that cultivates students' ways of thinking and creativity within their field of specialisation. This renders the student more aware of what this new model of institutions entails and may open future investment horizons in the entrepreneurial field. We consistently refer to empirical evidence from the field, that is, from the university environment, where what has been observed in the thinking patterns of this segment of society is their persistent fear of the future and of remaining unemployed after graduation.

This fear may serve as a stimulus that generates creative ideas among university students. In addition, many students today engage in tasks far removed from their academic specialisation. Their involvement in activities outside the university walls is not motivated solely by material needs. However, this also constitutes a factor driving them to undertake activities other than study, as well as the desire to secure a future that, in their perception, remains uncertain.

For this reason, this dimension fosters a spirit of initiative toward entrepreneurial activity. The reason for this lies in the level of awareness attained by university students today, particularly at Algerian universities, which attach importance to entrepreneurship and teach it across most specialisations. This contributes to an increase in achievements grounded in strategic thinking, that is, thinking on the basis of scientific foundations and a clear plan, among this youth segment.

## **8.2. The Organisational (Structural) Dimension**

This dimension encompasses the project holder's aspiration to benefit from all the opportunities afforded by his or her social environment, as this helps shape how services are formulated for members of society. It also includes the project holder's positioning within multiple environments, that is, the social spaces with which he or she interacts to achieve objectives and goals. The project holder's positioning within multiple social environments facilitates the alignment of the proposed project as a feasible undertaking with the external environment (society) and its needs. This dimension assists individuals in achieving the



greatest possible degree of alignment between the project and the parties working toward its success, particularly when the organisational plan is clearer.

The positioning of the project holder reflects the reciprocal process within the anthropological context, which is not confined to buying and selling alone but extends beyond this context and is understood as a social relationship rather than merely a material one. An example of this is what Marcel Mauss addressed in his discussion of gifts and exchanges. In “The Gift” (1925), he presented a conception of an economy based on the idea of nonmarket exchange, arguing that the gift is a social process governed by rules of mutual obligation and that it reinforces social and political relations within traditional societies (Group of Researchers, 2016, p. 7).

The latter establishes forms of obligation (such as acceptance, reciprocation, giving, and the construction of social status). In other words, through the gift, strong social bonds are constructed, bearing deep significance within human thought. Thus, reciprocal economic relations occur within social relationships, and this is evidenced by the fact that the act of reciprocation is not confined solely to the material dimension but may also express relationships of affection and moral ties, among others. Similarly, when an individual within society presents a project idea to an economic institution, he or she carries not only the idea but also a societal culture that positions him or her to respond in ways reflecting the reality of the social organisation within which he or she lives.

Hence, what economic anthropology discusses in relation to exchanges does not stop at market exchange as conventionally understood in economics. Rather, economic anthropology establishes the existence of relations that transcend the law of supply and demand and purely material economic designations, which are not apparent to the general public but are revealed specifically through anthropological readings. “Keith Hart and Chris Hann focus on a contemporary approach to the economy that takes into account the impact of capitalism and globalisation on economic interactions. Hart highlights the concept of the ‘informal economy’, indicating that markets are not merely capitalist institutions but social spaces in which parallel economic relations emerge alongside the formal economy, relying on trust and social networks rather than strict market laws. Hann, for his part, advances an approach of economic plurality, arguing that modern economies do not eliminate traditional forms of exchange but incorporate them within a broader framework that balances local customs with the mechanisms of the global market” (Rachid Abouch, 2025, p. 5).

## 11. Conclusion

In conclusion, the anthropological approach to institutional culture and its relationship to generational thinking presents a set of issues, foremost those that transcend the limits of the administrative organisation within which any institution operates. The institution is a cultural



and economic entity that reproduces society's values and structure, which in turn influences its future. Institutions cannot succeed on the basis of expectations and conjectures unless they adopt a culture grounded primarily in scientific strategic thinking that supports young people in realising their aspirations. There is also a significant element within institutions that may either ensure the success of what the institution seeks to achieve or undermine it, namely, effective communication. Consideration must therefore be given to generations and to the conflicts that may arise between them.

Its contribution to achieving economic diversification for the country has led us to formulate a set of key points, the most important of which are as follows:

- The thinking of university students should be directed through specialists to benefit from the spaces available within universities and vocational training centers and to present their creative ideas.
- The institution's establishment of incentive systems to encourage Algerian youth to present their projects.
- Reinforcing the student's mind, the value of collective work may significantly contribute to increasing the level of productivity and intellectual diversity in undertaken activities.
- The situations of institutions should be evaluated at regular intervals to avoid recurring errors and address them.
- Making the university a space with an appropriate environment for presenting and discussing ideas and training students so that they may embody and develop their ideas.
- Informing students of all the legal conditions required for establishing an institution, from idea to project, significantly contributes to reducing the problem of fear and hesitation experienced by many students.
- Facilitating and supporting centers for youth should be established as reception, guidance, and accompaniment bodies for young project and idea holders, and all youth needs should be identified through the data they provide.
- Organising scientific events within the university environment in which undergraduate and master's degree students primarily participate to improve their perception of entrepreneurial thought and guide them in how to search for a project idea.

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