

Start-up Mindset: Preparing China's Entrepreneurs for the AI Global Innovation Economy

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Abstract

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies is fundamentally transforming the nature of entrepreneurship and the conditions under which innovation emerges and scales in the global economy. In this context, traditional entrepreneurial models based on replication, rapid scaling, and growth-driven capital attraction are becoming increasingly insufficient, particularly in countries undergoing structural economic transformation such as China. The objective of this study is to analyse the formation of a start-up mindset as a central component of China's innovation management strategy in the AI era and to identify practical mechanisms that support the development of globally competitive entrepreneurs. The research employs a qualitative analytical approach, combining policy analysis, literature review, and case study methodology, with particular attention to innovation ecosystems, structural shifts in entrepreneurial paradigms, and work-integrated learning models. The findings demonstrate that the emergence of an AI-driven innovation economy requires a fundamental transformation of entrepreneurial logic, characterised by a shift toward original innovation, global market orientation, strategic alignment with national priorities, sustainable organisational models, and long-term value creation. These shifts are further reinforced by the evolution of ecosystem conditions, including the development of patient capital, the strengthening of university–industry knowledge transfer, adaptive regulatory frameworks, and increased emphasis on international professional experience. The analysis also shows that artificial intelligence functions as a cross-cutting factor that reshapes opportunity recognition, innovation processes, competitive advantage, and organisational structures. In this context, the “Chinese Internship in EU” Project, developed by the AuxBridge R&D Center, is examined as an applied model of work-integrated learning that bridges the gap between education and practice by embedding participants in real international business and technological environments. The study concludes that the effective formation of a start-up mindset in China requires a systemic approach that integrates technological competence, practical experience, and global exposure within a coordinated innovation ecosystem. Such an approach can significantly enhance the capacity of Chinese entrepreneurs to operate successfully in the AI global innovation economy and support the country's transition toward high-quality, innovation-driven development.

Keywords

Start-up Mindset, Artificial Intelligence, Innovation Management, Entrepreneurship in China, Global Innovation Economy, Work-integrated Learning, International Internships, Innovation Ecosystems