

Entrepreneurship and viability in Nigerian Architectural firms

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Abstract: *There is a paradigm shift from the central themes of traditional architectural practice to the effects of ideology (culture) and its role in viable architecture practice. Previous theories and empirical studies primarily examined the role of ideology in decision making, strategies to enhance viability of firms. The emphasis of most studies however stopped short of addressing the relationship between ideology and organisational strategies that enhance firms' profitability, viability, and sustainability through entrepreneurship. Although limited empirical studies asserts that entrepreneurial challenges have resulted to architectural firms not having the ability to plan for the future and carve the market share by balancing specialization with profitability. The exploratory nature of the study bridges the gaps created by existing studies by shifting emphasis from engineering/construction firms to architecture firms. The variables leveraged on viability (profitability, sustainability, diversity etc), ideology (entrepreneurial mindset and risk taking etc) and practices (partnership and innovation) using a cross sectional questionnaire survey method and a sample from ARCON Register of Firms. The study revealed that firms that emphasised entrepreneurial diversification as a survival strategy showed enhanced financial performance. Opportunities from increased skill acquisition and innovation versus traditional architecture practices. Increasing skills and innovations may contribute to firm viability by assisting in gaining an edge (niche viability). The paper further recommends that entrepreneurial education should be part of the core curriculum of architecture training in order to impact on the skills sets for architectural practice which is in-line with sustainable professional skills capacity and emerging enterprises in the architectural profession ("Archi-preneur").*

Keywords: entrepreneurship, innovation, organisational strategies, sustainability, viable architecture practice

1. Introduction

Due to the changing and diversity of the building design market, architectural firms in the continue to face multiple responsibilities, which involve decision making, personal and personnel management and professional expectations. These roles are played by these firms to build long term sustainability, in this context viability. For architectural firms to be viable, entrepreneurship activities are recently been adopted by firms to meet up to the diversity of the market needs and have an edge in the competitive industry. This trait has further lead to more architects with an entrepreneurial mind-set who will start new firms by following the normal entrepreneurial process which comprises identifying a viable opportunity, applying ingenuity and creativity in conceptualising something that can effectively take advantage of the identified opportunity, finding the resources needed for the conceptualised enterprise, establishing the new enterprise, managing the enterprise, accepting risk and reaping the anticipated reward (Neiman, 2006). This responsivity has impacted architectural

professionals and firms to continue to be leading giants in innovative, smart and sustainable building designs (Castro et al., 2018) and "high-tech interior decorations (Abdrakhmanov, 2018) and development of new building processes, procedures and protocols" (Zhou et al., 2017; Sarmiento, 2018).

Founders of architectural firms have built the mindset of entrepreneurs like other small business owners to remain viable, sustainable and relevant in the long run. Most founders of architectural firms look to receive reasonable reward and the opportunity for design expression. They do so for a variety of reasons including the associated independence, life-style, and to work with other like-minded individuals. For most architects, success constitutes professional respect, producing interesting buildings, and earning an adequate income (Klein, 2010). In today's competitive and ever-changing diversified world, the architectural industry is continually redefining itself. Although new building technologies and methods of communicating with clients have emerged as a result of innovation, the majority of the architecture industry remains pretty outdated, with architects relying on client fees

received from projects to run their architecture firms. Perhaps as a result of the emergence of start-ups in the technology sector and the increased competitiveness of the global economy, architects have recently chosen not to confine themselves to the world of architecture and instead to use their unique set of skills and competences to develop the entrepreneurial spirit of their firms. (Arch Daily, 2021).

According to Cuff & Wriedt (2010), one key to exploring enhanced productivity for architects may reside in the profession's self-conception and its relationship to entrepreneurship.

"Entrepreneurship is a process by which individuals...pursue opportunities without regard to the resources they currently control." (Stevenson and Jarillo, 1999).

While this definition was conceived in a business-oriented body of research, it bears a striking resemblance to the activities of an architect. In other words, architects are adept at pursue opportunities to shape the built environment without much deference to their relatively limited control of the capital resources employed in building.

Another commonly cited definition of entrepreneurship frames it "as the process of creating value by bringing together a unique combination of resources to exploit an opportunity." (Stevenson and Gumbert, 1985). This statement can likewise be understood in the context of architectural practice; architects are no doubt skilled in leveraging opportunities by bringing together a diverse combination of resources to create value through architecture. Even though architecture can be understood as an entrepreneurial endeavour, entrepreneurship isn't often an explicit part of architectural practice or education. As such, architects rarely view themselves as active entrepreneurs or leverage their entrepreneurial potential in any venue other than architectural practice. It is against the background that this research aims to assess the entrepreneurship and viability in Nigerian architectural firms.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Several theories have been proposed to explain what makes firms viable. These theories include Organisational and Systems theories which are widely applied in professional organisations. Architecture firms are knowledge-based professional organisations with an expectation of economic, ethical, sociological, and sustainable viability. Organisations as systems undergo life cycles, and architecture firms as professional organisations undergo business life cycles. Veryard

(2011) propounds that there are always future expectations for business ventures to become ultimately profitable.

The viability of the business in each stage determines the health and profitability of the business as it grows. Profitability is not limited to the economic sense. For instance, non-profit institutions, like non-governmental organisations, may not be profit seeking but are viable if the company can deliver social or another value. Research has recognised four dimensions of viability, namely; robustness, niche viability, sustainability and time - delimited viability (Gilkey, 2010; Veryard, 2011). Veryard (2011) also identified six factors that determined viability including profitability, market value, growth, system (organisational) strategies, survival strategies and culture which includes ideology, beliefs, and myths.

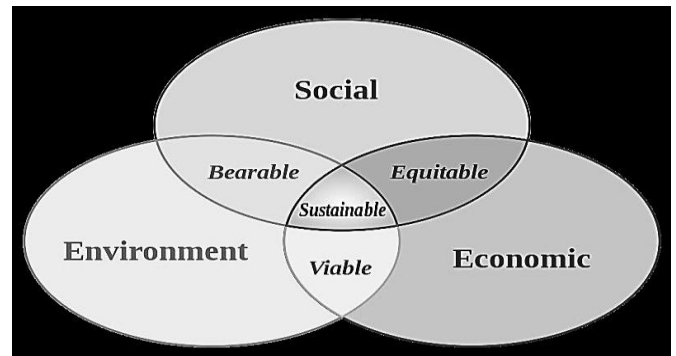


Figure 1: Relationship Between Sustainability and Viability

Source: Ola-Adisa (2016)

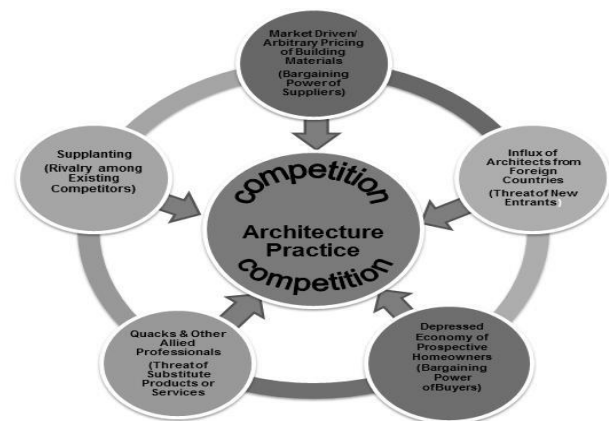


Figure 2: Forces That Shape Architectural Practice Strategy

Source: Gofwen, Ola-Adisa & Daniel (2018)

1.2 Problem Statement

Several challenges are being faced by the global architecture community and this must be addressed by making emphasis on persistent effort and corporate culture to allow architectural firms

remain in the list of the most successful companies in the world (Ityayar, 2020). Some of the challenges faced in recent times is the determination of the practice typology (Linley, 2017). According to Santa et al (2017), some other challenges reported is the lack of entrepreneurial skills and the authors concluded that it is urgently important to explore and adapt an architectural business model that allows architects to understand and provide more sustainable business elements more easily. These entrepreneurial challenges have resulted to architectural firms not having the ability to plan for the future and lack of knowledge of sound business, the need to carve market share by balancing specialization with profitability and the changes in target users and user experience dictating varied or personalized mode of service delivery (Awolere, 2011). This does not mean that they are not entrepreneurial but it was further identified that many architects do not have the background that can guide them in the process of starting and building a firm that can endure the challenges associated with architectural practice (Vosloo, nd). Review of empirical studies of management in architectural firms reports that previous literature focused on leadership behaviours of founders (Wang et al., 2011) and communication skills for workplace success (Doyle, 2017; Peter, Oni, Ogunowo, Fateye, 2019). There is however very little literature that has categorically described the entrepreneurial characteristics that are required for the successful running of an architectural firm and how they influence the firm. although those characteristics are not the only factors that completely predict success (Omar et al., 2017). The success of their firms is highly needed in sustaining economic growth and creating much-needed employment opportunities (Set, 2017). These studies however stopped short of addressing the relationship between ideology and organisational strategies that enhance firms' profitability, viability, and sustainability in architectural firms. This research further aims to bridge that gap by studying the entrepreneurship and viability in Nigerian architectural firms.

1.3 Research Objective and Questions

The objective of this research is to assess the entrepreneurship and viability in Nigerian Architectural Firms. This would be achieved through providing data and responses to these research questions –

- i. What is the viability of Nigerian architectural firms as entrepreneurial start-ups?

- ii. What is the ideology of Nigerian architectural firms as entrepreneurial start-ups?
- iii. What are the practices of Nigerian architectural firms as entrepreneurial start-ups?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this research would be significant to many architects' firms that have been established to grow beyond most definitions of small- or even medium-sized businesses, with limited specialised entrepreneurial or business managerial guidance available. The research will further pin-point that an entrepreneurial mind-set and skills can assist in establishing and growing an architectural firm through properly planning, structuring and management of its business model to grow and sustain an architectural firm.

2. Materials and Methods

This research adopts a mixed approach to assemble data related to entrepreneurship and viability in Nigerian Architectural Firms. The quantitative approach adopts the distribution of a questionnaire survey to retrieve data from these firms while the qualitative criteria was approached through a review of related literatures for validation of findings. Subjects (architects) for the study were pooled from ARCON's Register of Firms. A total of 68 subjects were randomly sampled based on the network of the researcher. The methodological approach used was derived from the array of methods adopted from a rigorous literature review. Variables adopted on the questionnaire includes variables centred on viability (profitability, sustainability, diversity etc), ideology (entrepreneurial mindset and risk taking etc) and practices (partnership and innovation). Data presented was an outcome of a research question and investigated using questionnaires similar to the ones used in Oluwatayo et al. (2018a; 2018b) and Akinola et al. (2018). Factor analysis was employed for the data analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 present the response rate of subject of the study based on the years of establishment of their firms. 50% of respondents are from firms that have been operational for over 5 years, 25% were from firms that 2-4 Years and 0-2 Years respectively

Table 1: Architectural Firms Years of Experience

<i>Years of Establishment</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
0-2 Years	25%

2-4 Years	25%
5 Years and Above	50%

Figure 3 shows the Viability of Nigerian Architectural Firms as Entrepreneurial Start-ups. 28.57% of the respondents strongly agreed that their firm has a good record of profitability and 53.57% agreed to this. 10.71% remained neutral while disagreed 7.14%. No respondents strongly disagreed to this. With regard to if the firm has a good reputation in the marketplace, 50% of the respondents strongly agreed and 28.57% agreed to this. 21.42% remained neutral. No respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed to this. 28.57% of the respondents strongly agreed that their firms are consistent and have a good history of repeat clients. 32.14% of the respondents also agreed to this. On the other hand, 14.28% disagreed and 25% strongly disagreed to this. With regard to if the firm has a particular area of expertise, 28.57% of the respondents strongly agreed while another 28.57% agreed to this. 14.26% were neutral while 17.86% disagreed and 10.71% strongly disagreed to this. With regard if the firm has varying delivery methods and efficiency, 21.43% of the respondents strongly agreed to this. 25% agreed while 17.86% were neutral. On the other hand, 10.71% disagreed and 25% strongly disagreed to this. For the variable that the organization has a good depth of key staff, including next generation of owners in place, 14.26% of the respondents strongly agreed to this. 25% agreed while 42.85% remained neutral. 10.71% disagreed and 17.86% strongly disagreed. Finally, 14.26% of the respondents strongly agreed that they diversify their services and another 25% also agreed to this. 42.85% were neutral while 10.71% disagreed and 17.86% strongly disagreed to this.

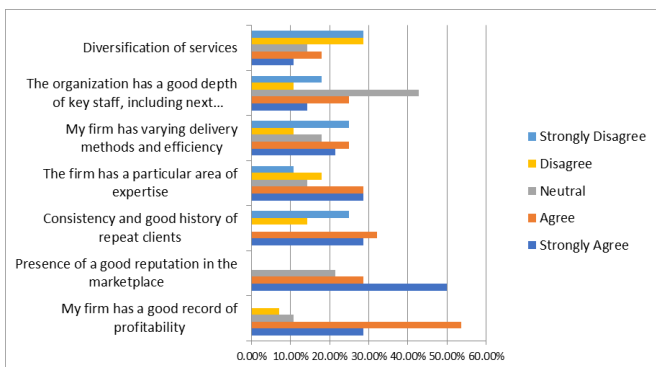


Figure 3: Viability of Nigerian Architectural Firms as Entrepreneurial Start-ups

Figure 4 shows the Ideology of Nigerian Architectural Firms as Entrepreneurial Start-Ups. 53.57% of the respondents strongly agreed that

making of profit is concern faced by them while 48.15% agreed to this. No respondents were neutral. Also, none disagreed or strongly disagreed to this. With regard to if they are aggressiveness in the pursuit of business opportunity, 21.43% of the respondents strongly agreed to this while 25% agreed. 17.86% remained neutral. On the other hand, 10.71% disagreed while 25% strongly disagreed to this. With regard to if the firm encourages entrepreneurial risk taking, 39.23% of the respondents strongly agreed that their firms do take risks. 21.43% also agreed to this while 17.86% were neutral. On the other hand, 10.71% of the respondents disagreed and another 10.71% strongly disagreed to this. 28.57% of the respondents strongly agreed that they encourage staffs to spot commercial opportunities for the firm. 25% agreed while 17.86% were neutral. Another 17.86% disagreed while 10.71% strongly disagreed to this. With regard to if the firm encourages building networks of relationships with external people and organisations, 35.71% of the respondents strongly agreed and 28.57% strongly agreed to this. 21.43% were neutral while 14.26% disagreed. No respondents strongly disagreed. Finally, with regard to if the firm encourages a multi-tasking culture among its employees, 57.14% of the respondents strongly agreed and 14.26% agreed to this. Another 14.26% were neutral, 14.26% disagreed 14.26% also strongly disagreed.

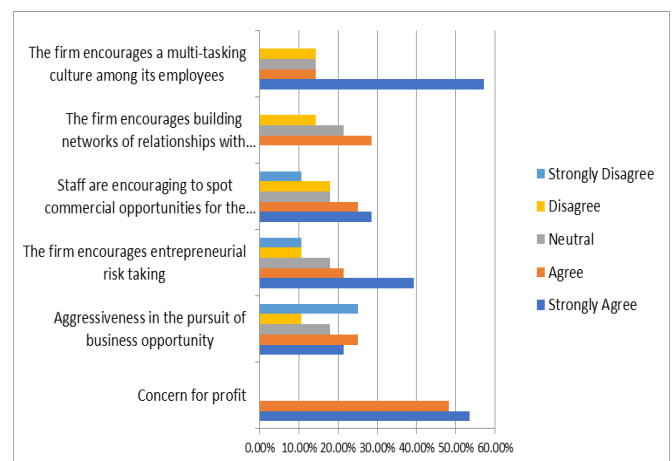


Figure 4: Viability of Nigerian Architectural Firms as Entrepreneurial Start-ups

Figure 5 shows Projects Practices of Nigerian Architectural Firms as Entrepreneurial Start-Ups. 17.86% of the respondents strongly agreed that their firm has a catalogue of stalled projects for potential investors. 21.43% of the respondents agreed while 17.86% remained neutral. On the other hand, 25% of the respondent disagreed and another 17.86% strongly disagreed to this. With

regard to if the firm has themselves students of local and global issues (and by extension opportunities) that transcend the built environment. 50% of the respondents strongly agreed while 21.43% agreed to this. 17.86% were neutral. 10.71% of the respondents disagreed and 50% strongly disagreed to this. With regard to if the firm has pro-actively establish relationships and partnerships with other entrepreneurial entities, 60.71% of the respondents strongly agreed and 35.71% agreed. 3.57% were neutral. No respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed to this. 28.57% of the respondents strongly agreed that the firm explores practices and initiatives as a response to an expanded competency in global challenges and entrepreneurial solutions. 25% agreed while 42.85% were neutral. 3.57% of the respondents disagreed and no respondents strongly disagreed. Finally, with regard to if the firm embrace their role in advancing, promoting, and even financing solutions, 10.71% of the respondents strongly agreed and 14.26% agreed. 35.71% remained neutral. On the other hand, 10.71% disagreed and 28.57% strongly disagreed to this.

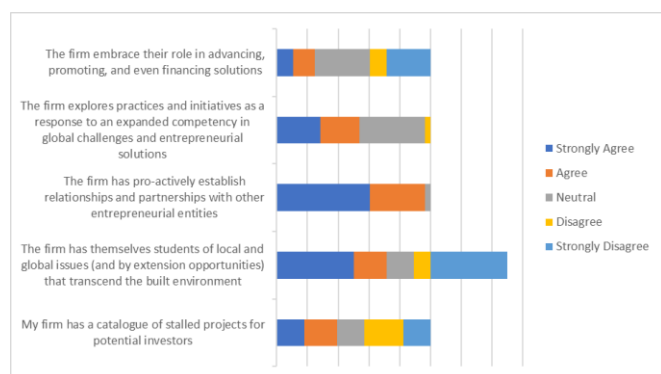


Figure 5: Projects Practices of Nigerian Architectural Firms as Entrepreneurial Start-Ups

These findings are important, as they have demonstrated that Nigerian firms like American architecture firms differ on ideological lines (Blau, 1984). Previous studies (Blau, 1984; Thompson et al, 2004), suggested that firms ideologies exerted an influence on firms, this present study therefore identify the implication of these influences. The study confirmed previous studies assertion that ideologies form a significant part of firm culture (Goll et al, 2001; Oluwatayo, 2009). The results also confirmed firm size is also a contributory factor to the differences in architecture firms (Oluwatayo, 2009). This is important to the present study as previous literature noted that internal influences included perceptions of architects in conceiving

practices as businesses rather than mainly creative ventures (Winch & Schneider, 1993).

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4. Conclusion

This research reveals a significant array of attributes among architectural firms which are consistent with entrepreneurship, among which are creativity, adaptability, criticality, confidence, initiative, and attentiveness to clientele needs in other to address diverse needs in the market. This is in-line with Bos-de Vos et al., (2017) findings in a similar study which stated that architectural firms aim for customer, user and/or social value, professional value (e.g., reputation and work pleasure) and organizational continuity. Ola-Adisa et al. (2019) is also of the opinion that architectural firms are knowledge-based professional organisations with an expectation of economic, ethical, sociological, and sustainable viability; and as organisations as systems undergo life cycles, and architecture firms as professional organisations undergo business life cycles.

While many professions may argue these characteristics reflect important attributes for success of a business start-up, the same is no less true in architecture as this study propels that architectural firms surveyed lacks aggressiveness in the pursuit of business opportunity, insufficient consistency of repeat clients and absence of diversified services. Architects are commonly charged with employing creativity in proposing solutions for complex problems, requiring them to adapt as project parameters shift around them and adopt entrepreneurial processes like recognizing opportunity, generating ideas, testing feasibility, developing an effective business model/plan, analysing the industry, competition, and financial viability, assembling a team and

obtaining funding (Baringer & Ireland, 2010). The absence of these traits has hindered the architectural firms to reach its full potential of achieving growth, sustainability and viability. In validation of the findings and conclusion, nearly all of the competencies covered in architectural education and practice have been relentlessly focused on buildings and this is a possible cause for latent entrepreneurial capacity among entrepreneurial firms in Nigeria.

5. Recommendations

In order to position architecture as entrepreneurship and to further address the viability lapses among entrepreneurial firms, the following are highly recommended –

1. Architectural firms and educational institutions must pro-actively establish relationships with other entrepreneurial entities. Such formal and informal networks can elevate the role of entrepreneurship within architectural education and practice. This would also elevate architecture and design within bastions of business and entrepreneurship. There are signs that indicate academia and practice are moving in such a direction, for example, the Oklahoma State University School of Architecture has expanded its architectural programs and curriculum to make more advanced connections to real estate, business and entrepreneurship (Richardson, nd). This is further in line with Ola-Adisa et. al., (2019) suggestion in similar research that “entrepreneurial education should form a larger part of the core curriculum of architecture training and a major curriculum review of courses should be undertaken to produce graduates who are ideologically business centred.
2. In order to move with the times, architectural firms must make themselves students of local and global issues (and by extension opportunities) that transcend the built environment. In addition, practices and initiatives should be explored as a response to an expanded competency in global challenges and entrepreneurial solutions, rather than accepting the bounds of conventional practice.
3. Architects, whatever the initiative, must embrace their role in advancing, promoting, and even financing solutions, rather than simply waiting for a benevolent client to embrace a common cause.

4. Architectural firms should capture their goals and business model into writing. A tool like the business model canvas of Osterwalder et al. (2010) might be of great support in gaining insight in the current status of the firm's organization, the future aspirations and how to get there.
5. The professional network (in this case - ARCON's Register of Firms) is the most important source of both advice and acquisition. A recommendation for starting architects is to actively start enlarging their network from the beginning to increase the time between the start-up and the transition in focus which increases the survival change, viability and sustainability of architectural start-up firms.

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