

Reimagining Architectural Practice as An Entrepreneurial Venture: Beyond Design Thinking for Profitability and Relevance in Emerging Economies.

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Abstract- This study investigates the reconceptualization of architectural practice in emerging economies from a predominantly design-centered discipline into an entrepreneurial venture capable of achieving sustained profitability and market relevance. While design thinking remains central to architectural innovation, it inadequately addresses critical business dimensions such as strategic positioning, revenue diversification, and financial sustainability. Adopting a survey-based empirical research design, data were collected from 176 practicing architects in Nigeria using a structured questionnaire to examine the relationships between entrepreneurial orientation, business model innovation, and firm performance. The findings indicate that architectural firms demonstrating strong entrepreneurial orientation, particularly in innovativeness and proactive market engagement, are significantly more likely to adopt innovative business models. These models, including service diversification, strategic partnerships, and technology-driven delivery systems, are shown to have a positive and significant impact on firm performance, especially in terms of revenue growth, client acquisition, and competitive positioning. Furthermore, regression analysis reveals that entrepreneurial orientation indirectly enhances profitability through its strong influence on business model innovation. The study concludes that the sustainability and competitiveness of architectural practice in emerging economies depend on the integration of entrepreneurial strategies and innovative business frameworks beyond traditional design service models, thereby positioning architects as strategic actors within the broader built environment value chain.

Index Terms- Architectural Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Business Model Innovation, Strategic Management, Professional Practice Transformation

I. INTRODUCTION

Architectural practice has traditionally been positioned as a profession rooted in design thinking and creative problem solving. Design thinking emphasizes human-centered approaches, iterative ideation, prototyping, and creative solutions to complex spatial problems (Brown, 2008). Across architectural education and professional practice, design thinking remains a dominant epistemological framework shaping how architects conceptualize, develop, and deliver built environment solutions. However, while design thinking enhances creative outputs, it does not inherently encompass essential business strategy dimensions such as revenue diversification, market positioning, and financial sustainability (Carlgren, Rauth, & Elmquist, 2016).

Emerging economies such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and parts of Latin America are characterized by rapid urbanization, informal market structures, unstable regulatory environments, and high demand for affordable housing and infrastructural solutions (UN-Habitat, 2020). Under these conditions, traditional architectural practice models often fail to achieve long-term profitability and firm relevance. As a result, many architects experience income volatility, scope limitations, and decreasing competitiveness. Conventional fee-for-service models restrict architectural firms to transactional relationships with clients, limiting their potential role in strategic business and development outcomes (You, 2022). These limitations raise critical questions concerning the relevance of design-only practice modes in contemporary emerging market contexts.

This study posits that architectural practice must evolve beyond design thinking into entrepreneurial

enterprise frameworks that integrate strategic management, business model innovation, and adaptive firm capabilities. Specifically, the research conceptualizes architectural practice as an entrepreneurial venture wherein architects deploy strategic orientation, innovate business models, and engage value creation mechanisms that extend beyond traditional design service delivery. This reconceptualization is expected to enhance firm profitability, market relevance, and sector resilience in emerging economies.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore how architectural practices in emerging economies can operate as entrepreneurial ventures that use strategic business approaches and innovative business models to increase profitability and maintain market relevance.

The objectives are;

- I. To explore how architectural practices in emerging economies can adopt entrepreneurial approaches beyond traditional design thinking.
- II. To investigate how entrepreneurial strategies and business model innovations influence the profitability of architectural firms.
- III. To determine how entrepreneurial and innovative practices enhance the relevance and competitiveness of architectural firms in emerging markets

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Architectural Practice and Entrepreneurship

Architectural practice has traditionally focused on design outcomes guided by design thinking principles. Design thinking emphasizes human-centered approaches, creativity, iterative prototyping, and problem-solving (Brown, 2008). While this approach fosters innovative spatial solutions, it does not inherently address the business and strategic aspects necessary for profitability and market relevance. Emerging economies, with dynamic and volatile markets, require architectural firms to adopt entrepreneurial practices that extend beyond conventional service delivery models (You, 2022).

Richardson (2011) argues that architectural activity inherently possesses entrepreneurial characteristics,

as architects identify opportunities, mobilize resources, and create value under uncertainty. However, most firms remain limited by fee-for-service models, which restrict their potential to engage in strategic ventures, diversify revenue streams, or scale operations. Transforming architectural practice into an entrepreneurial venture requires integrating business model innovation, strategic marketing, and adaptive capabilities (Ismail, Mohamed, Ja'afar, & Mohamed, 2024).

2.2 Entrepreneurial Orientation

Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is a firm-level strategic posture that includes innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking, competitive aggressiveness, and autonomy (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). EO influences how firms identify opportunities, experiment with new business models, and adapt to environmental uncertainties.

Empirical studies indicate that EO positively impacts firm performance in dynamic markets. Okangi (2019) found that innovativeness and risk-taking significantly enhance profitability in construction firms, while Bayus (2025) highlighted that strategic marketing capabilities mediate the relationship between EO and firm performance in architectural SMEs. For architectural practices, EO fosters entrepreneurial behaviors that support revenue diversification, strategic partnerships, and innovative service delivery models, which are crucial for relevance in emerging economies.

2.3 Business Model Innovation

Business model innovation (BMI) involves redesigning the core logic through which firms create, deliver, and capture value (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Zott & Amit, 2010). In professional service industries such as architecture, BMI can include:

- I. Offering integrated design-build services.
- II. Partnering in real estate or property development.
- III. Productizing design services and intellectual property.
- IV. Using digital platforms for project management or design consultancy.

BMI enables architectural firms to move beyond transactional service models, ensuring sustainable

revenue streams, competitive differentiation, and relevance in volatile markets (Ismail et al., 2024).

2.4 Integrating Design Thinking, EO, and BMI

While design thinking emphasizes creativity and user-centered solutions, EO provides the strategic posture, and BMI operationalizes entrepreneurial strategies. Combining these approaches allows architectural firms to simultaneously:

- I. Innovate creatively (design thinking)
- II. Pursue opportunities proactively (EO)
- III. Sustain profitability and relevance (BMI)

This integration aligns with emerging research on architectural entrepreneurship, particularly in developing economies where firm survival depends on both innovation and strategic business execution (Ayo Odifiri, 2023; Lawal, Oyewo, Mohammed, & Osunkunle, 2023).

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach is structured to generate empirical evidence regarding the relationship between entrepreneurial strategies, innovative business models, and the economic sustainability of architectural firms.

The methods employed allow the study to address the three core objectives of the research: exploring the adoption of entrepreneurial approaches in architectural practice, examining the influence of entrepreneurial strategies on profitability, and determining how innovative practice models enhance professional relevance in emerging markets.

3.1. Research Design

The study adopts a survey based empirical research design. This design allows the systematic collection of information from practicing architects regarding their strategic practices, operational models, and perceptions of profitability and competitiveness within the industry.

Survey research is widely used in professional practice and management studies because it enables researchers to examine patterns of behavior, organizational strategies, and industry trends across a relatively large population (Creswell, 2014). In the

context of this study, the survey design enables the examination of entrepreneurial behavior within architectural firms and the extent to which such behavior contributes to business sustainability and market relevance.

3.2. Study Area

The research focuses on architectural firms operating in Nigeria. Nigeria represents a rapidly developing built environment characterized by expanding urbanization, increasing infrastructure demand, and intense professional competition within the architecture and construction sectors.

Architectural firms in the country operate within a regulatory framework governed by the Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON) and the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA). These firms range from small independent studios to large multidisciplinary organizations. The dynamic economic and professional conditions within the Nigerian construction industry make it an appropriate environment for examining entrepreneurial transformation in architectural practice.

3.3. Population of the Study

The population for this study consists of practicing architects involved in professional architectural services, including design consultancy, project management, and construction administration. This population includes:

- I. Principal partners and firm owners
- II. Senior architects and project managers
- III. Practicing architects working in design consultancies

These professionals were selected because they play direct roles in strategic planning, project acquisition, financial management, and business development within architectural organizations.

3.4. Sampling Technique

A stratified sampling strategy was adopted in order to ensure that the study captures perspectives from different categories of architectural firms. The population was grouped according to the following characteristics:

- I. Size of architectural firm
- II. Years of professional practice
- III. Organizational structure

This approach ensures representation across emerging firms, mid-level practices, and established architectural organizations. Within each category, respondents were selected randomly to ensure fairness in the selection process.

3.5 Sample Size

A total of 200 practicing architects were selected for participation in the survey. This sample size provides sufficient representation of professional perspectives within the architectural industry and allows reliable interpretation of patterns and relationships among the variables under investigation. The sample includes professionals from firms of varying sizes and levels of experience, thereby ensuring that the study captures a broad range of entrepreneurial practices and business strategies within the profession.

3.6 Data Collection Instrument

The primary instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed specifically for this research. The questionnaire was organized into four sections to capture different dimensions of architectural practice and entrepreneurial activity.

Section A: Demographic Information

This section collects background information about the respondents and their organizations. The variables include:

- I. Years of professional experience
- II. Position within the firm
- III. Size of architectural firm
- IV. Number of projects completed annually

These variables provide contextual information that assists in interpreting the findings.

Section B: Entrepreneurial Orientation in Architectural Practice

This section examines the extent to which architectural firms demonstrate entrepreneurial characteristics such as opportunity seeking, innovation, and proactive market engagement. Sample items include:

- I. Our firm actively seeks new business opportunities beyond conventional architectural services.
- II. Our firm introduces innovative design or service solutions regularly.

III. Our firm explores emerging market opportunities in the construction industry.

Section C: Business Model Innovation

This section evaluates the adoption of innovative business strategies within architectural practice.

The items assess practices such as:

- I. Service diversification
- II. Strategic partnerships;
- III. Technology driven service delivery
- IV. Alternative project procurement models

Sample statements include:

- I. Our firm collaborates with developers or contractors to expand project opportunities.
- II. Our firm uses digital technologies to improve design and project delivery processes.
- III. Our firm has diversified its revenue streams beyond traditional architectural design services.

Section D: Profitability and Market Relevance

This section assesses indicators related to the economic sustainability and professional relevance of architectural firms.

Sample statements include:

- I. Our firm has experienced growth in revenue over the past five years.
- II. Our firm consistently attracts new clients and project opportunities.
- III. Our services remain competitive within the evolving construction industry.

All questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

3.7 Instrument Validation

The questionnaire underwent a validation process to ensure that the questions accurately reflect the concepts under investigation. The instrument was reviewed by experts in:

- I. Architectural practice
- II. Construction management
- III. Entrepreneurship studies

Their feedback helped refine the clarity, relevance, and structure of the questionnaire items.

3.8. Reliability Testing

A pilot test was conducted using a small group of practicing architects who were not included in the main study. The purpose of the pilot study was to evaluate the consistency and clarity of the instrument. The reliability of the questionnaire items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which measures the internal consistency of survey instruments. A reliability coefficient above 0.70 is considered acceptable for research in the social sciences (Nunnally, 1978).

3.9 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed to practicing architects through professional networks, architectural firms, and professional associations. Respondents were provided with clear instructions regarding the purpose of the research and how to complete the questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were collected and carefully reviewed to ensure completeness and accuracy before being prepared for analysis.

3.10 Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were organized and analyzed using statistical techniques commonly employed in management and professional practice research. The analysis included:

- I. Frequency distributions
- II. Mean score analysis
- III. Correlation analysis to examine relationships between variables
- IV. Regression analysis to determine the influence of entrepreneurial strategies on firm performance

These analytical procedures enable the study to identify patterns within the data and draw meaningful conclusions regarding the role of entrepreneurship in architectural practice.

3.11. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participation in the study was voluntary and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that individual responses were not linked to identifiable participants or firms. All collected data were used solely for academic purposes.

IV. EXPERIMENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected from practicing architects through the survey instrument described in Chapter Three. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns within architectural practice regarding entrepreneurial orientation, innovative business models, and firm performance outcomes. This chapter includes demographic analysis, descriptive statistics, reliability testing, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. These analyses provide empirical evidence regarding the relationships between the variables identified in the conceptual framework.

4.1 Response Rate

A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed to practicing architects across architectural firms.

Description	Number
Questionnaires distributed	200
Questionnaires returned	182
Valid responses	176
Response rate	88%

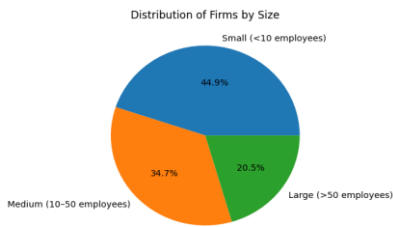
The response rate of 88 percent is considered adequate for professional survey research.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0–5 years	48	27.3%
6–10 years	59	33.5%
11–15 years	37	21.0%
Over 15 years	32	18.2%
Total	176	100%

The results indicate that the majority of respondents possess more than five years of professional experience, suggesting a knowledgeable respondent base.

Table 4.2 Firm Size



The distribution indicates that small and medium sized firms dominate architectural practice, which aligns with industry patterns in emerging economies.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the level of agreement among respondents regarding entrepreneurial orientation, business model innovation, and firm performance indicators.

Table 4.3 Entrepreneurial Orientation Indicators

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Opportunity seeking behavior	4.02	0.71
Innovation in services	4.08	0.66
Proactive market engagement	3.91	0.74
Risk taking in new ventures	3.63	0.81

The results indicate that architectural firms demonstrate strong innovation orientation, though risk taking appears relatively moderate.

Table 4.4 Business Model Innovation Indicators

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Service diversification	3.74	0.77
Strategic partnerships	3.86	0.69
Digital technology adoption	3.79	0.73

Alternative project delivery methods	3.61	0.82
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These findings suggest that architectural firms are gradually adopting innovative business models, particularly through partnerships and digital service delivery.

Table 4.5 Firm Performance Indicators

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Revenue growth	3.68	0.75
Client acquisition	3.93	0.70
Market competitiveness	3.88	0.67
Professional relevance	4.01	0.65

The results show that firms maintaining innovative practices report higher levels of market relevance and client acquisition.

4.4 Reliability Analysis

Reliability testing was conducted to ensure internal consistency of the survey items.

Table 4.6 Reliability Statistics

Construct	Cronbach Alpha
Entrepreneurial Orientation	0.86
Business Model Innovation	0.84
Firm Performance	0.82

All values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability.

4.5 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships between the variables.

Table 4.7 Correlation Matrix

Variables	EO	BMI	FP
Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO)	1		
Business Model Innovation (BMI)	0.71	1	
Firm Performance (FP)	0.63	0.65	1

The results indicate strong positive relationships among the variables. Entrepreneurial orientation shows a strong relationship with business model innovation, suggesting that firms with entrepreneurial characteristics are more likely to adopt innovative practice models.

4.6 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the influence of entrepreneurial orientation on business model innovation and firm performance.

Table 4.8 Regression Results
 Dependent Variable: Business Model Innovation

Predictor	Beta	t value	Significance
Entrepreneurial Orientation	0.68	9.42	0.000

Table 4.9 Regression Results
 Dependent Variable: Firm Performance

Predictor	Beta	t value	Significance
Business Model Innovation	0.62	8.87	0.000

Business model innovation significantly predicts firm profitability and relevance.

4.7 Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals several important findings. Architectural firms demonstrating strong entrepreneurial orientation are more likely to develop innovative business models. Business model innovation contributes significantly to improved firm performance. Entrepreneurial strategies indirectly

influence profitability through their impact on business model innovation.

These findings support the argument that architectural practice must extend beyond design thinking toward entrepreneurial and strategic business approaches in order to remain profitable and relevant in emerging economies.

V. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the interpretation of the findings derived from the analysis conducted in Chapter Four. The discussion links the empirical results with the objectives of the study and existing theoretical perspectives on entrepreneurial orientation, business model innovation, and firm performance within professional service industries. The chapter concludes with practical recommendations aimed at improving the profitability and relevance of architectural practice in emerging economies.

5.1 Summary of Key Results

The analysis of survey responses revealed several important patterns regarding the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation, business model innovation, and firm performance within architectural firms.

First, the results indicate that architectural firms demonstrate moderate to high levels of entrepreneurial orientation, particularly in terms of innovation and proactive market engagement. However, the results also show that risk-taking behavior remains relatively moderate, suggesting that many firms remain cautious when pursuing new business opportunities.

Second, the findings show that firms that adopt innovative business models tend to report stronger indicators of performance. Architectural firms that diversify services, collaborate strategically with industry partners, and adopt digital technologies demonstrate improved revenue growth and client acquisition.

Third, the regression analysis reveals that entrepreneurial orientation significantly predicts business model innovation. Firms that actively seek opportunities, experiment with new services, and engage proactively with the market are more likely to adopt innovative business models.

Finally, the results show that business model innovation significantly influences firm performance outcomes such as profitability, competitiveness, and professional relevance.

These results collectively suggest that entrepreneurial orientation plays a critical role in shaping the strategic direction and economic sustainability of architectural firms.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the argument that architectural practice must evolve beyond traditional design-focused models in order to remain economically viable and professionally relevant in emerging economies.

Entrepreneurial Orientation in Architectural Practice

The results indicate that innovation and proactive opportunity seeking are widely present among architectural firms. This finding aligns with the argument presented by Lumpkin and Dess (1996) that entrepreneurial orientation reflects an organization's strategic posture toward innovation, risk-taking, and proactive market engagement.

Architectural firms that demonstrate stronger entrepreneurial orientation tend to explore new markets, develop creative service solutions, and pursue unconventional project opportunities. However, the moderate levels of risk-taking observed in the findings suggest that many firms remain cautious when investing in new business ventures. This may reflect the financial constraints and uncertainty often associated with the construction industry in emerging economies.

Business Model Innovation and Architectural Practice

The findings reveal that business model innovation plays an important role in improving the performance of architectural firms. Firms that adopt innovative

approaches such as service diversification, strategic partnerships, and technology-driven project delivery are better positioned to capture new opportunities within the built environment sector.

This observation supports the perspective proposed by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), who argue that business model innovation enables firms to redefine how they create, deliver, and capture value. For architectural firms, this may involve expanding services beyond traditional design consultancy to include project management, development consultancy, digital modeling services, and integrated project delivery.

The growing use of digital technologies and collaborative project frameworks further demonstrates the evolving nature of architectural practice. These innovations allow firms to increase efficiency, reduce project risks, and expand their service offerings.

Entrepreneurial Orientation and Firm Performance

The regression results indicate that entrepreneurial orientation indirectly contributes to firm profitability through its influence on business model innovation. Firms that adopt entrepreneurial thinking are more likely to develop innovative business strategies that generate sustainable revenue streams.

This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that entrepreneurial orientation is a key driver of organizational performance in professional service firms (Rauch et al., 2009). By adopting entrepreneurial strategies, architectural firms can identify new opportunities within rapidly changing construction markets and maintain competitive advantages.

The findings also reinforce the argument that relying solely on design thinking may not be sufficient to sustain architectural practice in contemporary economic environments. While design thinking promotes creativity and problem solving, entrepreneurial thinking provides the strategic and economic framework necessary for firms to grow and remain competitive.

5.3 Implications for Architectural Practice

The findings of this study highlight several important implications for architectural practice in emerging economies. Architectural firms must expand their strategic orientation beyond traditional design services. Firms that integrate entrepreneurial thinking into their operations are more likely to identify new market opportunities and develop sustainable revenue models. The increasing complexity of the built environment industry requires architectural firms to collaborate with professionals from other disciplines such as developers, engineers, contractors, and technology specialists. Strategic partnerships can enhance innovation, improve project delivery, and expand business opportunities.

Technology adoption is also critical for maintaining competitiveness. Digital design tools, building information modeling, and remote collaboration platforms provide architectural firms with the capacity to improve efficiency and deliver value-added services.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the profitability and relevance of architectural practice in emerging economies.

1. **Integration of Entrepreneurial Education:** Architectural education programs should incorporate entrepreneurship and business management training into their curricula. Students should be exposed to concepts such as business strategy, market analysis, financial management, and innovation management in order to prepare them for the realities of professional practice.
2. **Adoption of Innovative Business Models:** Architectural firms should actively explore new business models that expand their service offerings. These may include development consultancy, integrated design services, sustainability consulting, and digital visualization services. Diversifying revenue streams can reduce financial risk and improve the long-term stability of architectural firms.
3. **Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration:** Architectural firms should establish collaborative relationships with developers, contractors, engineers, and technology companies. Such

partnerships can enable firms to access larger projects, share resources, and participate in integrated project delivery systems.

4. **Investment in Technology:** Firms should invest in digital technologies that enhance design efficiency, communication, and project coordination. Tools such as Building Information Modeling and digital visualization platforms can improve project quality while increasing competitiveness.
5. **Policy and Professional Support:** Professional bodies and regulatory institutions should encourage entrepreneurial innovation within architectural practice. This may involve providing training programs, mentorship initiatives, and funding opportunities that support business development among architectural firms.

5.5 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that entrepreneurial orientation and business model innovation play a significant role in improving the profitability and relevance of architectural practice in emerging economies. Architectural firms that adopt entrepreneurial strategies and innovative business models are better positioned to respond to the dynamic challenges of the construction industry.

The findings suggest that the future of architectural practice lies in the integration of design expertise with entrepreneurial thinking, strategic partnerships, and innovative service delivery models. By embracing these approaches, architectural firms can achieve sustainable growth while contributing meaningfully to the development of the built environment.

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