

Versatility or Specialty

Architecture is a diverse profession with many building typologies. Each typology needs specific set of knowledge and visualization skills. Each building has its own set of users, behavior pattern, physical context, regulations, climatic response and most importantly economic equation. Acquiring such knowledge needs dedicated effort and continual practice. Traditionally, architects took up any project that came their way and clients trusted the architects with their projects. It was a time of versatility. However, the trend changed in the past decades. We have seen many architectural firms specialize in Healthcare, Industries, Housing, Hospitality, to name a few building types. Over the years, these firms added ancillary services to their portfolio to give a holistic service to their niche clientele. This approach had a fulfilling result for the firms and clients as well. They specialized and promoted themselves as experts in the specific building typology.

But there is a change again in the profession. As competition among architects increased, specialization became a hindrance. Diversification became the name of the game. Firms started inclusive thinking and not just by adding ancillary services to their specialization, but also parallel services and building typologies to their portfolios. This trend is not out of versatile thinking but more of survival instincts. Firms are primarily business houses and need to keep their setup running. They need projects to feed their work force and today whatever comes is more than welcome.

But where does it leave both young and senior employees of the profession?

Architectural education always helped to get exposure in most typologies and construction technologies. However, after graduation, work experience sets the path of professional development. But as the architectural practice moved in the direction of specialization, young professionals were limited to certain typologies and did not always get the overall perspective of the profession. The first job after graduation ushered the young professionals in a direction and had little flexibility for a change as they grew in their career. This left considerable gap in their knowledge and they are aware of it. And now with the trend to adapt to various typologies, the employees have a hard time coping up with the change.

So, should we specialize or be versatile? That is the question of our time. **I think we should specialize in versatility!** Change is inevitable. If we analyze our architectural education system, it has taught us to think and explore, and not just learn about buildings. Switching between building typologies becomes easier if we continue to think with our logical mind. Yes, we do have to research and learn some specific information. But that shouldn't stop us from exploring new areas of work. Today, the best employees are the ones who are adaptive to the new work culture. A culture that demands multiple skills, specialized knowledge and most importantly versatility. **If you want to move ahead in your career, specialize in versatility!**