



**AN INTERVIEW ABOUT AN ARCHITECT**

**(FINAL SUBMISSION)**

**COURSE:                   MANAGEMENT SEQUENCE**

**COURSE NO.:           MG-1, EXTERNAL CONTEXT**

**REPORT NO.:            ONE**

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**TERM NO.:             ONE (2006)**

**SUBMISSION DATE:    28 APRIL 2006**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The report presents the interview conducted with a Facilities Supervisor, Mr. Mark Nerland.

The basis of result stemming from this report is that architects play an integral role in the design and operation of facilities. However, it is evident that a lack of understanding toward the skills and capacity of architects may foster a negative opinion of the profession.

Mr. Nerland's personal and professional experience illustrates the mutual, uninformed perceptions of the profession, as well as displays how the profession can be valued as experience in dealing with competent professionals increases over time.

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The terms of reference for this report were derived from the original course outline for MG-1, External Context. As noted in the outline,

“This report is to interview a person who has many dealings with architects (but is not an Architect), and is really about determining an “informed person's opinion” about an architect .... The essence of this report is to describe ... what a lay person thinks of what architects are and what architects do.”

The basis of this report is to present an unedited opinion of architects and the architectural profession.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology followed in completion of this report involved steps along a linear process:

- Consideration and selection of the desired interview candidate.
- Obtain consent from the candidate to participate.
- Submission of the proposed candidate to the Course Examiner for approval.
- Obtain the approval of the Course Examiner to proceed.
- Submission of course outline and terms of reference to interview candidate for review.
- Conducting an in-person interview between the student and interview candidate.
- Preparation of draft interview summary.
- Submission of draft interview summary to the candidate for confirmation and clarification of specific facts.
- Incorporate revisions as required to ensure accuracy.
- Preparation and submission of final report.

The interview was conducted using a prepared set of questions as an outline. Additional queries were formulated as the interview progressed, based on the line of discussion at that time.

The report format of the interview is based on the standard method of text formatting for an interview, as derived from CBC Radio Broadcast interview transcripts.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to present a “layman’s view” of an Architect.

The candidate selected for the interview is Mr. Mark Nerland, Supervisor of Facilities for the Prairie Valley School Division No. 208. The Prairie Valley School Division is responsible for the management and operations of school administration and facilities in the region of rural Saskatchewan immediately outside the City of Regina limits. The Division’s boundaries extend from the city limits of Regina to a radius of approximately 200 km.

Mark Nerland is also currently serving as Regional Governor for the Pacific Northwest Region of the Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI). He has represented the Region at conferences locally, nationally and internationally including San Antonio, Texas.

Mark’s experience relative to facility management and use spans twenty-five years, involving all aspects of facilities from caretaker through to capital planner. His awareness of the architectural profession has grown throughout his experience, providing him with a keen, first-hand insight of the profession, originally from a layman’s (outside) point of view and currently as a member of project teams.

The views and comments provided by Mr. Nerland are presented herein in a manner consistent with the interview conducted. Any elaboration or text added for clarification is shown within parentheses. These items have been integrated with the consent of Mr. Nerland upon his review of the interview summary.

## CANDIDATE INTERVIEW

The interview was conducted in a casual setting during the afternoon of April 13, 2006. The interview spanned a total of two hours, with subsequent conversations to clarify the facts and details.

### Interview Transcript:

K. Dietrich:

*I would like to start the interview with some background on your experience in facilities.*

*When did you first get started in the facility operations field?*

M. Nerland:

I started in the facility operations field in 1980. I came in on the “ground floor” as a facility caretaker. I worked as a caretaker for approximately three years, when I was promoted to the position of maintenance mechanic where I worked on HVAC units and general facilities maintenance.



**Figure 1: Leboldus High School (RCSD #81)**

K. Dietrich:

*What type of facilities were you employed in?*

M. Nerland:

Primarily I was employed by the Regina Catholic School Division No. 81 in Regina, Saskatchewan. The first facility I was stationed at in 1980 was Dr. Martin LeBoldus High School, constructed in 1975. I then moved to Miller Composite High School which had been constructed in the 1960's. After that facility, I moved to O'Neill High School, the original portion of which was constructed in 1966.

K. Dietrich:

*How long were you employed with the R.C.S.D.?*

M. Nerland:

My employment spanned a total of 16 years.



**Figure 2: Miller High School (RCSD #81)**

K. Dietrich:

*Through this time period, did you have any involvement or participation with the architectural profession?*

M. Nerland:

I did not have any direct involvement at all. My first dealing with the (architectural) profession was after I moved to a new position with a rural School Division.

K. Dietrich:

*Can you describe your opinion of the architectural profession during this employment period?*

M. Nerland:

My opinion of the profession during this time was that I viewed Architects for the most part as arrogant and pretty unrelenting in their position on facilities.



**Figure 3: O'Neill High School (RCSD #81)**



K. Dietrich:

*Can you elaborate on these impressions?*

M. Nerland:

I felt that their approach came with a lot of attitude and ego-based assumptions. There was resistance to any suggestion from operational staff that would impact the long-term performance of the project.

K. Dietrich:

*Did you feel that they had a fixed stance; possibly ignoring any input or advice you may have submitted as a facility operator?*

M. Nerland:

Yes.

K. Dietrich:

*Would it be accurate to describe your opinion during this time period as a “Negative Point of View”?*

M. Nerland:

Absolutely. I saw no use or value in the profession’s activities. I felt that the practitioners didn’t know what they were doing, nor did they understand the impact of their activities.

K. Dietrich:

*By the end of your employment with the R.C.S.D., what was your operational position?*

M. Nerland:

I was at a level of HVAC and boiler systems repair and maintenance. My responsibilities covered several schools within the Division. It was a sub-managerial position, responsible for staff working under my direction as well as involved in hands-on work on the systems themselves. There were numerous sites involved.

K. Dietrich:

*So, moving past this employment period, you changed jobs, moving to a rural School Division (Indian Head S. D. No. 18)?*

M. Nerland:

Yes, I moved out to take a new position with the Indian Head School Division in 1997. The School Division inventory consisted of six schools – two high schools, two elementary schools, and two K-to-12 schools. My new position was as a maintenance employee. This position was a decrease in responsibility from that which I occupied with the R.C.S.D. My rationale in making the move was the potential for advancement, as the Facilities Supervisor was scheduled for retirement in the near future. When he retired, I was appointed as the Supervisor of Maintenance for the School Division.



**Figure 4: Bert Fox Composite High School (IHSD #18)**

K. Dietrich:

*What was your role in the new position?*

M. Nerland:

My role was that of managerial duties combined with some hands-on facilities work. I was directly involved in Capital Projects (facility expansion or upgrades). My involvement included participation in the planning and execution of Capital Projects. My responsibilities also included the planning and administration of the Maintenance Budget for the schools. There were also duties that required my direct involvement in the repair or alteration of facilities as a field employee, tools and all.

K. Dietrich:

*Did your involvement with the architectural profession change during this period?*

M. Nerland:

Yes, I was having direct contact with members of the profession as I was now representing the Client on all the capital projects underway.

K. Dietrich:

*Did this increased involvement have any impact on your approach or impression of the architectural profession?*

M. Nerland:

Actually, I came into the position with the negative approach towards Architects that I had developed in my previous job at the R.C.S.D. I still felt the same towards Architects as I had at my previous position, not seeing much use for them in general.



**Figure 5: Indian Head High School (IHSD #18)**

K. Dietrich:

*Did your opinion change at any point in time, and could you describe what type of change occurred?*

M. Nerland:

My opinion started to change as I began to recognize the benefits of the Architect's experience and knowledge in the facilities field. My first few approaches and involvement with Architects were quite guarded on my part as I had not developed any level of personal comfort or trust in their actions. My opinion evolved more towards a positive impression as I recognized, or rather saw, a willingness to listen on the part of the practitioners I was working with.

K. Dietrich:

*So was your opinion altered because the professionals you dealt with understood more than you anticipated? Was there more willingness to work with you in capital projects than you had expected?*

M. Nerland:

My opinion bettered as I found that there was more willingness to listen; their approach was far more open than I anticipated as I had expected them to impose their dictum directly, without consideration for my input or that of the end users.

K. Dietrich:

*On what scope of projects were you involved with Architects during this time period?  
Can you provide a facilities budget amount or capital project scope for the projects?*

M. Nerland:

The total capital project budget was in the area of \$400,000 to \$500,000 per fiscal year. This budget was applied to projects of varied scope, from painting and general upgrades to facility renovations or additions.

K. Dietrich:

*Were Architects typically engaged on all capital projects or did you select which ones you felt required their services?*

M. Nerland:

I was still guarded on the aspects of the profession as there hadn't developed a trust level for the skills or participation of the profession. I would bring in the

profession only when it was either recommended by governing agencies or when I felt their services were directly required.

K. Dietrich:

*Why did you hesitate to engage the profession? Did you feel that they complicated the process in some way?*

M. Nerland:

I was of the opinion that Architects certainly did complicate a project, and that their involvement increased costs for the work. I didn't see any added value in their participation during this time period.



**Figure 6: McLean Community School (IHSD #18)**

K. Dietrich:

*What would be the rationale for you to determine whether or not an Architect would be involved in a specific project?*

M. Nerland:

My rationale would be related to the overall scale and complexity of the intended project. I didn't feel a need for the Architect's involvement on projects that fell within my knowledge and skill level.

K. Dietrich:

*Can you identify what sort of value you did see in the Architect’s participation on capital projects during this time?*

M. Nerland:

I think that the value found was in the role that the Architects played relative to my position. I found that they were willing to provide value through an educational aspect, allowing me to learn a greater amount via their experience and resources. Their participation actually increased my ability to perform in my position at a higher level through the knowledge and availability when I had a situation to resolve or questions or concerns.



**Figure 7: James Hamblin School (IHSD #18)**

K. Dietrich:

*How was the role of Architects relative to your position changing over time during this period?*

M. Nerland:

At the outset of this period, an Architect would have been the last person I thought to call when faced with a dilemma or concern. I had to ‘bite the bullet’ to actually ask an Architect for their opinion or expertise as I was extremely guarded, and initially doubtful, as to the value of their participation. During this

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time period, I was becoming more comfortable and confident in dealing with Architects on the various projects.

K. Dietrich:

*Did your increased role with the profession have an impact on your perception of Architects?*

M. Nerland:

My role as it increased in participating with the Architects had a direct bearing on my opinion towards the profession. This change in opinion is because with the more times I asked questions and received answers that displayed their expertise and knowledge base, the more my level of trust in their involvement grew.

K. Dietrich:

*What happened during this period that may have changed your opinion of the profession and role of the Architect?*

M. Nerland:

Subsequent to this time period, my trust in the knowledge base and abilities of the profession grew exponentially. The more I used them, with positive results from my point of view, the greater my trust level became. The greater my level of trust became, the more I began to use Architects on projects varying in scope.



K. Dietrich:

*Were all these uses of the profession positive experiences? Were there some negative experiences along the way?*

M. Nerland:

There were certainly projects that didn't turn out as expected; some that went "sour" during the process. I think from my experiences with Architects during these negative periods that the problems were handled in a professional manner. This doesn't necessarily mean that I always got what I wanted, that the Architect would just defer to my opinion to please me, but the difficulties were always dealt with professionally. All in all, the experiences I had were good. There were likely instances where the items were resolved as I had expected, maybe not as the Architect desired, but it was always professionally handled by those involved.

K. Dietrich:

*After your experience with the rural School Division, another job/position change came your way. Can you elaborate on the scope of your current position?*

M. Nerland:

Through amalgamation of rural School Divisions, my job has changed dramatically within the last three years. The Indian Head School Division joined with two other Divisions and I took on the role of Supervisor of Facilities for the Qu'Appelle Valley School Division, managing 21 schools plus administration and operational facilities of the combined group. Further amalgamation, formalized in January 2006, has created massive growth within our School

Division. Currently I am employed as the Supervisor of Facilities for the Prairie Valley School Division No. 208, which serves the greater Regina area and rural Saskatchewan. My responsibilities extend over 50 separate facilities, ranging in function from Industrial (bus shops and maintenance buildings) through office complexes (School Division Board Offices) and schools. We have 48 schools ranging in educational scope from Daycares through Grade 12.



**Figure 8: Prairie Valley School Division Map**

K. Dietrich:

*Can you describe the responsibilities of your role in this position?*

M. Nerland:

I am responsible for determining when the role of an Architect is required. I am also responsible for selection, engaging and overseeing the Architects involved in every project.

K. Dietrich:

*What is the scope of the budget that you administer in this position?*

M. Nerland:

The facilities operational budget for our last fiscal year was slightly more than eight million dollars. That budget included four million dollars for capital works and four million dollars for maintenance and facility upkeep.

K. Dietrich:

*So the role that you have with the architectural profession now is directly as the Client?*

M. Nerland:

Yes.

K. Dietrich:

*What is one of the benefits of the profession that you rely on when engaging an Architect for a project?*

M. Nerland:

Their vast resource base. This resource is a combination of their experience in the profession and their ability to find the answers or devise a solution in order to resolve the complexity at hand. This resource base relates both to design of a successful solution as well as implementation required in order to carry out the construction to a timely completion.



**Figure 9: Pilot Butte School (PVSD #208)**

K. Dietrich:

*Do you feel that the Architect's role in the construction process is valued as well?*

M. Nerland:

Absolutely. Their skills in management of General Contractors and subsequent subtrades are crucial to the success of a project. I rely on the expertise of the profession to successfully implement a capital project on site; managing scheduling, budget items, changes in the work and bringing the project to a timely close.

K. Dietrich:

*Are there any projects wherein you don't engage an Architect? As noted earlier in the interview, you used to make a determination related to when to hire an Architect based on a negative perception related to their role.*

M. Nerland:

The times when I decide not to engage an Architect now relate solely to confidence on my part and my facilities crew that we can complete the work on our own. These times are rare since I will for the most part consult with the architectural profession in almost every case, at least to gain their professional opinion and expertise. The determination on when to engage an Architect has nothing to do with my previous perception of the profession since I used to decide this sort of thing based on a negative view of Architects, but that view has changed to positive based on my experience with the profession.

K. Dietrich:

*Do you feel that members of the profession are adequately trained to carry out the role you expect of them on capital projects?*

M. Nerland:

The ones I currently work with are well trained to handle the duties and meet or exceed my expectations. I am aware however, of other members in this profession, and have been approached by some who are not desirable to work with because of a lack of skills that I feel are required, or that I have come to expect of the profession necessary to successfully complete projects.



**Figure 10: Lipton Community School (PVSD #208)**

K. Dietrich:

*What do you feel some of the negative aspects of the profession may be relative to positions similar to your own?*

M. Nerland:

I see it out there that some Architects will still complete designs on the basis of theory, not incorporating an aspect of long-term maintenance and upkeep which both impact facility costs greatly. From my immediate point of view, I'll use the example of latex paints. Architects will specify latex paints for high-use areas of a facility, although this finish type cannot be sustained throughout the life or

even short term of a (school) facility. You can't wash it down, it doesn't stand up, and it's basically not good. Some of these decisions may stem from a client's viewpoint even though the end user doesn't understand the long-term ramifications of their choice. I feel that the knowledge base and experience of a good Architect would bring these items to the forefront, at least for discussion. Some members of the profession don't consider what a facility will look like in ten years, or how hard it will be to keep the facility in good condition. It may look good on opening day but after that, the ongoing upkeep becomes my problem and it can prove to be a real problem over the long term.

K. Dietrich:

*Have you had any negative experiences with the profession recently, given your current involvement with Architects?*

M. Nerland:

I have. Well, I don't think that I would define those moments as specifically negative in the sense that it changed my opinion, or lowered by perception of the profession. There have been problems on projects that I wasn't happy about but as I said before, these issues were handled in a professional manner with successful results so I can't really say that I have experience any lapses in the growth of a positive attitude towards Architects.



**Figure 11: Kennedy Langbank School (PVSD #208)**

K. Dietrich:

*What do you feel is a benefit that Architects bring to the process of a capital project?*

M. Nerland:

A quick completion - just kidding. What I really look forward to on a project is overall process – from concept, through construction documents, to breaking ground, through to the construction process. The experience overall is what I enjoy, and having an Architect that I trust and have faith in makes it more enjoyable, as I have greater confidence on the potential success of the project.

K. Dietrich:

*What key items would you consider crucial in your approval to engaging an Architect for a project?*

M. Nerland:

Integrity. This quality exceeds other items such as design talent or drawing skills since the working relationship in my mind forms the foundation of success in every project. Integrity brings the ability of the Architect to perform to the utmost of his skills; listening to our needs, respecting our requirements of budget and time-frames, and fairly engaging with contractors in order to run through the whole process of a project.



**Figure 12: White City School (PVSD #208)**

K. Dietrich:

*Do you think that there is anything more that the profession could employ to better serve the needs of the client?*

M. Nerland:

I think that the profession exceeds my expectations of performance relative to their role on our projects. They often go above and beyond the basics of a project to give us a better product. I don't think that there is anything more needed or expected, although this response is based on my experience with Architects on our projects.

K. Dietrich:

*Is there anything that you feel the architectural profession can do to enhance the public perception?*

M. Nerland:

I certainly think that public programs would assist in the public perception. The only time I see Architects, or that the general public would perceive Architects, is when construction is happening. I think that people should have a chance to see the Architects as contributing members, participating in the civic life as a whole, rather than select individuals. The negative perceptions are likely pervasive throughout the general population, as I know this opinion exists within staff of my own office. The presence of an Architect doesn't evoke the confidence and trust within others that I have come to understand and rely on, based on my experience.



K. Dietrich:

*As you have mentioned the staff of your own office, how do you think the architectural profession is viewed within your own organization, or as may be viewed by other staff members of your School Division (the general public)?*

M. Nerland:

I think most of the people view Architects as I used to view them in the past. It is certainly within my world that the profession could seek more input from individuals that are “in the trenches” in order to listen and respond to the end-user needs.



**Figure 13: Glenavon School (PVSD #208)**

K. Dietrich:

*How would you describe your attitude towards the architectural profession today?*

M. Nerland:

I hold the profession in high regard. Based on my experience, I respect the vast knowledge that is required of a person in that position. Tact and candor are also essential components of the personnel. I’ve seen all these qualities in architectural representatives that I’ve worked with. They have a talent for resolving issues and confrontations that do not provide an easy solution. They

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sometimes have to act as a mediator between parties, always working towards a benefit of the final product. The better the skills of the Architect has a direct result on my capacity to perform my job to a higher level, resulting in a better quality of product in the end.

K. Dietrich:

*What do you mean by “the better the skills of the Architect”? Does this comment relate to a thoroughness in their performance? Does it relate to design skills?*

M. Nerland:

This comment definitely refers to a design talent component. There is also a component of professionalism in the Architect’s approach to personnel situation, how they deal with complications, how they understand and listen to my expectations. If the Architect doesn’t put forth the effort to understand the needs that I am putting out, then we have a problem.

K. Dietrich:

*Do you feel that your opinion of the architectural profession would have changed if you hadn’t had the experiences of working with members?*

M. Nerland:

No, the only way my attitude did change was through continual positive experiences with the profession. These experiences occurred again and again, as we talked about, enabling me to grow in respect and confidence of persons trained as Architects.



**Figure 14: South Shore School (PVSD #208)**

K. Dietrich:

*What is your current opinion of the role and work that Architects do?*

M. Nerland:

I value highly the work that Architects do. It is an integral part of my job. I see Architects as a critical component in my performance of daily duties. I don't see how I would get by now without their involvement in my position.

**CONCLUSION:**

The interview process reveals that uninformed, non-involved persons may have a negative view of the architectural profession. This view may be taken as a stereotype among persons who are operating on the periphery of the profession, yet not involved with Architect but affected by the architectural design.

The opinion of Mr. Nerland dramatically changed from his original position of “no use or value in the profession’s activities”, to the point where “I don’t see how I would get by now without their involvement in my position”. This change in opinion or perception was brought about by consistent involvement with competent professionals who met or exceeded the client’s expectations. This type of response is indicative of persons who learn through experience of the value and skills that an Architect brings to the facility design process.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is the recommendation of this report that Architects engage in public information and awareness campaigns in order to educate the public on the value and skills that can be applied to all project types. It is only through experience and understanding that perception will change to view the profession as a positive player in the industry. Education of the layman will be first step in enhancing the perception and image of the role of an Architect and the profession as a whole.