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DIFFERENT PATHS, COMMON GOAL:

INSIDE THE EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OWNERS, CONSULTANTS, AND CONTRACTORS

BY: TWILA DRIEDGER

“WE ALL HAVE DIFFERENT RESPONSIBILITIES,” SAYS DOERKSEN. “BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY, ALL PROJECTS ARE PARTNERSHIPS.”



CRAIG DOERKSEN

In construction, tension between owners, consultants, and contractors is nothing new. Tight timelines, budget pressures, incomplete information, and shifting expectations have challenged project teams for decades. Yet despite the friction, one truth continues to emerge across the industry: successful projects rarely come down to one team doing its job well. They succeed when everyone works together well.

That dynamic was at the centre of a panel discussion titled *Different Paths to a Common Goal* at the Construction Specifications Canada (CSC) Conference in Winnipeg in May. Moderated by Craig Doerksen, Executive Director, Capital, Clinical Engineering and Facilities Management for Shared Health, the conversation explored one of the industry's longest-running realities: the tension – and growing collaboration – between owners, consultants, and contractors.

Additional panelists included: Peter Grose, President at Westland Construction Ltd.; Rock Jerome, Principal, Contract Administrator at ft3 Architecture Landscape Interior Design; Jerald Peters, Principal Architect at ft3 Architecture Landscape Interior Design; and Harald Schulz, Senior Vice-President, Pre-Construction at Concord Projects. Each is affiliated with their respective companies as noted.

“Projects are successful when the owner, designer, and contractor all achieve what they need from the project,” says Doerksen. “As an owner, I want something new or improved. Designers are translating that vision into something workable on paper, and contractors are trying to physically

construct it and make it work. Everyone approaches the project from a different perspective, but the overall goal is shared.”

The challenge, he says, is that the path to that shared goal is rarely straightforward.

“Projects often start to go sideways when we leap blind,” admits Doerksen. “Usually, it’s because of time. We feel pressure to move quickly, so we push ahead before properly defining scope, schedule, and budget. That can cascade through the entire project.”

From the owner’s perspective, that pressure is especially amplified in healthcare construction, where projects often involve aging facilities, occupied spaces, and highly complex systems that must remain operational throughout construction.

“Most of our work is renovations,” he explains. “You’re working around medical gas systems, fire alarms, electrical systems, data communication systems, and nurse call systems – all while people continue receiving care nearby. It adds layers of complexity that require a tremendous amount of coordination.”

That increasing complexity places even greater importance on communication, coordination, and complete project documentation – something Ryan Epp, Landscape Architect and Associate at ft3 Architecture Landscape Interior Design, says the industry continues to navigate.

“I think communication is the overarching answer,” says Epp, who also serves on the board of CSC’s Manitoba Chapter. Epp agrees that a lot of issues



RYAN EPP



stem from schedule pressures, compressed timelines, and budget constraints. “That creates coordination challenges between consultants and having a truly coordinated drawing and specification set.”

Epp says late-stage value engineering and failing to identify project risks early can further compound those issues. “The more collaboration that happens upfront, the stronger the project tends to be throughout the process,” he says.

For Peter Grose, President and CEO of Westland Construction Ltd., many project challenges can be traced back to issues that are not fully identified until construction is already underway. “The unfortunate part is that construction is tangible, but consulting is intangible,” says Grose. “You only really get to evaluate the completeness of a consultant package during execution – and by then, it’s often too late to avoid conflict.”

Grose believes earlier collaboration between owners, consultants, and contractors can help reduce many of those challenges before they escalate. “I don’t think there’s a one-size-fits-all delivery model,” he says. “But regardless of the model, communication, and collaboration are critical. The more clarity and coordination there is upfront, the better the project.”

While tensions and disagreements are still inevitable on projects, all three industry perspectives point to a noticeable shift in how teams are approaching those challenges.

“I’m definitely seeing more desire for projects to be collaborative rather than adversarial,” says Doerksen. “As owners, we need strong relationships because we need strong bidders, strong design teams, and strong contractors. These relationships matter.”

Epp agrees that contractor input early in the process is extremely valuable, especially in today’s construction climate. “Projects are becoming increasingly complex and require a high level of organization and coordination,” he says.

Grose adds that tighter margins and growing competition are also pushing companies to improve how they operate and collaborate. “There’s less room for error today,” he says.

At its core, the conversation is less about eliminating tension altogether and more about improving how teams navigate it. Construction will always involve competing pressures, evolving conditions, and difficult decisions. But increasingly, industry leaders are recognizing that the strongest projects come from teams willing to approach those challenges as partners rather than opponents.

We all have different responsibilities,” says Doerksen. “But at the end of the day, all projects are partnerships. 🤝

THE GROSE REPORT THOUGHTS FROM WESTLAND’S CEO



Construction has evolved dramatically over time. Historically, projects were often led by a single “Master Builder” – one individual or entity responsible for overseeing nearly every aspect of design and construction. Over the years, however, the industry has become far more specialized. Today, successful projects rely on a broad network of owners, consultants, contractors, subcontractors, suppliers,

and trades, each contributing unique expertise and playing a critical role in the delivery process.

In many ways, that evolution also created a period of fragmentation within the industry. As responsibilities became more divided, relationships between stakeholders sometimes shifted toward a “we versus they” mentality. But I believe the industry is continuing to move in a better direction – one that places greater value on collaboration, shared accountability, and teamwork. More than ever, successful projects depend on strong partnerships and a collective commitment to achieving the best outcome together.

Communication in construction is often talked about, like it’s simply attending meetings or sending emails. But effective communication is much broader than that. It’s embedded in the drawings, specifications, schedules, planning meetings, and expectations established from the very beginning of a project.

I’ve always considered myself a systems-driven person. In my mind, every stakeholder on a project should clearly understand their role and responsibilities, and how they support the overall team throughout every phase of a project.

Construction is very much like a domino rally. As soon as one piece falls out of place, the flow gets interrupted. One missed scope item, one delayed decision, or one breakdown in communication can impact the entire team.

At Westland, we focus on controlling what we can control – our own conduct, communication, and processes – while also contributing positively to the project team. Accountability and trust are critical to that process. If we make a mistake, we own it. We correct it, learn from it, and put systems in place to help ensure it doesn’t happen again.

In my experience, the strongest projects are never about one company performing well in isolation. They are successful because the entire team is committed to fulfilling their role and supporting one another along the way.

The industry continues to evolve. Competition is stronger, technology is advancing rapidly and companies are being challenged to operate more efficiently than ever before. But despite all the changes, construction remains a people-driven industry. Strong relationships, ethical conduct, and teamwork still matter – and always will.

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RENAN LUIS



From the heights of Pico das Agulhas Negras in Brazil to the construction industry in Canada, if it's one thing Renan Luis enjoys, it's the climb.

A project manager with Westland Construction, Luis pursued a six-year civil engineering program in Brazil, a trajectory that led to an internship, full-time work

with a large general contractor, and eventually, an opportunity to move to Canada through a scholarship program. Looking to pursue his PMP (Project Management Professional) certification, Luis discovered a program through the University of Winnipeg and relocated to Winnipeg in late 2018.

"I could have gone to several different countries, but Winnipeg had a great program and a reasonable cost of living," he says. "I came for school originally, but after being here for a while, I wanted to see what construction looked like in Canada."

After completing the program and earning his PMP certification, Luis joined Westland Construction Ltd. in January 2020 and has been with the company ever since.

Now six years into his role as a project manager, Luis oversees everything from budgeting and subcontractor coordination to scheduling, client communication, and project execution.

"I like the ever-changing environment," he says. "In a project-based company, everything changes all the time. Projects are temporary, teams change, clients change, and every project brings different challenges."

Luis says the supportive team environment at Westland has played a major role in his experience with the company.

"Construction can be stressful, but having a strong team around you makes all the difference," he says. "It's all about the people."

Some of his most memorable projects include his first major project with Westland – Hasting's School – as well as work completed at the Royal Canadian Mint. "That first project really taught me the ropes at Westland," he says. "And the Mint project stands out because it was a great team environment with strong collaboration between everyone involved."

Collaboration is something Luis believes is essential to successful construction projects. "There are always challenges on projects, so being respectful, open-minded, and willing to listen is huge," he says. "Good collaboration and communication make a big difference."

Outside of work, Luis enjoys spending time outdoors hiking and exploring nature with his wife, whom he has been with since high school. The couple recently returned from hiking in Zion National Park and previously spent 40 days travelling across South America during their honeymoon, exploring destinations throughout Patagonia, Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia.

"We love being outdoors," he says. "Whether it's mountains, hiking, or travelling somewhere new, that's probably our favourite way to spend time."

When he's not on a construction site or hiking trail, Luis can also be found enjoying another summertime hobby – riding motorcycles. 🏍️

CELEBRATING OVER 40 YEARS; CELEBRATING THE FUTURE YESTERDAY, TODAY & TOMORROW



YESTERDAY

St. Boniface General Hospital C3 Nuclear Medicine

In 2017 Westland renewed the C3 Nuclear Medicine ward at St. Boniface General Hospital. Nuclear Medicine

is a safe and painless procedure that uses small amounts of radioactive substance, or "tracer", to help record information about the function and structure of the major organs in your body. Westland Construction is pleased to have been part of a project specializing in leading edge medicine.



TODAY

Misericordia Health Centre Operating Room Upgrade

Westland is currently working on upgrading the HVAC systems serving the Operating Room, including the replacement of fan

coil units, new chilled water piping and controls, and selective architectural modifications to support the new infrastructure. Temporary hoarding and protection measures are paramount and are being implemented to maintain a safe and controlled construction environment.



TOMORROW

Health Sciences Centre Pediatric Indigenous Healing Space

Westland Construction is honoured to be delivering Canada's first Indigenous healing space within the HSC Children's Hospital, a landmark project designed to

create a culturally grounded environment for healing, connection, and support for Indigenous children and families. 🏡

ABOUT US

Westland Construction Ltd. is a full-service General Contractor serving the institutional, commercial, and industrial sectors through new construction, civil support, and renovations.

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