

**An Examination of the Career Paths and Professional Challenges
Of Women in Management Positions in Major University and
College Transportation Departments**

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Abstract

Women have been involved in the field of transportation since the 1800s and comprise almost half of today's workforce, yet the transportation industry continues to be male-dominated. The Transportation Research Board in its 2000 Task Force on Women's Issues in Transportation identified a need to learn more about women leaders in transportation. Such knowledge would help the transportation industry in the pursuit and hiring of women and also assist those wishing to pursue a career in transportation. This study provides information on the demographics, career paths, and professional challenges of women managers in major university transportation departments.

Keywords: Women managers, Transportation, Career paths, Professional challenges, Career variety, Managerial adaptability

Women comprise almost half of the workforce today and yet the transportation industry continues to be male-dominated. An article in the *Monthly Labor Review* stated that in 2000 over half of the young workers in executive/managerial, professional and technical occupations were female (DiNatale & Boraas, 2002), however little to no research exists that addresses women in transportation. In 2000, the Transportation Research Board's Task Force on Women's Issues in Transportation (Transportation Research, 2000) identified women leaders in transportation and their career paths as important research topics for the transportation community. In order to pursue the hiring and development of women in the transit industry, first the agencies need information on the education and career paths that women use to gain leadership skills (Schachter, 2001). Data on the interrelatedness of educational background, professional work experiences and career challenges may help identify and understand the successful career paths of women at a time when women managers in transportation are scarce.

The purpose of this study was to examine the career paths and professional challenges of women in management positions in major university and college transportation departments. This examination would provide demographic data about these women and provide their personal accounts of work experiences and challenges.

Method

This study utilized a structured approach to qualitative research methods through the use of a survey to obtain descriptive statistics, in-depth interviews and a focus group.

Data Collection

Prior to initiating data collection, a pilot test of the survey and survey process was conducted to ensure that the survey questions were clear and understandable and that the on-line process was easy to access and complete.

Population and Sample

The selection of the participants for this study was conducted through purposeful selection. Maxwell (2005) identifies purposeful selection as the “strategy that involves selecting individuals deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 88). The potential candidates were obtained from the membership roles of the International Parking Institute (IPI). The International Parking Institute is a professional organization composed of personnel involved in the management of parking and transportation departments for universities, colleges, airports, hospitals, municipalities, and cities. IPI’s publication entitled, *Who’s Who in Parking* identified 1248 members for membership year 2006 (IPI, 2006). Of those 1248 members, 37 women in upper and mid-level management positions from 31 major university or college transportation departments were identified. The major universities or colleges were defined as those schools with a school enrollment of 20,000 students or greater. Women managers from similar-sized universities and colleges were chosen to maintain commonalities in their facilities. There are significant differences in the transportation needs of larger universities versus smaller universities.

Survey

The initial phase of the process started with an invitation to participate sent electronically. The invitation explained the study, the process and included an informed consent form. The survey, created using an on-line website program was then distributed electronically. Once completed, thirty-three women managers returned the completed surveys to the website where the demographic information was compiled. The descriptive statistics obtained from the responses were used to analyze similarities and difference among the women managers.

Interviews

The women managers for the in-depth interviews were selected from universities or colleges with a student enrollment of 30,000 or more. These women managers in the positions of director, associate director and assistant director were contacted via e-mail with a request for interview volunteers. Twelve interview participants were identified and an interview schedule was coordinated.

Questions from an interview guide were used to introduce concepts that participants expounded upon based on their own particular experiences. As such, the interviews were nondirective in order to “learn the respondents’ beliefs, experiences, and views rather than persuade them of my perspective” (Glesne, 2006, p. 95). Based on the interview participant’s preference, the interviews were either conducted face to face in the Tampa Bay Conference Center during IPI’s annual conference or they were conducted by telephone. Additionally, all interviews were audio taped and then transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews.

Focus Group

A focus group, composed of women from the initial survey sample, convened once the analysis of the interviews was conducted using the on-line Adobe Connect meeting website. Focus groups can be a “useful way to gather further insight into issues that developed through data analysis of individual interviews or to member check my developing understandings with the participants” (Glesne, 2006, p. 104). The focus group was composed of individuals from the larger initial survey sample. The focus group was used to discuss and verify the themes that resulted from the in-depth interviews.

Validity, Reliability and Objectivity

Maxwell (2005) identifies validity in qualitative analysis as a component of the research design that employs strategies to identify and attempt to rule out validity “threats” by providing

evidence to the contrary. Throughout this study, triangulation, peer review, negative case analysis, clarification of researcher process, member checking, and the use of rich thick description were all utilized to address concerns related to validity as well as reliability, and objectivity. The process of triangulation occurred through the use of the interviews, surveys, and a focus group. A pilot test of the survey was administered to three transportation managers to ensure the clarity of both the survey questions and survey process. The interviewees, through member checking, were provided copies of their interview transcripts to review for accuracy and understanding of their narrative. One participant had experienced a very negative experience. This participant's situation provided information for a negative case analysis. The focus group discussion verified the themes arising from the in-depth interviews. Information from the focus group also added to the descriptions provided by the interview participants.

In writing the analysis, rich, thick description was used to accurately express the information obtained from the twelve interviews and the focus group discussions. Samples of the data, coding efforts and resulting analysis were shared with a peer who reviewed the samples and provided useful and constructive comments which were incorporated into the study.

Results

The Survey

Demographics

From the demographic portion of the survey, the data revealed that over fifty-one percent of respondents were over the age of 41 years old. An additional twelve percent of those surveyed were between 31 and 40 years of age. Thirty percent, or ten of those women surveyed, fell into the age category of 51 to 60 and two were sixty and over. Twenty-five of the thirty-three

respondents were married, with an additional six divorced, and two single. Fourteen of the thirty-three participants still had children living at home.

Table 1

Survey Participant Demographics

Survey Participant Demographics		
Age		
	Response Percent (Count)	
25 & under	0.0%	(0)
26-30	0.0%	(0)
31-40	12.1%	(4)
41-50	51.5%	(17)
51-60	30.3%	(10)
60 & over	6.1%	(2)
Marital Status		
	Response Percent (Count)	
Single	6.1%	(2)
Married	75.8%	(25)
Divorced	18.2%	(6)
Widowed	0.0%	(0)

Do you have children currently living at home?		
	Response Percent (Count)	
Yes	42.4%	(14)
No	57.6%	(19)

In terms of educational background, 17 participants (51.5%) had completed either four years of college or obtained a bachelor's degree. Six of the seventeen degree majors were in the field of business. Only two of the seventeen degree holders, actually possessed a degree in transportation. Four participants reported high school diploma or GED as their highest level of education. Twenty-one percent of the thirty-three participants possessed a Master's degree in majors ranging from Business Administration to Public Administration to Anthropology. None of the respondents possessed graduate degrees in the area of transportation. It is also interesting to note that none of the participants had an engineering background even though the field of transportation is commonly connected to engineering programs.

Table 2

Educational Background of Women Managers in Major College and University
Transportation Departments

Educational background (check highest degree earned & provide degree information)		
	Response Percent (Count)	
Less than high school graduate	0.0%	(0)
High School graduate or GED	12.1%	(4)
Some college, no degree	21.2%	(7)
2 years of college/Associate's degree (Major)	12.1%	(4)
4 years of college/Bachelor's degree	51.5%	(17)

(Major)			
Master's degree (Major)	21.2%	(7)	
Professional degree (Specify)	12.1%	(4)	
Doctoral degree (Topic of Study)	0.0%	(0)	

Transportation as a Career

The second set of questions focused on transportation as a career. Twenty of the thirty-three women managers indicated that they would stay in the field of transportation. When queried about the type of position in transportation that they would pursue, the majority of the women managers identified career advancement positions within their own organization. For example, the mid-level managers wished to pursue upper-level or director positions. The current participants already in director positions would pursue Vice Chancellor or Assistant/Associate Vice President positions. Three respondents were nearing retirement and therefore were not interested in advancement, one respondent mentioned moving into consulting and one respondent was content in her current position.

In terms of training and development, the survey reflected high response rates. Over 87% of respondents participated in in-house training and more than 90% participated in training programs outside of the organization. Eighteen of thirty-two respondents have obtained or are pursuing a professional certification with a professional organization. Half of the respondents are attending academic classes to enhance educational levels.

The existence of mentors for these women managers in transportation leaned positively with twenty-one of the thirty-two respondents stating that they had or have had a mentor. When

asked the number of mentors throughout their career, ten respondents identified one mentor, eight participants identified two, and two respondents identified the existence of three mentors during their career and one revealed four or more. Fifteen of the respondents who identified themselves as having mentors selected or found the mentors on their own. One respondent obtained a mentor through an organized program and the remaining six identified their selection process by opting for the "other" category. In terms of the gender of the mentors, it was a split with 50% male and 50% female.

Career Support and Advancement

The final section of the survey addressed the area of career support and advancement. Some literature suggests that there is a tendency of women to change their management style, to a style more synonymous with male managers, in order to be successful in management positions (Bartol, Martin, & Krankowski, 2003). Of the 33 respondents to the survey, 23 or 71.9% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they needed to change their management style to be successful in their current positions. Seven respondents identified the need to change their style and two were undecided. In terms of gender, when asked if being female in a male-dominated industry has helped them to advance in their career only one respondent agreed. Twenty-six respondents, resulting in 81.2% of the respondents, did not believe that being female in the male-dominated industry assisted in their career advancement.

The majority of respondents (78.2%) stated that their organizations support or empower them to perform successfully. Three respondents were undecided and four disagreed that they received organizational support or empowerment.

The final question of the survey was an open-ended question giving the respondents the opportunity to provide any information that they felt would be important to note in terms of their

current position, career path, educational background or challenges experienced. Seventeen respondents skipped this question; however, sixteen provided written responses. The responses ranged in content from educational requirements required for the job, to networking, training, and related experiences. Survey Participant 9 identified her experience in the industry as follows: “I have found in this type of industry you must be aggressive while not turning people off. The nature of the parking industry requires people to be “tough”. As a women in this type of position, it can be controversial....The other aspect of transportation, particularly in parking, is that the industry, until recently, was not recognized, nor were there formal resources. Anyone in the industry had/has to have the ability to gather information and ideas from networking versus through formal education and training. If you don’t have the initiative or willingness to take charge and run on your own, it can be a difficult industry.”

Survey Participant 4 shared, “Part of my experience as a woman in the parking management field has included working on a degree while raising a family and working full-time in an extremely busy and stressful position. Trying to maintain balance has not always been easy.”

Some respondents shared experiences related to gender issues. Survey Participant 29 related, “in a university environment, I have found it difficult to advance. ... It is difficult to gain additional responsibilities. Other male directors who report to my boss have been able to obtain additional responsibilities that have led to their ability to advance in rank.”

Survey Participant 22 stated that, “Women are still underpaid, underclassed, and undercut at every opportunity.” In contrast, Survey Participant 13 shared, “I have found the new parking professional to be very progressive and haven’t experienced a gender bias.”

Several respondents identified the importance of networking and training through professional organizations such as the IPI. Survey Participant 12 shared, “Belonging to our state

association as well as IPI has broadened my horizons and has been a great tool in helping me with resources. Starting my IPI certification has opened many new doors, plus given me fifty-three new networking resources to learn from.”

The importance of work experience was a common theme as well. Survey Participant 21 provided the following insights: “I think what has built my experience was gaining knowledge in all aspects of institutional transportation. I haven’t gained too much knowledge on the municipal side of things, but I have taken classes with IPI on those aspects and have networked with professionals in that field.”

Survey Participant 11 related, “I believe that all of my life’s experiences have helped me to be successful in my current position.” In comparing a career move from one university to another, Participant 6 provided, “I did find that moving from one college where I started as a clerk and was promoted to administrator over fifteen years to another university where I came in as director opened up a whole new level. I was viewed as an expert in my field rather than the nice young kid who grew up here.”

Career Paths and Professional Challenges

The Interviews

The in-depth interviews with the higher-level managers provided stories of career experiences focusing on career paths and challenges. These stories were analyzed and then compared and contrasted against each other. As a result of the analysis, three themes emerged.

“Climbing the Ladder”

The first theme, entitled “Climbing the Ladder”, was the most prominent and refers to career advancement either within the same department, within the same career field, or external to the university. Six of the twelve interview participants moved up through the ranks within their

organization. Interview Participant 1 related, “When I came to the university, I was a student employee in the parking department working towards a four-year degree in Business

Administration. Here we are twenty- four years later and I am running a business.”

Interview Participant 2 shared, “Transportation was never my chosen career field, I fell into it. I was getting married and needed a full-time job. I was going to college. My mother-in-law knew someone in the parking office at the [major university]. I was hired on as a clerk and fell into it, rising through the ranks.” Interview Participant 11 stated, “I spent my entire career, even my job as a student employee in this department...in this field. My career is pretty straight and narrow. I started out as a bus driver, loved the department, loved the people, loved what we were doing, and loved the students.”

Several incentives were mentioned in regards to the participant’s motivation for “Climbing the Ladder.” Three participants identified transportation as an original career goal. One of those participants shared her story: “I took Transportation Logistics in college. I worked for a professor in Transportation Logistics. He got me interested in the whole field of moving product, moving people.”

One participant possessed a degree and background in Urban and Regional Planning. She related, “my first internship out of school was in the [city] as a transportation intern... From that path, I always stayed in it, since I liked it – Transportation planning, the engineering side.” The third participant stated that transportation was always her chosen career field – “transportation in the global end of things, not the parking end.” She further explained that she “started out in freight management. Then, I was in parking management for a [university]. I worked for the management company where the university liked the company and liked their management style...”

As indicated, half of the participants accepted entry-level positions in transportation departments early in their careers, and remained in the department, rising through the ranks.

Interview Participant 11 identified her career path as follows: “When I first came back to the department in the late eighties, I held a series of administrative leadership jobs from painting parking lots to working events, how to respond to event parking, permit operations, enforcement, appeals, garage operations, all over the course of twelve to thirteen years.”

For two participants, the move to the university transportation department was the result of a career change. Interview Participant 3 revealed, “I actually came to the [major university] to do graduate work – a mid-life career change. I was attending graduate school in counseling psychology. I needed a job and was hired to work the counter in the parking office. ... By the time I had finished my graduate work, I had been promoted twice. For awhile I worked part-time in the evenings in a counseling center. Another promotional opportunity came up, to be assistant director. I took that and then the director left ... and that’s when I decided to seek that position. I went from the parking counter to director.”

Interview Participant 12 shared: “I never worked in parking before. I was working as a family therapist, I had a degree in psychology and I wanted to get out of it. I was tired and wanted to work for the state, with the university, so I put in an application. That’s when they (the university) started sending the job vacancies.”

One participant cited financial incentive and stability as the attraction to the university’s transportation department. “I started down the path of parking because of money. I started in the airport as a parking manager and was hired away from them to work in the university in a manager role in parking. I was then the interim director and then became director. I guess transportation was an opportunity to manage.” She also stated that “when the (university)

position opened up, it was interesting to me. The airport was always exciting. I felt it (the university position) was a pretty solid career. People weren't going to stop using transportation." Regardless of the attraction or reason for accepting a position with a major university transportation department, all interview participants remained to "climb the ladder."

"Experience is the Key"

A second theme evolved entitled "Experience is the Key". During the interviews, participants discussed their work experience, training and education as it pertains to the managers' career paths and current positions. In all but one of the cases, work experience took a primary role in preparing the participants for their positions. These experiences ranged from work internal to the transportation department, to work external to the university position through to personal life experiences. Interview participant 1 shared how the work experiences she gained from "climbing the ladder" put her in a position to advance. "I started as the front office clerk, and then became the accountant. Then I became the office manager while it was under the police. I was the secretary to the Chief of Police, then parking manager and dispatch coordinator. When they (the department) decided to separate parking and police, the administration asked if I wanted to go with police or parking. They gave me a year shot at it with a temporary increase. They were happy. By the time I was twenty-two, I was acting director and then at twenty-three, the director."

Experience outside of the university is exemplified by Interview Participant 3's story taken from previous work experience as a classroom teacher. She related, "There is very little in terms of management that you don't exercise in a classroom. I taught high school. Much of your effort is in managing the classroom as well as managing the educational opportunities in the students. I think in that regard, while it was not formal management training, it prepared me to deal with a

variety of issues to deal with differing personalities, differing objectives.”

In the case of Interview Participant 5, it was not any previous work but rather life’s lessons learned as the middle daughter in a military family. “I didn’t have anything really to prepare me.... Moving a lot in the military and having to fit in with different groups of people. My parents decided we could go to Catholic school, not the army school, which was really tough. It makes you a little better at adapting.”

Interview Participant 4 attributed her ability to deal with challenges more to training than to previous work experiences. “I grew with the department. [University] prides itself on training. [University] has an excellent program on supervision and leadership. The training has been a huge thing. I can’t say enough about it....Our department, because of training, has had multiple people leave to be directors elsewhere.”

The politics of a university transportation department were echoed by eight participants as a difficult part of the job. While some participants did not mind the politics, others would rather stay in their current position than advance into an administrative position due to the increased need to deal with the political rather than operational aspects of their jobs. Interview Participant 2 stated, “I don’t mind the politics; I enjoy it sometimes, at a certain level.” Interview Participant 6 discussed her frustration with the politics of a university and how she and her supervisor create a balance: “The only thing that I get frustrated with is our administration, not our boss. We work as partners. We have a great relationship. We can talk. Above her it gets fuzzy. Sometimes it’s hard and you get to the point where you have to pick your battles. I am ready to fight all of the time. She (the supervisor) says that we need to think this through. I am still learning. It’s a balance. I like doing operations and she is more about the policy. We complement each other very well.”

Interview Participant 7 equated her previous work experience and her ability to deal with the politics as key to succeeding in the position. “Through default, if I wanted to succeed at my job, I needed to take the initiative; do what needed to be done. All of those jobs (previous work experience) built up to a point where I am comfortable doing the job and doing new things and ready to take on the politics with the job. Parking is not a popular world and most people want to stay out of it.”

In the case of Interview Participant 9, she found a difference between public and private university environments when she accepted a position at a private institution. “I learned a different kind of thing at [private university], not professional more political. That was a valuable lesson since I am not a political animal.” Interview Participant 12 summarizes the political component as follows, “It’s the trickiest part of being at a university. The politics make or break you.”

Managing people is another responsibility that the women felt was learned more through experience than training. Interview Participant 2 stated, “Probably the biggest challenge is managing the people.” Personnel management in terms of this position is two-fold: There is the management of the departmental staff and then there is the management of the needs of the university population. She proceeded by saying that in terms of her staff, “They work in remote settings, often by themselves. The biggest challenge is making them feel valued, informed, etc.” In terms of managing the needs of the customers, she related, “When I moved here, my assistant said,

“Where do you spend most of your time? I responded that 80% to 90% of the time is the people – faculty, staff, students. If you don’t have people skills and don’t like people; you can’t work in this environment.”

“Support of the Administration”

The third theme focused on support of the administration. This term, defined broadly, ranged from the support or lack of support from a direct manager to the support or lack of support of the university administration. It encompasses areas such as decision-making, training, resources, and professional development. Seven of the twelve managers identified issues related to a lack of support by their administration. One participant related that through her years of experience and work with the university she has gained the support of the administration, but there remains an overarching issue. Interview Participant 3 stated, “I have to tell you that it remains a challenge being a women administrator on a university campus. Another challenge is advancement. You get to the executive officer level at our campus and there are only two out of twenty at my level. It is a little bit better but still not outstanding.”

Interview Participant 7 talked about her experience in not just the university setting, but in the field of business as well. “Probably the biggest thing about being a woman in business is the typical thing that you run into such as the roadblocks or lack of support from male management and stuff. ...You learn to deal with it and manage those people or manage around those people. I think that it’s a lot less than what it was. I also think it’s a cultural issue where some people just aren’t with it and refuse to get on board.”

Interview Participant 12 shared similar experiences, “There are always obstacles and barriers. Being a woman, still to some degree, impacts ones’ ability to get ahead or get common respect like the guys do. The guys get it whether they deserve it or not. We (female managers) need to work for it. We need to be a little faster, smarter, more intuitive, and more creative. It’s a barrier that will always be there.”

Some literature suggests that there is a tendency for women to change their management style, to a style more synonymous with male managers, in order to be successful in management positions (Bartol, Martin & Krankowski, 2003). Of the 33 survey respondents, 23 either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they needed to change their management style to be successful in their current positions. Seven women did identify a need to change their style. Only four of the twelve interview participants identified gender inequity as an issue.

Interview Participant 9 identified additional issues related to support of the administration including weak management, lack of support in decision-making, providing necessary resources, and access to needed information in order to be successful in her job. “The challenges started nine months into the job. It stemmed from if you don’t have the administration backing you and if you don’t have the ability to sell your program, and if you don’t have access either. I didn’t have access. There was a filter between me and him (administrator). ...The turning point was this is not getting any better. You are not being heard any better. Staff turned on each other and on me. No leadership. I didn’t look like a leader.”

Eleven of the twelve interviewees expressed that, in their current positions, their administration supported their decisions, training opportunities, and participation in professional organizations for career development. Interview Participant 12 shared her experience as follows: “I could probably count on the fingers of one hand the number of times that the university administrator made a decision about parking or transportation that they did not first consult me. I am a very fortunate person. ...I talk to too many of my colleagues who were the last to know.”

This need correlates with the findings of Yoder, Schleicher, and McDonald (1998) who suggest that for token women to be effective as leaders of male-dominated masculine-task groups, they

must not only be empowered with position (by being appointed the leader) and expertise through training, but also be legitimated by high-status others.

In terms of providing support for training opportunities, Interview Participant 8 explained her experiences. “Yes, with my newest boss, he has been very positive in helping me with training pieces. My old boss didn’t believe in it (training) so I did it against his will. He felt it was a waste of time and money. I still did it since I felt it was important.”

Support by the administration in allowing flexibility in their operation was explained by Interview Participant 4. Her university allows the department to move staff among various positions in order to find the best fit that will help the employee to be most productive. “If a position opens up somewhere else, we can waiver that person in as long as they are doing an acceptable job and there are no disciplinary actions. We don’t have to hire from the public.”

Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion involving five participants from the survey group was used to verify the themes and information. The participants were asked to discuss their feelings about the resulting themes and categories and to discuss whether or not the themes resonated with them in terms of their experiences. They were also asked to identify if there were any gaps in the information provided.

The discussion of the first theme, "Climbing the Ladder," revealed no surprises to the focus group participants. Four of the five participants stated that their experiences identified with the concept that most women managers in transportation started in lower-level positions and advanced through the ranks. Focus Group participant 3 stated, “I also think that we raise our own within our organizations.” Focus Group participant 4 presented a different view, “Most of the managers who work for me did not plan to be in transportation. Of my three associate directors,

two moved to transportation from other university departments and one was hired from the outside with a business background.”

Educational level was one of the categories listed under the “Climbing the Ladder” theme and all participants agreed that although in the past bachelor’s or masters’ degrees were not required to obtain a management position in the university and college transportation departments, most universities and colleges have moved to such a requirement. Participant 4 related, “One of my associate directors does not have a four year degree but she started thirty years ago. Now, at least a Bachelor of Arts would be needed, and my other two associate directors and I have Master’s degrees.” Although degrees may be required, Focus Group 1 stated her opinion. “Once you are in an organization, it is all about experience. The education helps you get in the door.”

Participant 5 agreed by stating, “Transportation and parking requires

a unique individual, and education isn’t always a major factor. I’m a firm believer in education; and I don’t think we should discount it. I just think experience should be considered as well.”

The focus group participants were quick to identify with the politics of the job. The concept of “politics” in the job intermingled with the need for the woman manager to be assertive on many occasions is contradictory. Focus Group participant 4 shared that “You need to be assertive enough to make things happen and overcome obstacles, but it is very important to be politically astute.” Participant 1 added, “Learning to be assertive without rubbing people the wrong way (the political side of the business) is a critical factor.” Focus Group participant 5 explained it by stating, “Assertive women are often called a b*tch. Not fair, but it’s how we’re viewed. I’ve accepted that label, and don’t view it as a negative thing anymore. I suppose it means I’m doing my job correctly.”

In discussions about specific challenges, most agreed that the politics of the job were difficult but there were varying opinions about the priority of other challenges. Personnel management and customer service issues were identified as priority issues and equally as challenging.

In terms of support, the participants voiced the concerns and sometimes frustrations of the interview participants. Focus Group participant 4 stated, “Internal Public Relations (within the university) is critical. You need to lay the ground-work for the support you need and provide the administration with the policy arguments to take up the ladder for you.” Four of the five participants shared that their administration was supportive of their work. One participant did add a disclaimer to her support response with the following, “I feel we are supported by upper administration to a degree. We are supported as we are. However, in order for us to experience growth, there needs to be change, and we’re faced with an administration who is afraid of the change that’s necessary to move forward.”

The group provided additional input on gender inequity in the industry. Focus Group Participant 4 brought up an interesting point when she stated, “I think there is somewhat of a glass ceiling, however, it is compounded by the image of “Parking.” My colleagues in the university system at other campuses who were all male have encountered some difficulties moving to other areas and expanding responsibility.” This was a new concept that had not been brought up in either the surveys or the interviews. In contrast, however, Participant 5 shared her opinion by stating, “I think women have to climb the ladder more so than men. Women tend to have to prove themselves where men are given more of a chance with simply a degree.” Focus Group 1 added her take on the situation. “Some females start with a chip on their shoulder – they expect to be treated poorly and they create their own reality. We need to develop strong female leaders who can lead others along the path.” This statement led the participants to a

discussion about ways to develop strong female leaders. These were ideas that had not been discussed previously. Focus Group 4 identified a “Women in Transportation” organization at her location that provides good networking and scholarships for young women. Participant 3 has approached IPI about providing a reduced rate for students to attend IPI conferences in order to expose students to the industry. She also shared, “We have a graduate position in our department with Civil Engineering. We have graduated at least six Master’s students that interned with us.”

Summary of Findings

Themes Related to Career Paths and Professional Challenges

The information obtained from the in-depth interviews, the results of the survey, and the focus group discussion culminated in three major themes: 1) Climbing the Ladder; 2) Experience is the Key; and 3) Support of the Administration. The stories from each interview participant, the multiple choice and short answer responses from the thirty-three women surveyed and the topics in the focus group discussion could all be linked to one of the three themes.

"Climbing the Ladder"

The theme entitled, "Climbing the Ladder" was the most prominent among the women interviewed. Half of the women managers interviewed started in entry-level positions within their organization and moved up through the ranks to their current positions of director, assistant director or associate director. One focus group participant summed it up by stating, "I also think that we raise our own within our organization" (FG3). There were those participants that began their careers outside of the university transportation department, however, once inside, regardless of the attraction or reason, the participants remained to "climb the ladder."

In terms of education, there was diversity in both the levels of education achieved and the major topics of study. Only three participants identified possession of a transportation degree.

Additionally, for that matter, the same number identified transportation as their intended career goal.

"Experience is the Key"

This theme resulted from discussions related to work experience, training and education as it pertains to the managers' career paths and current positions. Experience assumed the dominant role over training in preparing the participants for their positions as high-level managers. The experiences identified were wide-ranging detailing the importance of personal life experiences, work experiences internal to the transportation department, and external work experiences

Although the focus group participants agreed on the importance of experience, the majority stated that their upgraded job descriptions would require an advanced degree for future directors, associate directors, and assistant directors. This common statement among the upper-level managers contradicted the findings about experience. Although all of the managers support higher education, the majority admitted that education could not replace experience for persons pursuing such a position.

A recurring topic under this theme involved the politics of working for a university. Most participants identified politics as the toughest part of their position and in some cases, the need to deal with political issues, kept mid-level managers from advancing to higher-level positions. How to handle the political aspect of a university environment is not easily taught in training but rather through direct experience. "It's the trickiest part of being at a university. The politics make or break you" (Interview Participant 12). The manager must maintain the integrity of the program while at the same time understanding that her actions with the various university customers could have far-reaching implications to the university.

The process of managing people was identified as two-fold: 1) managing the staff or; 2) managing the needs of the customers which included the university population and visitors to campus all of who utilize the campus' transportation services in one way or another. Again the majority of participants felt that this management process was learned more through experience than through training. Until actually faced with an angry customer or employee, one does not truly know how s/he will respond. Typical training does not provide the emotion and resulting physiological reactions that being in the moment provides. The emotions associated with the angry insults incorporating personal attacks against your character and/or background are hard to mimic in a training module.

"Support of the Administration"

This theme encompasses a broad range of situations from the support or lack of support of a supervisor to the support or lack of support of the university administration. The types of support identified in this study varied from support of the managers' decision-making to supporting professional development through training opportunities or membership in professional organizations to support by providing the adequate resources needed to be successful in their organization. Almost all participants in the interview and the survey stated that their current administration supported training and professional development. It was in the elements of decision-making and resources that participants reflected differences in the support that they received. Some managers felt less supported when it came to looking for professional development opportunities in terms of growing their department or responsibilities.

It was also in this theme that several participants expressed their opinion that women in university administration, in the business world, and in the transportation industry still experience challenges related to perceived gender inequity. Although most participants did not

feel that gender negatively impacted their career paths, the concept of gender inequity was raised several times. Most participants talked of the past and how the parking and transportation industry used to be predominantly male. They all agreed that it has changed immensely. In fact, most participants highlighted that there are probably as many females representing the parking side of the industry than men. Some participants related that gender equity issues still exist but it is based more on specific location than in the overall parking industry. Some universities are seen as being more equitable than others in terms of gender equity. It has become more of a case-by-case situation rather than an overarching issue.

The following figures depict the connectivity of the previous three themes discussed.



Figure 1. Factors that play a role in the career advancement and success of women managers in major university and college transportation departments.

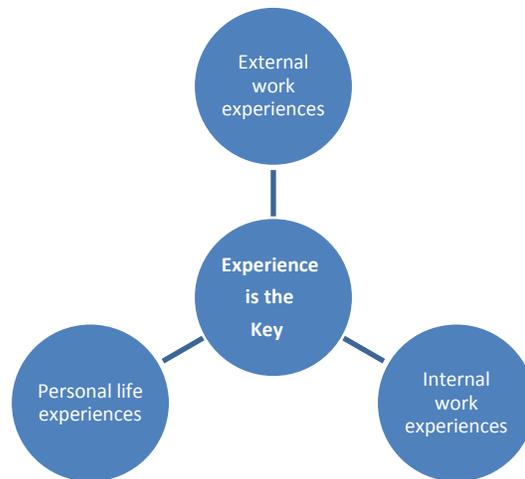


Figure 2. Factors vital to the managerial success of women managers in major university and college transportation departments.

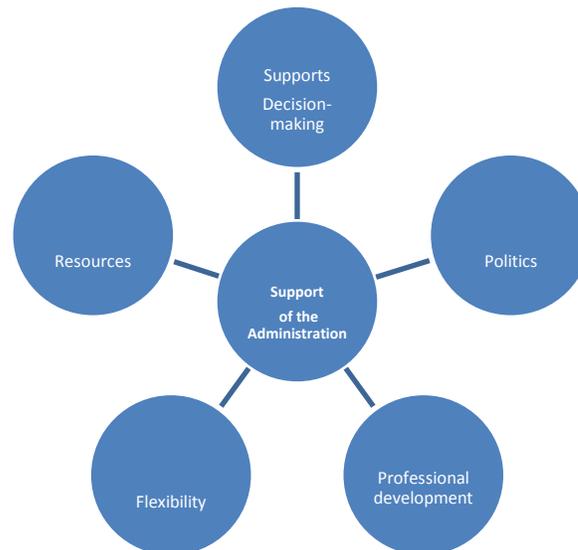


Figure 3. Support factors required for the career advancement and success of women managers in major university and college transportation departments.

Each figure identifies a set of factors culminating in a central theme that study participants identified as key to career advancement and success. All three figures, although shown separately, play an interconnected role as well. Based on the findings, in order to “Climb the Ladder”, these women managers relied on their “Experience as the Key” and the “Support of their Administration” to advance and be successful in their careers. So, the figures may be viewed in layers. The first layer breaks down each theme and its components. The second layer

incorporates the blending of the themes and their shared factors and how the interconnections among the three works together to relate what these women managers believe are the necessary requirements for managerial advancement and success in major university transportation departments.

Limitations

The limitations are as follows:

- This study was limited to women in management positions in major university and college transportation departments.
- Neither men nor women managers outside of the university or college transportation departments were included in this study.
- This study was limited to universities and colleges with a student enrollment of 20,000 or more.
- Women managers in college and university transportation departments represent only a small portion of the total number of women in the transportation industry.
- The researcher was representative of the group of women managers studied.

Conclusion

The results of this study serve multiple purposes. First, all of the findings from this study add to a base of knowledge that was minimal at best regarding the demographics, education, work experiences, career paths and professional challenges of women managers in transportation. This information answered the call of the Transportation Research Board's (2000) "Task Force on Women's Issues" that identified a need to understand the career paths of female transportation professionals.

A second purpose, closely related to the first, was offered by Schachter (2001) and Mason (2003) who highlighted the need to better understand the correlations between the educational background, educational level, professional work experiences and career challenges of women in the transportation arena. Although Mason and Schachter specified the need for this information for state departments of transportation and transit agencies, the same information applies to all potential transportation employees. The findings of this study provide data that can help organizations recruit, train, and retain women managers in transportation.

One of the most significant findings of this study indicated that the majority of the women managers entered the department at entry-level positions, and remained in the department to advance to the higher-level management positions. Even the women, who entered the department at the mid-level or higher-level positions, remained in the department with little desire to change careers. Some of these women managers started in different careers, but once in the university's transportation department, they remained as well. These women attributed the desire to remain in their departments to various reasons from financial stability, to university benefits, to a love of the job. This "love of the job" was defined in a variety of ways one of which involved the idea that the transportation industry, like many others, is constantly evolving and therefore offering new challenges almost daily. There were others that had no desire to leave their staff or the students whom they serve.

An additional finding relates to the three themes: "Climbing the Ladder"; "Experience is the Key"; and "Support of the Administration" in Figures 1, 2, and 3. Each theme, identified at the center of the figure, is connected to the factors that in various combinations aid in the advancement and success of these women managers in transportation. The themes portray a

simplistic and yet universal depiction of the requirements that these women managers felt were needed for career advancement and success.

All of the women managers in this study were eager to discuss their experiences in hopes that their experiences might assist in providing valuable information for women pursuing positions in transportation or to, in some way, help enhance the transportation industry for future women managers. This information can now serve as a base of knowledge about women managers in the transportation industry that did not exist previously.

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