

CONCLUSIONS

Transit leadership is in a period of transition. Awareness of the need for changes at the top of transit agencies is at a very high level. The attention that has been given to the topic by the American Public Transportation Association, the Federal Transit Administration, and by individual transit systems, mirrors that given in a number of other service-oriented industries. The current economic environment presents an opportunity for the transit industry to retool its message and its means of ensuring that it has the human resources it needs to lead agencies now and in the future. In this environment, transit agencies need to look inward at the types of corporate cultures they have developed and at the people who are waiting for an opportunity to contribute at the leadership level. At the same time, these agencies should look outward to determine how they can attract the resources they need to diversify their leadership talent.

Corporate cultures develop over time. Organizational leaders, in particular chief executive officers, and the teams they lead play a major role in determining what is valued in an organization. Many of today's transit leaders have grown up in the industry and hold similar values. Values held sacred within the industry, such as reliable, convenient, safe, and affordable transit services, have shaped much of the corporate culture in transit today. Other values inherited over the years hold dear the bureaucratic approaches to developing and retaining staff. Some individuals responding to the survey still adhere to the segmented orientation of every person's being responsible for himself or herself, including personal development and advancement. This perspective is not viable in an environment where interdependence is a given and separateness leads to poor-quality products and services. When senior managers report that they do not have time to mentor individuals with leadership potential or that the agency does not have a credible, well-communicated process for helping those with potential develop, it is clear that segmented thinking is quite active in the industry.

The literature on the topic of leadership development shows that employees expect to participate in organizational decision making earlier in their careers. Those individuals who have had such opportunities are more likely to be successful in these roles. An additional finding from the literature is that those who have the opportunity for structured leadership preparation for extended periods tend to be better prepared to take on the challenges of leadership. It is a message particularly pertinent for agencies that want

to attract workers who may stay with the agency for many years. These would be workers who have not been stuck in the traditional bureaucratic transit management model of the past.

Transit currently has numerous senior statespersons within agencies throughout the nation capable of mentoring those who desire to be a part of an industry known for its meaningful, sustained power to make a difference in the everyday lives of citizens. During the synthesis study, it became apparent that transit agencies are now attracting talent from other industries to add to the cadre of leaders. The mix of the seasoned veterans with those having limited transit experience presents an opportunity to create corporate cultures capable of adapting to the transportation needs and expectations of future customers.

One of the concepts gaining momentum in transit is the need for mobility managers, individuals who have the capability to communicate with, influence, and lead employees and organizations with more breadth than has been done in the traditional transit agency. In a number of instances, former transit agencies have been given responsibility for other related functions, such as congestion management, highway projects, and traffic control. Executives with such diverse functions must be able to lead agencies made up of individuals with backgrounds differing from those found in the traditional transit environment.

The case studies showcased how visionary leadership teams respond to changing expectations and needs in their communities. In these agencies, leaders embrace and help to create change. In doing so, they provide models for how transit agencies can work within their organizations and communities to develop corporate cultures that produce positive results for constituents. Much of the work, however, has to start within the organization, with attention to the types of leaders who are being recruited, developed, and retained. First, however, is the need for a clear, compelling vision of the future and what is important—what values are to be part of the fabric of the organization.

Transit agency leaders must be skilled in knowing how to select, develop, and retain senior staffs that have complementary leadership skills. These leaders must also have skills in how to involve all stakeholders in creating a culture that works for the organization. The synthesis showed that responding transit agencies have established positive relationships with communities and, to a large extent, with

governing bodies. An area that still needs much work is labor–management relations. Previous TCRP studies have documented the tension that exists between unions and management in the transit industry. Even with concerted efforts on the part of respondents to the synthesis survey, slippage in these pivotal relationships is part of the reality in today’s transit work environment.

This project provided an opportunity to take a first look at the role of corporate culture in attracting and maintaining transit leadership. Limitations inherent in a synthesis study prevent one from delving into deeper issues related to corporate culture and leadership development and retention. Thus, additional study on how transit cultures change

to adapt to new environments and expectations, and how these changes influence the types of leaders needed in these new environments, would be of benefit. Research could address issues related to recruitment, retention, training and retraining, and labor relations.

In addition, study of the career paths of individuals who can be considered mobility managers could help others to create appropriate career paths that might advance the industry. The industry could also take advantage of these individuals’ commitment to and experience in the industry. Such knowledge could also aid curriculum development at universities and other entities that provide education for those desiring to pursue leadership careers in the industry.

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