

20 June 2023

CIHT Dubai Online Seminar – Bulletin

Michelle Wood, Head of Technical Development, PTRC Training (Moderator)
Dina El Daly, Senior Commercial Manager
Jhanvi Dhanak, Commercial Management and Quantity Surveyor, AECOM
Noor Hajir, Head of Transport Planning and Mobility, WSP Middle East
Raghas Alansaari, Principal Senior Land Transport Engineer, UAE Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure
Sarah Alshammasi, Engineering Manager, Land Mobility Roads Division, NEOM

About the Event

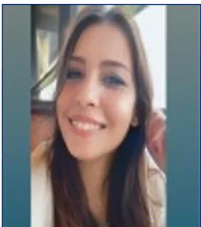
International Women in Engineering Day (INWED) is an international awareness campaign which raises the profile of women in engineering and focuses attention on the amazing career opportunities available to women and girls in this exciting industry. In 2023, the theme is 'Make safety seen' to celebrate the work that women engineers and planners are doing to support lives, livelihoods, and communities every day.

CIHT Dubai was proud to support INWED with an online seminar focused on women pursuing careers in the engineering, highways and transportation sector in the Middle East. The theme of the seminar was 'My Journey' where a panel of women, at different stages of their careers reflected on what has influenced their academic and career choices, their current roles and responsibilities, as well as the challenges, concerns, and opportunities they have encountered along the way. They shared their experiences and thoughts about how professional women in the sector can meet and balance professional and personal choices.

We're raising the profile of women professionals in engineering for INWED23

About the Panel Speakers

Today's Panel



Dina El Daly



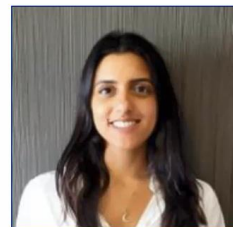
Jhanvi Dhanak



Noor Hajir



Raghas Alansaari



Sarah Alshammasi

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Our panel was chaired by **Michelle Wood**, Head of Technical Development, PTRC Training, UK. She is a Chartered Transport Planner, reviewer and mentor for the transport planning qualification and leads Professional Development within the CIHT Dubai Group and London.

Dina El Daly has over 14 years of experience in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Currently working as a senior commercial manager in a government organisation in Saudi Arabia. Dina is currently managing giga projects in Saudi Arabia from a commercial perspective. She has experience in managing projects such as entertainment, offices, hotels, and mixed-use. Her experience covers all aspects of pre and post-contract scope. She is a member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors RICS.

Jhanvi Dhanak is a recent graduate from Heriot Watt University and has two years of experience in the field of Commercial Management and Quantity Surveying at AECOM. She has been involved in administrating projects at the post-contract phase, advising clients on budgets, and maintaining budgets. Jhanvi is also currently an RICS (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors) candidate and is in the process of attaining a charteredship in the next two years.

Noor Hajir has over 15 years of experience as a transport planner. As Head of Transport Planning & Mobility for WSP in the Middle East, Noor leads a discipline of 27 professionals for both the public and private sectors across the GCC region. She is responsible for discipline wide operations, ensuring first and foremost client satisfaction and service excellence, while simultaneously setting and exceeding revenue and P&L targets, and promoting a collaborative team environment.

Raghas Alansaari is a Principal Senior Land Transport Engineer at the Ministry of Energy & Infrastructure, UAE. She has 7 years of practical experience in the transportation and mobility sector including planning and developing public transport in the emirate of Dubai, future foresight, and strategic planning of mobility. Currently, managing the UAE Smart Mobility Strategy which aims to make the United Arab Emirates among the world's leading countries in smart intermodal mobility by the year 2031.

Sarah Alshammasi is the Engineering Manager at the Land Mobility Roads Division of NEOM. Her role includes developing road project specifications and requirements and overseeing and managing the delivery of current and future road-related projects for the full NEOM road network. Sarah's work focused heavily on managing design delivery, providing optimized solutions to facilitate project delivery of highway expansions, flyover ramps, tunnels, and associated utilities.

Panel Discussion

In his welcoming remarks, **Martin Tillman**, the new Chair of CIHT Dubai, welcomed attendees and the speakers to the event. He noted that one of the CIHT's goals for the year was to improve and promote diversity and inclusivity, and how it was important to hold this event on this important topic.

Michelle Wood introduced the seminar of five engineering and transport professionals who are all at different stages in their career.

The Panel provided reflected on what has influenced their academic and career choices, their current roles and responsibilities, as well as the challenges and opportunities they have encountered along the way:

Dina El Daly was proud to be talking to the seminar from KSA. She explained in her view the way that in KSA there is a change in a positive direction for women in engineering. It is the right time to be a women in the construction and engineering field in KSA, with a culture promoting women. Dina noted engineering is still a male dominant industry, and in meetings you can tend to be the only women in the room.

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She reflected on how women have previously been perceived as being very emotional, but she encouraged women to be professional and practical, and remember that as a women in engineering this an exciting and challenging field:

“you should be who you are.... and why we need diversity in the engineering field”.

She noted it is positive to have different points of view when delivering projects and supporting teams, and having a women's heart makes you special and gives you more strength.

Dina also reflected that a challenge might be as a women you might not believe in yourself, you might question yourself. Dina encouraged women to trust yourself, believe in yourself, and that your emotion should not hold you back, and should not make you any less competitive. She encouraged every women to think, act, and be proud to be a women – this makes you special and makes women excel.

Jhanvi Dhanak reflected on her passion for physics and maths, and being a curious “Dubai Kid” seeing how the City was changing. This got her interested in engineering and became the first female engineer in her family. At university, she reflected on how there were only 5 women on her course – she was not surprised by this, but wished there were more women.

She encouraged more women to choose STEM careers, and how since joining as a graduate she has worked with many inspirational women, especially those balancing family life and professional life. Role models are one of her biggest motivations - she encouraged women in their early careers to interact with role models to help push themselves, and how her line manager has supported her, built her confidence, and helped her manage challenging situations.

She concluded by saying that if you get intimidated by your surroundings, you are not alone, and overcoming these challenging situations will make you unbeatable.

Noor Hajir reflected on how she is from a family of engineers, and engineering has always been at the forefront of her mind. When starting out her studies and career, she didn't know what urban design or mobility really was – they were not a used term. She found out about urban design “by accident” but realised what an interesting field it is.

She challenged how more can be done to encourage young girls and boys to enter STEM – with greater explanation needed to be provided to students and young professionals on the options and specialities that you can go in to. She called for the industry to be doing more to drive the education of the next generation. Noor explained that the types of projects she is now working demonstrate the shift in the transport and mobility sector.

Some key reflections Noor highlighted:

Luck – being in right place, right time – cannot control luck

Independence and ownership – as a women you shouldn't shy away and become people pleasers. There is an importance of being in an environment where you are allowed to flourish

Find your value add – think about what you bring to your team that it doesn't currently have as diverse teams are a good thing – taking on a role, however small, can help progress your career

Look for ways to increase your scope – stay relevant and explore how you can expand your scope

Credibility – it is not a disadvantage to be a women, it is an advantage

“as the only women in in the room, you can positively stand out and have the spot light on you – an opportunity to make yourself credible”

Raghas Alansaari reflected on how she came from an architectural background and didn't know much about transport at the start of her career. Her work to date has shaped a new generation of designs for bus stops and she is proud to see her work applied in reality. Her work

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saw her after one year in to her career being named the best youth employee in the Dubai government excellence awards. This recognition gave her the push and passion to do more.

She believes there needs to be more academic programmes specialising in transport and mobility. She is currently working for the UAE Federal Government in their future foresight unit, playing an important role in shaping future strategies for making transport better between the Emirates.

Sarah Alshammasi's passion for engineering started at school in KSA. She reflected it was a hard decision but her parents were supportive even though at the time in KSA there were not many career opportunities in this field. At the time there were even people who questioned what a women in engineering would do after university, but she is happy she made that choice and more engineering jobs for women have opened up.

She noted you shouldn't get intimidated by your experience and gender – learning ways to communicate teaches you new things and gains understanding to move forward

She has never felt intimidated to be a women in engineering, but encourages women to stay confident, assertive and focused on what you are doing.

Michelle concluded the opening session by saying that even if you are a women or a man, you have shared goals and outcomes in your work, and you should make contributions, be trustworthy and credible with each other. Transport is a small field and need to work together.

Questions

What is the most significant thing employers could to do promote equality and advancement of women?

Understanding diversity, and there is a difference between equal opportunity and equality – equality is making sure women and men are the same, but we are different in a “beautiful ways” – equal opportunities is for example how being a mother should be taken in to consideration. Workplaces and environments should be comfortable surroundings, as this has a major role in supporting a women's personal and professional life. More remote and flexible working can support women with their personal and professional lives.

Women are mothers and daughters, sometimes on call 24 hours a day as a mum and engineer – we need understand there are beautiful differences that will help a lot in the industry. Flexible working and better maternity cover are ways to help support women. Maternity and paternity leave should also be more equal, with a cultural shift as well as institutional shift.

Engineering not the best industry for work environment – mostly focussed on delivery and deadlines. Other industries are more focused on employees health and wellbeing – such as day care provision and flexible working hours, such as a 4 day week. Improvements in this area may make it more attractive to women and men.

Q – Should the Dubai Ministry of Happiness do more to mandate maternity and paternity leave

Maternity leave is currently around 3 months, but depends on the employer. There are a lot of things that the government are doing to have more balance for women and families, such as government offices providing have nurseries, however there is a hope for more initiatives in the future.

Maternity leave is not subsidized by the UAE Government for expats and it is not consistent across industries in its payment which provides challenges for families working for different companies with different policies.

Men should be allowed equal paternity leave – and must ensure maternity leave does not hinder a women's career opportunities.

Q – Transport is still male dominated in the Middle East, elsewhere in the world it is more balanced, what can be done here?

Improvements to the work environment to appeal to more people. The quality of your work life is important, as well as work life balance.

Q – What more could be done to raise awareness of working in engineering and transport

In the UAE, 50% of female college graduates are specialised in STEM. More needs to be done on transport planning to attract more women. Awareness of the range of roles in the mobility sector needs to be promoted, as it is very dynamic with a lot happening. More thought on initiatives, such as annual hackathons, in order to think of different ways to get people interest. Creating awareness of the benefits of working in transport are critical,

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including what the work environment is like.

Q – Many women have come in through architectural routes at university, do architectural courses have a better image than engineering courses?

Women may have more creative interests – not lack of equality just men and women have different interests. Potentially re-branding transport planning that it is more than fixed rail, and actually there is a lot of big picture thinking that needs to be done, which requires more creative and strategic thinkers in transport. Transport planners don't need to be engineers – you can be a geographer, English student, economist...

Q – What are the perceptions men towards women in engineering in the GCC?

Many men proud to see women in field, and they want to see more women. A call from the Panel to “keep it up” as a women in engineering, as it is more accepted and becoming the norm.

This Bulletin is issued by CIHT Dubai. For further information, contact ciht.dubaigroup@gmail.com.