

Gender-responsive governance among unit heads in higher education institutions

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Abstract: Effective management styles in higher learning institutions are critical for ensuring equal access to opportunities and development for both men and women, thereby enhancing organizational productivity and performance. This study aimed to determine gender-responsive governance among unit heads of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Negros Occidental during the school year 2021-2022. Using a descriptive-correlational and comparative research design, the study explored relationships between gender-responsive governance and variables such as age, sex, length of service, and educational qualification. The respondents were 94 unit heads from three state universities and colleges (SUCs). Data were collected using the Gender Responsiveness Governance Tool and analyzed through SPSS with descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, Mann-Whitney U test, and Kruskal-Wallis H test. Results indicated a moderate level of gender-responsive governance ($M = 53.80$, $SD = 19.99$), with older respondents demonstrating higher responsiveness. No significant differences were found regarding sex, length of service, or educational qualification. The study concludes that promoting gender-responsive governance requires targeted interventions, particularly for younger unit heads. Practical implications suggest that institutional leadership training and policy development should prioritize building gender competence across all managerial levels to foster inclusive, equitable, and effective organizational environments.

Keywords: Employee diversity, Gender equality, Gender-responsive governance, Higher education institutions, Inclusive decision-making, Women empowerment.

1. Introduction

Effective management styles in higher learning institutions are important for ensuring equal access to opportunities and development for all workers, regardless of gender. According to the Australian Government [1] these practices promote organizational productivity and performance by creating a fair and just workplace environment. Hall [2] also reported that gender-responsive governance and efficient conflict management yield numerous benefits, including economic growth, improved productivity, innovation, diverse perspectives, flexible working hours, a stable workforce, happier employees, better client targeting, enhanced quality of life, and a strengthened institutional reputation. Conversely, non-gender-responsive governance and poor conflict management fail to provide equal access to rewards, opportunities, and respect.

Despite increased female representation in decision-making roles, gender mainstreaming in higher education institutions (HEIs) still faces significant challenges. Empowering gender structures and building gender competence are crucial for overcoming the status quo [3]. Consequently, conflicts are likely to occur and hinder organizational desired outcomes. For instance, in Pakistan, incivility among faculty members and dissatisfaction with university resources have led to conflict-inducing attitudes, negatively affecting both teachers and students' psychological health and educational outcomes [4]. Similarly, in the Philippines, women and girls have reported experiences of sexism in HEIs, facing gender biases despite governmental mandates for gender equality [5].

Undoubtedly, these circumstances necessitate interventions to prevent conflicts from escalating. It is therefore incumbent upon school leaders to adopt a gender-responsive governance and effective conflict management styles to foster unity and productivity. Thus, in relation to CMO 1 Series of 2015 and R.A. 9710 (Magna Carta of Women), which mandates HEIs to implement development programs that ensure gender sensitivity, equality, and equity among administrators, faculty, staff, and students, the proponent had been inspired to delve into a study on gender-responsive governance among unit heads in HEIs in Negros Occidental. These institutions frequently face conflicts arising from gender issues, making this study both timely and significant.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the gender-responsive governance among unit heads of HEIs in Negros Occidental during the School Year 2021-2022. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of gender responsive governance of the respondents when grouped according to the following variables:
 - a. Age
 - b. Sex
 - c. Length of Service
 - d. Educational Qualification
2. What is the highest gender-responsive governance of the respondents as a whole and when grouped according to the aforementioned profile variables?
3. Is there a significant difference in the level of gender-responsive governance of the respondents when grouped and compared according to age, sex, length of service, and educational qualification?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study employed the Descriptive-Comparative Research Design, to determine the level of gender-responsive governance among unit heads of HEIs in Negros Occidental (Western Visayas, Philippines).

The Comparative Research Design was incorporated to analyze significant differences in the levels of gender-responsive governance when respondents were grouped by various demographic variables. This design facilitates the comparison of groups based on specific criteria (e.g., age, sex, length of service, and educational qualification) to determine if and how these factors lead to variations in gender-responsive governance. This comparison helps identify specific areas for improvement and highlights best practices.

The Descriptive- Comparative Research Design provides a robust framework for addressing the research questions. This approach ensures a thorough analysis by not only describing the current state but also providing insights into differences and potential causes of these differences. This comprehensive understanding is crucial for developing targeted interventions and policies to enhance gender-responsive governance in HEIs.

2.2. Respondents of the Study

The respondents were 94 out of 110 unit heads from three State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Negros Occidental, with 40 (out of 42) respondents from SUC 1, 22 (out of 26) from SUC 2, and 32 (out of 42) from SUC 3. Unit heads, defined as middle-level and top-level managers with at least five personnel under their supervision, were selected using purposive sampling. This method was chosen to ensure an equitable gender distribution and a relevant sample for examining conflict scenarios [6]. Furthermore, this sampling approach allows for the deliberate selection of participants based on specific

characteristics, such as managerial level and supervisory responsibilities, which are critical for examining gender-responsive governance.

To mitigate potential biases inherent in purposive sampling, selection criteria were applied consistently across all three SUCs. Efforts were made to include unit heads from various departments and functional areas to capture a wide range of perspectives. Additionally, demographic characteristics such as age, sex, length of service, and educational qualification were considered to ensure a representative sample. While the study focused on unit heads in three SUCs in Negros Occidental, the findings can be generalized to similar HEIs in the region, given the diverse and representative sample. However, caution should be exercised when applying these findings to different contexts without further validation.

2.3. Data Gathering Instruments

The Gender Responsiveness Governance Tool Version 2 [7] was used to assess the level of gender-responsive governance among unit heads. This tool, consisting of ten questions, helps decision-making teams evaluate and improve their gender-responsiveness over time. The tool's scoring ranges from 0 to 100, with reverse coding for questions 9 and 10.

Regarding validity and reliability, the tool was tested by 221 LeaderNet members, with 146 completing the entire survey. This testing showed strong gender diversity, with women representing slightly more than 50% of the respondents, and one respondent identifying as a transgender man. Of those who completed the survey, 62% agreed or strongly agreed with the scoring scheme of the tool, while about 23% remained neutral, and about 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed with it.

Regarding the tool's feasibility, 66% agreed or strongly agreed that the tool was feasible for its intended use, whereas 21% remained neutral, and 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed on its feasibility. About 48% thought it would be moderately useful, and 49% thought it would be highly useful for assessing the gender responsiveness of leaders. In contrast, 3% thought the tool would not be useful at all. Furthermore, 83% thought it would be moderately or highly useful for educating governing body members, while 15% thought it would not be useful at all. Two percent of respondents thought the tool would be harmful to the gender education dimension [7].

2.4. Data Collection

Data collection occurred from August to December at three State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Negros Occidental. Formal consent was obtained from the administrators, and detailed information about the study's objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations was provided. Questionnaires were distributed in person, adhering to health and safety regulations, including mask-wearing, social distancing, and hand sanitizing.

Before completing the questionnaire, informed consent was obtained from all participants using a written consent form. This form provided comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, and participants' rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. Participants were given sufficient time to read the consent form and ask any questions they had before agreeing to participate. Confidentiality was rigorously maintained by anonymizing all participant data. Each questionnaire was assigned a unique code, and no identifying information was linked to the responses. All data were securely stored in a password-protected database, accessible only to the research team. Data will be retained for five years and then securely deleted.

The questionnaire took approximately ten to fifteen minutes to complete, based on a pilot test conducted to ensure this estimate was accurate and that the process did not burden the respondents. Upon completion, each respondent received a small token of appreciation, such as a pen or a notebook, which did not influence their participation. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to prevent data loss.

Additionally, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any point during the study. If a participant chose to withdraw after submitting their questionnaire, their data was excluded from the analysis and securely destroyed to respect their decision.

2.5. Data Analysis

The encoded raw data were tabulated and analyzed by the school's statistician, who was not involved in the study's design to avoid potential conflicts of interest. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated to summarize the data and provide a clear overview of the respondents' characteristics and their levels of gender-responsive governance.

For inferential statistics, the following tests were used: (a) Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between gender-responsive governance and variables such as age, sex, length of service, and educational qualification; (b) Mann-Whitney U Test was used to compare differences in gender-responsive governance levels between two independent groups (e.g., male vs. female respondents); meanwhile, (c) Kruskal-Wallis H Test was used to compare differences in gender-responsive governance levels among more than two groups (e.g., educational qualifications: bachelor's, master's, and doctorate).

These statistical analyses were conducted using JASP software to ensure accuracy and reliability. The results were interpreted in the context of the study's objectives, providing insights into how different factors influence gender-responsive governance and conflict management styles among the unit heads of HEIs in Negros Occidental.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Level of Gender Responsive Governance of the Unit Heads

Table 1 presents the level of gender responsive governance of the unit heads employing the mean and standard deviation.

Table 1.
Level of Gender Responsive Governance of the Unit Heads.

Variables	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Whole	94	53.80	19.99	Gender-Responsiveness
Age				
Older (45 years old - above)	52	58.04	20.33	Gender-Responsiveness
Younger (below 45 years)	42	48.55	18.48	Not Enough Gender-Responsiveness
Sex				
Female	53	54.76	20.66	Gender-Responsiveness
Male	41	52.55	19.288	Gender-Responsiveness
Length of Service				
Longer (15 years - above)	42	54.81	18.70	Gender-Responsiveness
Shorter (Below 15 years)	52	52.98	21.13	Gender-Responsiveness
Educational Qualification				
Bachelor	3	63.33	29.30	Gender-Responsiveness
Doctorate	50	54.26	21.13	Gender-Responsiveness
Master	41	52.54	18.19	Gender-Responsiveness

Note: 75 and above indicates a high degree of gender-responsiveness, 50-74 indicates gender-responsiveness, 25-49 indicates not enough gender-responsiveness, and below 25 indicates gender non-responsiveness (USAID).

As a whole, the respondents met the "Gender Responsiveness level" ($M = 53.80$, $SD = 19.99$). With this, the majority of the respondents across the different groups obtained the "Gender Responsiveness level" except the younger respondents ($M = 48.55$, $SD = 18.48$) who showed "Not Enough Gender-Responsiveness level," which could be attributed to inadequate managerial exposures and/or experiences.

Despite minimal variations with respect to younger respondents, the results still implied that respondents were generally responsive to the different needs of their people regardless of gender. As unit heads, they considered the different needs of their respective people before reaching certain decisions. Likewise, they considered the implications of their decisions not just to their subordinates but also to their clients – men and women alike. However, this result runs counter to Baird, et al. [8] finding wherein over one half of working women said they felt men were treated better than women at work. Basically, each gender group felt that the other was treated better at work. Women, on the other hand, were much less likely to think that both genders were treated equally. Furthermore, this negative perception is damaging wherever it occurs. In the workplace, this perspective may hurt career prospects and affect employee development when either of the two-gender group gets less constructive feedback than the other. In addition, this perceived gender bias can impede equality and efficiency at work. In fact, a good number of experiments have documented differences in decisions that led to disparate outcomes between men and women in the workplace [9].

The results, however, showed that respondents were advocates of gender responsive governance. In making decisions, they have embraced such manner of leading their people not just to promote organizational productivity and performance but also because it is fair and the right thing to do [1]. In doing so, having that high level of gender-responsive governance necessarily promotes better economy, improved productivity, increased growth and innovation, diversity of views, more flexible working hours, a more stable workforce, happier employees, improved client targeting, better quality life, and improved institutional reputation [2]. The results likewise suggest that respondents were vigilant in their decisions to ensure optimal choices. With prudence, they could reduce the frequency of making errors that make organizations less effective, competitive, and fair in all facets as much as possible [9]. Hence, understanding gender issues in the workplace as basis for sound judgment and better decisions can minimize the stereotypes created, shrink the wage gap, and produce an equal distribution of both men and women [10]. In addition, the provision of effective gender equality initiatives can potentially address occupational segregation and gender inequality in the workforce [11]. As such, the promotion of gender equality is beneficial to all workers, that is, for men and women alike. To reiterate, being gender-responsive in the workplace is important not only because it is fair and the right thing to do but also it is crucial to the workplace's entire productivity and organizational performance [1]. As regards improved productivity and organizational performance, gender equal workforces work better in many ways. One major benefit of improved gender equality in the workplace is a more cohesive and more productive workforce. This was supported by the University of Greenwich's study which reported that skilled women returning to work increased productivity [12]. Likewise, the study made by Accenture found out that a culture of equality or the same kind of workplace environment that helped everyone advance to higher positions was a powerful multiplier of innovation and growth [13].

Table 2.
Itemized result of the Gender Responsive Governance of the Unit Heads.

Item	M	SD	Rank
I considered the different needs of women and men before making this decision.	5.92	2.49	3
This decision I made responds to the different needs of women and men.	6.00	2.50	2
I considered the implications of this decision on our clients as a whole and also women and men clients separately.	5.77	2.32	4
I considered the implications of this decision on our employees as a whole and also women and men employees separately.	6.02	2.34	1
I consulted women and men in governance positions, women and men in management positions, women and men employees, women and men clients, or women's organizations before making this decision.	5.13	2.66	8
I considered aggregate evidence and sex-disaggregated evidence before making this decision. (Aggregate evidence is data and evidence collected and presented collectively for men and women, whereas sex-disaggregated evidence is data and evidence collected and presented separately for men and women.)	5.23	2.53	7
This decision enables women to make a choice in a matter concerning them.	5.59	2.50	5
This decision recognizes and compensates for disadvantages women or people of other gender identities face.	5.55	2.43	6
This decision adversely affects women.	4.36	2.92	9
This decision maintains inequalities among people of different gender identities or supports stereotypes based on the gender identity.	4.23	2.94	10

Among the items in gender-responsive governance questionnaire in Table 2, "*I considered the implications of this decision on our employees as a whole and also women and men employees separately.*" (M=6.02, SD=2.34). When grouped according to age, younger respondents rated "*I considered the implications of this decision on our employees as a whole and also women and men employees separately.*" (M=5.50, SD=2.16) the highest, while older rated "*This decision I made responds to the different needs of women and men.*" (M=6.47, SD=2.71) the highest. In terms of sex, male rated "*This decision I made responds to the different needs of women and men.*" (M=6.01, SD=2.47) the highest, while female rated "*I considered the implications of this decision on our employees as a whole and also women and men employees separately.*" (M=6.12, SD=2.42) the highest. Regarding length of service, those in service for shorter time rated "*I considered the implications of this decision on our employees as a whole and also women and men employees separately.*" (M=5.99, SD=2.39) the highest, while those in service the longer time rated "*This decision I made responds to the different needs of women and men.*" (M=6.05, SD=2.46) the highest. With respect to educational qualification, those with a bachelor's degree rated "*This decision enables women to make a choice in a matter concerning them.*" (M=8.00, SD=3.46) the highest, while those with master's degree rated "*This decision I made responds to the different needs of women and men.*" (M=5.82, SD=2.38) the highest and those with doctorate rated "*I considered the implications of this decision on our employees as a whole and also women and men employees separately.*" (M=6.12, SD=2.35) the highest.

The gender-responsive governance questionnaire revealed several interesting results. Younger respondents and those with shorter tenure rated highest the item about considering the implications of the decision on all employees, as well as women and men separately, suggesting a focus on holistic, inclusive decision-making among these groups [14]. Similar patterns of gender-related gaps in awareness and practices have also been documented in the technology sector among younger populations [15] underscoring the importance of early training and capacity-building in gender competence. In contrast, older respondents, males, and those with longer tenure rated highest the item about their decision responding to the different needs of women and men, indicating a greater emphasis

on gender-specific considerations among these groups [16]. Additionally, respondents with bachelor's degrees rated highest the item about the decision enabling women to make choices in matters concerning them, highlighting the importance of empowering women's agency [17]. Overall, the responses point to diverse perspectives on gender-responsive governance, with some emphasizing broad employee impacts and others prioritizing attention to the unique needs and choices of women [18].

3.2. Difference in the Level of Gender Responsive Governance of the Unit Heads according to Age, Sex, Length of Service, and Educational Qualification

Tables 3 and 4 show the comparative statistics in the level of gender responsive governance of the unit heads when grouped and compared according to variables. Mann-Whitney *U*-test was used for age, sex, and length of service while Kruskal-Wallis *H*-test for educational qualification.

The computed values showed significant difference existed in the level of gender responsive governance of the respondents when grouped and compared according to age ($U = 1466.50$, $p = 0.004$) except sex ($U = 1126.50$, $p = 0.763$), length of service ($U = 1217.50$, $p = 0.341$), and educational qualification ($X^2 = 0.313$, $p = 0.855$) at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 3.

Comparative Statistics in the Level of Gender Responsive Governance of the Unit Heads when Grouped and Compared According to Age, Sex and Length of Service.

Variables	Mean Rank	U-ratio	p
Age		1466.50**	0.004
Older (45 years old - above)	58.04		
Younger (below 45 years)	48.55		
Sex		1126.50	0.763
Female	54.76		
Male	52.55		
Length of Service		1217.500	0.341
Longer (15 years - above)	54.81		
Shorter (Below 15 years)	52.98		

Note: ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 4.

Comparative Statistics in the Level of Gender Responsive Governance of the Unit Heads when Grouped and Compared According to Educational Qualification.

Variables	Mean Rank	X ²	p
Educational qualification		0.313	0.855
Bachelor	63.33		
Doctorate	54.26		
Master	52.54		

The results in Table 3 implied that gender responsive governance varies with age. In fact, the older group of respondents got the highest total mean not just in comparison with their counterpart group but also among the rest of the groups. In support to this result, Birkinshaw, et al. [19] averred that while younger managers prefer narrower, more technical approaches, older ones tend to work through others and focus on the big picture.

Thus, in relation to this premise, when leaders or managers are of age, the more they become responsive decision-makers to the different needs of their people and clients based on gender (USAID, n.d.). In addition, Kunze and Menges [20] conducted a study on the consequences of average age differences between leaders and followers, specifically age differences between younger leaders and older followers, at the organizational level. Findings of the study revealed that that greater average age differences were associated with company performance. Likewise, Scheuer [21] mentioned in her study that age groups of 50 and over brought with them some sets of unique skills, experiences, and

perspectives. In turn, these characteristics create potential and significant advantages for its people and for the entire organization insofar as performance and productivity.

4. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of gender-responsive governance among unit heads in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Negros Occidental during the School Year 2021-2022. By employing Descriptive-Comparative Research Design, the research underscored the critical role of effective management styles in promoting productivity and performance through fair and equitable workplace practices.

The findings revealed that the overall level of gender-responsive governance was moderate. Significant differences existed based on age, with older respondents demonstrating higher levels of gender-responsiveness compared to their younger counterparts, highlighting the importance of experience and maturity in fostering gender-sensitive decision-making. However, no significant differences were observed concerning sex, length of service, or educational qualification.

Unit heads prioritized the well-being of their subordinates, ensuring fair and beneficial situations for all. This approach led to positive outcomes, including equitable treatment and opportunities for all employees, regardless of gender. The organization's commitment to inclusivity and fairness improved employee satisfaction and morale. Enhanced decision-making processes that considered diverse perspectives showed potential to increase productivity, innovation, and organizational success.

The study's findings highlight the necessity for a multifaceted approach to promoting gender-responsive governance in HEIs. While some respondents emphasized holistic, inclusive decision-making, others focused on the unique needs of women and men. Additionally, respondents with bachelor's degrees underscored the importance of empowering women's agency in decision-making. This diversity of perspectives requires institutions to balance broad, inclusive practices with targeted efforts to address specific challenges and opportunities faced by women.

In conclusion, promoting gender-responsive governance in higher learning institutions is both fair and essential for enhancing organizational performance and productivity. The study underscores the need for continuous efforts to build gender competence and empower gender structures within HEIs, ensuring that all employees thrive in an equitable and inclusive environment. Future research should explore the impact of gender-responsive governance on organizational outcomes and identify best practices for diverse educational contexts. By effectively implementing gender-responsive governance, organizations can achieve a more equitable, inclusive, and supportive work environment, ultimately leading to greater overall success.

Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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