

# The influence of a university's HRM practices on women academics' progression to management positions\*

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## Abstract<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this article is to examine the effect of New Public Management (NPM) inspired university human resource management (HRM) practices on gender segregation at universities. Drawing on gender and organisational theories, we conducted a case study of a managerial university in Lithuania drawing on analyses of policy documents, websites and senior academic staff survey data (n=142). We find vertical gender segregation in the management structures of the case study university, with women academics being more likely to experience career progression barriers than men. This study contributes to higher education, gender and management research in three important ways: (1) by providing empirical evidence of the persistence of gender segregation at a university, despite the transformation of university HRM practices, (2) by providing a more nuanced picture regarding gender and tokenism among university management, (3) by pointing out that despite the long tradition of women employment in the post-Soviet Central and Eastern European context, universities are still the bastions of the masculine culture and power, where women academics face a 'glass ceiling' to reach management positions. We discuss the practical implications for gender-balanced composition of higher education management at Lithuanian universities.

**Keywords:** academic careers, HRM, gender segregation in organisations; managerial university; barriers for promotion; Lithuanian higher education system;

**JEL Codes:** I23, I24, M12

## Introduction

In recent decades, a range of laws and policies were passed to foster inclusive workplaces for people from diverse backgrounds, abilities, ages, ethnicities, races, religions, sexual orientations, socioeconomic statuses and genders<sup>2</sup> (Plummer 2003). However, studies show that women are under-represented in management positions (Mitchell/Holtom/Lee/Sablynski/Erez 2001; Rindfleish/Sheridan 2003; Leathwood 2005; Bolton/Muzio 2008). In the higher education sector, an inclusive workplace is still far from reality despite various policies and initia-

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tives. This is especially true when looking at the composition of management positions at universities (O'Connor 2010; Schmitt/Wilkesmann 2020).

A number of structural, cultural and psychological reasons are the cause of the slow progress to the gender parity in management of higher education and in general progression of women academics to higher positions in academia (Valian 1999; Müller/Castaño Collado/González/Palmén 2011). Some researchers see this as an organisational problem, while others perceive it as an individual problem (Acker 2014; Metz/Kulik 2014; Burkinshaw/White 2017; Acker/Millerson 2018).

On the one hand, universities as organisations are known to have formal and informal barriers for career progression for women academics. They are known to be places where masculine cultures thrive as in academia, the displays of physical strength, such as long working hours and gender discriminatory behaviours providing preferential treatment to men have been commonplace for decades (Metz/Kulik 2014; Herschberg 2019). On the other hand, universities are increasingly using the range of human resource management (HRM) tools that are supposed to make certain hidden processes of hiring and promotion more transparent, which potentially can decrease vertical gender segregation in these organisations (Leišytė/Hosch-Dayican 2014; Acker/Millerson 2018; Herschberg/Benschop/van den Brink 2018).

The evidence from Western European countries has shown to date, that despite the range of gender equality policies and related new HRM practices, the progression of the number of women academics to management positions has had mixed effects on vertical segregation in academia and universities (Ayman/Korabik/Morris 2009; Paustian-Underdahl/Walker/Woehr 2014). Also, studies show that the national institutional systems have a key role for gender diversity in management positions (Küpper/Dauth 2021). At the same time, we have limited evidence regarding the effect of HRM practices on the promotion prospects, horizontal and vertical gender segregation in management positions at universities in the Central and Eastern European countries, and especially post-Soviet countries (see Žalėnienė/Krinickienė/Tvaronavičienė/Lobačevskytė 2016; Rybnikova/Soulsyby/Blazejewski 2020; Górka/Kulicka/Staniszewska/Dobija 2021; Vohlídalová 2021).

To fill this gap, in this article we seek to understand how New Public Management (NPM) inspired university HRM practices influence the progression of women academics to management positions in the Lithuanian higher education context. We pose two interrelated questions: How has the gender composition of management positions at a managerial university changed over time? What kind of promotion barriers do academics perceive in a managerial university and how do they compare by gender?

To answer our research questions, we choose a higher education system that has undergone rapid transformation towards a managerial model of universities following the NPM rhetoric – the Lithuanian higher education system (Leišytė/Rose/Želvys 2019). After the break-up of the Soviet Union, universities streamlined their decision-making processes and embraced the performance imperatives to compete with the universities abroad. At the same time, this system, like many other post-Soviet systems, has a high proportion of academic workforce consisting of women compared to the Western counterparts (57 % of scientists and engineers were women in Lithuania in 2017 – the highest in the EU (Eurostat 2019)). Further, in the Soviet era women and men in Lithuania were employed full-time and were obliged to enter the labour market upon graduation compared to Western Europe, where for a significant part of 20<sup>th</sup> century women chose or were legally obliged to stay at home or work part-time. Thus, women in Lithuania historically balanced home and work and one can assume that the chances for women to hold management positions are much higher in Lithuania as a post-Soviet country, compared to the Western European countries.

The paper is structured as follows. We start with the literature review on the vertical and horizontal gender segregation at universities as well as the barriers for career progression for women in academia, and then review the NPM inspired implications for universities and their HRM policies at Lithuanian universities. Next, we present the methodology of the study to answer our research questions. Finally, we present the results of our empirical study and discuss them revisiting our hypotheses. We close with the conclusion, limitations and practical implications of the study.

## Literature Review

### *Horizontal and vertical gender segregation in academia*

Even though management is celebrated in policy and practice in terms of bringing efficiency to organisations, it is questionable to what extent it reduces gender segregation. One of the glaring problems is the structural inequality between men and women among managers. While a substantial body of literature shows the increase of the number of women in management positions in corporate leadership in the past decade, men still dominate the boards in various sectors (Tyrowicz/Terjesen/Mazurek 2020). Women are more likely to be excluded from the management, especially in traditionally men-dominated sectors and in masculine organisational cultures (Acker 1990; Metz/Kulik 2014). Universities are not an exception in this regard, as these are traditionally hierarchical organisations with masculine organisational cultures, where the university management boards and faculty leadership positions have been dominated by men (Sherer/Zakaria 2018; Apostoae/Prodan/Manolescu 2019; Park 2020). Horizontal or vertical gender segregation in academia have been evidenced, as

women are more likely to hold part-time positions while men are more likely to hold higher ranking stable appointments, and thus, have better chances to be decision-makers and power holders (Coin 2018; Stringer/Smith/Spronken-Smith/Wilson 2018; Kezar/Acuña 2020).

Here, gender segregation denotes the distribution of women and men working in certain professions and employment positions (Gross 1968; Biblarz/Bengtson/Bucur 1996; Meulders/Plasman/Rigo/O'Dorchai 2010). There are two types of segregation: First, the horizontal segregation is the under- or over-representation of one gender in a profession or field of work. Second, the vertical segregation is the under- or over-representation of one gender in a position (Meulders et al. 2010). Specifically, in academia the horizontal segregation refers to the gender distribution in a particular discipline and vertical segregation refers to the gender distribution of employment positions of academics (Charles/Bradley 2002).

The distribution of men and women between the disciplines in academia is attributed to traditional gender roles – care-related and soft disciplines being dominated by women, while hard disciplines – like mathematics and physics – and most reputable – by men (European Commission 2019). Also, women seem to prefer less research fields that would lead to scientific discovery (Santos/Horta/Amâncio 2021). Recent studies show that at universities vertical gender segregation is observed with men dominating professorships as well as management positions (European Commission 2019). Thus, the unequal distribution of men and women in management positions, the vertical segregation, persists due to a range of reasons, some of which can be seen as barriers for women's career progression in academia.

### *Barriers for women's career progression to management positions in universities*

The progression of women to professorship and management positions has been slow, despite decades of activism and affirmative action policies and practices (Valian 1999; Stewart/Valian 2018), due to the stereotypes and societal expectations of men and women, as well as structural, organisational and cultural factors in academia (Charles/Bradley 2002; Barone/Assirelli 2020; Lipovka/Buzady 2020). Recent studies show persistent challenges in implementing gender equality in higher education (Clavero/Galligan 2021).

The literature has pointed out formal and informal barriers for women to progress in management career in academia (Howe-Walsh/Turnbull 2016). Throughout history men enjoy greater public prestige and status than women (Coleman 2005), which is also reflected in their higher economic and social status (Conway/Pizzamiglio/Mount 1996; Chatillon/Charles/Bradley 2018). Thus, research shows that structural gender inequalities in academia are justified

and legitimised by gender stereotypes (Ridgeway/Smith-Lovin 1999; Ellemers 2018), and lead to gender biased hiring and promotion practices (Treviño/Gomez-Mejia/Balkin/Mixon 2018). There seems to be a tendency to assign positions of authority and power to men rather than to women (Carvalho/Santiago 2010).

Further, the disproportionately gendered division of workloads and tasks among women and men academics, related to traditional role expectations, constitutes another barrier for women's career progression in academia (Leišytė 2016). Women academics more often take up teaching roles and care work, such as supporting non-academic student needs, administrative housekeeping, while male colleagues predominantly work in research that brings prestige and more likely career prospects (Guarino/Borden 2017; Dengate/Peter/Farenhorst 2019; Lynch/Ivancheva/O'Flynn/Keating/O'Connor 2020; Górska et al. 2021). These gender differences lead to disadvantages in career development for women, as in order to climb the career ladder within universities a strong research profile is essential (Leišytė/Hosch-Dayican 2014).

Another line of literature has pointed out structural informal barriers for women's promotion to management positions, such as highly masculine work conditions, a culture of recruitment of people like oneself (homophily) and limited organisational development opportunities, such as 'glass ceiling' (Acker 1990; Bain/Cummings 2000; Probert 2005; Hoobler/Lemmon/Wayne 2014; Hartlep/Hensley/Wells/Brewer/Ball/McLaren 2017). This implies, that male managers predominantly are more likely to be replaced by men than by women (Gronn/Lacey 2006; Lee/James 2007; Morley 2013). The persistent stereotypical notions of gender roles in society matter, as women are underestimated in performance reviews and face more promotion barriers than men (Ragins/Cotton 1991; Winchester/Browning 2015). Studies pointed out the biases in hiring committees, where merit is interpreted based on descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes (Caleo/Heilman 2013; O'Connor 2013; van den Brink/Benschop 2014). For example, Paludi and Bauer (1983) showed that research articles in performance reviews were perceived differently, depending on author's gender, favouring men. Other studies show that women are pessimistic regarding career prospects in academia due to powerful hierarchical structures (Eslen-Ziya/Yildirim 2022). Also, recent studies have shown the nepotism and gender bias in peer review (Allen/Cury/Gaston/Graf/Wakley/Willis 2019; Lundine/Bourgeault/Glonti/Hutchinson/Balabanova 2019). Finally, a strand of literature shows the importance of micro-politics and networks in career advancement, with women having weaker and less male dominated and thus – less powerful networks than men (Durbin 2011; Meschitti/Lawton-Smith 2017).

Therefore, women academics experience a variety of formal and informal promotion barriers at universities to reach managerial positions, that maintain hor-

izental and vertical gender segregation in academia. However, most of the evidence comes from the higher education systems based on the Western models of higher education, such as the UK, Australia, the US, Canada, Germany, Ireland or Sweden. However, there is a lack of research investigating the gender segregation in university management in the Central and Eastern European countries, and especially in the post-Soviet context (Lipman-Blumen 1976; Acker 1990; Rosener 1997; Chitsike 2000; Krefting 2003; Teichler/Höhle 2013).

### *NPM inspired HRM tools at universities*

NPM reforms in public sector organisations have brought the performance management imperatives to organisations that were supposed to bring more efficiency and accountability via transparency (Ferlie/Ashburner/Fitzgerald/Pettigrew 1996; Carter 2000). Universities have not been an exception for these reforms. According to Mintzberg (1993), universities are considered to be professional organisations whose members have a considerable degree of independence and control over their own work. Traditionally, universities have been characterised as bottom-heavy collegial institutions where academics participate in all decision-making processes. Here, management positions, such as deanships, rectorships, heads of senates or university council memberships were taken on a temporary basis through election (Leišytė/Dee 2012). Based on NPM reforms, European universities underwent managerial changes, including increased organisational control, the creation of matrix structures and centralised top-down management with appointed management positions (Boer/Enders/Schimank 2007). Universities have become organisational actors with strengthened managerial capacities and strategic managerial orientation (Hüther/Krücken 2018). In this context, the importance of management at universities has increased alongside with the HRM tools that support accountability and control, such as performance-based pay, time accounting, performance reviews, explicit criteria for promotion, to name a few (Leišytė/Dee 2012; Welp/Wollersheim/Ringelhan/Osterloh 2015; Pinheiro/Geschwind/Hansen/Pulkkinen 2019).

The studies on the effects of the managerial university on academic profession and careers has shown mixed findings. On the one hand, the managerial university has strengthened its strategic orientation and centralised its management and decision-making in crucial areas like HRM and budgeting, which strengthens and professionalises university administrative capacities with more women entering management ranks than before. So, one could argue that centralised HRM practices would decrease vertical gender segregation at universities (Krücken 2013). At the same time, studies have shown that the managerial university has brought forward performance imperatives, which center largely around research performance, based on publications and acquired third party funding, that are determined through possibly gender-biased peer review procedures (Lamont

2009; Ramirez/Christensen 2013; Leišytė/Wilkesmann 2016). Even though policies encourage gender equality in academia (Utoft 2021), one can argue that the informal barriers, such as 'glass ceiling', homophily in hiring decisions, and gendered distribution of work roles based on cultural gender expectations, may persist in managerial universities.

In line with the literature, we propose the following hypotheses:

*H1: Vertical gender segregation in management positions at a managerial university persists over time.*

*H2: Women academics are more likely to experience promotion barriers at a managerial university than men academics.*

## Methodology

This study is based on a mixed-methods case study design to understand the implications of university managerialism on gender segregation in university management positions, drawing on a case study university in Lithuania (Teddlie/Tashakkori 2006). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argue that with the mixed methods design the weaknesses of any single method can be reduced via corroboration of findings. Triangulating different data sources in this study supports the robustness of findings (Moran-Ellis/Alexander/Cronin/Dickinson/Fielding/Sleney/Thomas 2006). Specifically, we corroborate drawing on different data sources and methods of analysis. To answer the first research question, which focuses on a comparison over time, "How has the gender composition of management positions at a managerial university changed over time?", historical administrative data from a case study university were examined, using qualitative document and website analyses. For the second research question, which refers to the situation at the point of time of data collection, "What kind of promotion barriers do academics perceive in a managerial university and how do they compare by gender?" academic staff from the case study university were surveyed using the online survey.

Our case study is a public, large, comprehensive university in Lithuania with strong traditions and a recent management change at the top level, instigating a more performance driven approach. Lithuania was chosen as a useful context for the study as it has implemented strong NPM reforms since 2009, and it has a high number of women researchers compared to the EU average, as well as the historical legacy of women full time participation in the labour force.

### *Variables and analysis instruments*

To understand how the gender composition of management positions at a managerial university changed over time, we used a qualitative approach. Drawing

on primary data sources such as university documents and webpages of the selected university, we investigated the gender composition of its management positions. Due to data availability, we concentrated on the period between 2013 and 2017, since there was an election in this period which changed the composition of the management bodies, and this was the time of implementing NPM reforms. We specifically studied the gender distribution among the rector, chair of the senate and vice-rectors at the top management level. For the middle management level, we focused on the gender distribution among deans, faculty council chairs and department heads in 2018. In order to test the first hypothesis, we studied nine faculties that comprise 65 % of all departments at the university (due to public reliable data availability). The documents under investigation were taken from 2009 to 2018 and included yearly activity reports, as well as individual websites of departments, faculties and central administration.

To explore what kind of promotion barriers do academics perceive in a managerial university and how do they compare by gender, we drew on the survey data of senior academics across all disciplines at our case university. The online survey was conducted from September to October 2016 among all academic staff (n=360, response rate 15 %). The online questionnaire was carefully developed and piloted before launching the survey and focused on 1) perceptions of the organisational environment, 2) satisfaction with the work environment and 3) academic work practices. The survey questionnaire was developed based on a literature review of managerial university and employee satisfaction and used in a predecessor study (Leišytė 2016) in a different national context. It was then adapted and piloted for the Lithuanian context.

After a stepwise cleaning procedure, our dataset included 254 valid responses. For our analysis, we selected senior academics involved in decision-making and university politics, such as professors, associate professors, senior researchers and associate senior researchers (n=142). Out of the 142 respondents in these senior academic positions, 69 (51.5 %) were women and 65 (48.5 %) were men. 8 respondents did not indicate their gender and were therefore not considered in the analysis. In total, we analysed survey responses of 134 women and men academics in senior academic positions (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 Overview of Number and Gender of Respondents in the Online Survey

	Women		Men	
	Frequencies	Percentages	Frequencies	Percentages
Full Professor	21	42,0 %	29	58,0 %
Associate Professor	37	60,7 %	24	39,3 %
Senior Researcher	3	42,9 %	4	57,1 %
Associate Senior Researcher	8	50,0 %	8	50,0 %
Totals	69	51,5 %	65	48,5 %

The gender composition of our respondents is representative (less than 5 % negative or positive deviation) of academics in our case study university, as well as the total population of academics at Lithuanian public universities (Centre of Information Technologies in Education 2018).

In order to answer the second sub-question, we used the independent variable gender and dependent variables relating to academics' experience with their institution's HRM practices and promotion policies. Gender is a binary variable in which women were coded 1 and men were coded 2.

We used a 5-point Likert scale with five answer options 1-“strongly disagree”, 2-“disagree”, 3-“neutral”, 4-“agree” and 5-“strongly agree”. Based on former studies on informal and formal barriers for the promotion of women to higher academic ranks (Howe-Walsh/Turnbull 2016), the first item “I am encouraged and financially supported to develop my professional skills (e.g. leadership, communication)” focused on the encouragement and guidance to develop required qualifications for promotion. The item “My voice regarding my promotion is heard and acted upon in my faculty” identified to what degree the opinion of respondents regarding their promotion is taken seriously by faculty management. Fairness of promotion and recruitment were measured using two items, “The university has fair promotion policies” and “The university has fair recruitment policies”. Finally, we investigated the awareness of performance requirements using the item “The requirements for a positive performance evaluation are clearly communicated to me”. In this way, we could explore four promotion barrier categories: 1) satisfaction with the management encouragement and support, 2) being taken seriously regarding promotion by faculty management, 3) perception of fairness in recruitment and promotion and 4) clarity and information provision of university regarding performance requirements.

We first generated a correlation matrix among the items to test for multicollinearity and a t-test fit to measure the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Further, in order to test the second hypothesis, we used contingency table analysis to show the relationship between the categorical variables for gender and HRM practices and policies. Hence, we recoded the items of the independent variable and combined the negative answers (“strongly disagree” and “disagree”) and positive answers (“strongly agree” and “agree”).

## Findings

In the following section, we will answer the two research questions by examining the data from the qualitative and quantitative sources. First, based on the institutional and national policy document as well as website analyses, we will present the HRM practices as well as management bodies' composition by gender at the case study university. Secondly, we will present the results of the

survey regarding the perceptions of senior academic staff of selected aspects of HRM practices and possible barriers for promotion.

### *HRM practices at the case study university*

Looking at higher education in Lithuania, managerial structures at universities have been promoted through the strongly NPM oriented Law on Higher Education and Research in 2009, even though some aspects of liberalisation were already introduced earlier. This law, together with a demographic decline in student numbers, has fostered competition and market orientation at Lithuanian universities (Leišytė/Rose/Želvys 2019). It reshaped the hiring and promotion criteria towards an explicit performance orientation. In line with managerial imperatives, the key performance criteria for academic staff include research and teaching performance as well as leadership experience, which are described in internal case study university regulations. As described in documents of the analysed university, the criteria for professorship appointments are strongly linked to research performance, while management positions require leadership experience as well as having an associate or full professor title. In Lithuanian universities, academics have teaching as well as research tasks, however, their academic career progression depends mainly on performance in research. To be elected to a rector position the candidate needs to be a full professor. The performance criteria are often linked to the point accumulation system within universities, which translate in salary bonuses as well as points to be accumulated for promotion (Leišytė/Vilkas/Staniškienė/Žostautienė 2017). In case of underperforming, there is a threat of being demoted to a lower position as there are very limited permanent positions in Lithuanian academia. The tenure for a professorship can be granted after ten years of serving as a professor and two rounds of reviews. Thus, Lithuanian universities are strongly managerial in their HRM practices, where performance measurement is central in the context of scarce resources (Leišytė et al. 2017).

One can thus argue, that the introduction of NPM at Lithuanian universities has introduced the managerial university model, that celebrates performance, goal orientation, achievement, competitive advantage and efficiency (Mad-dock/Parkin 1993; Halford/Leonard 1999; Knights/Richards 2003). University HRM capacities have been strengthened with various tools, used to emphasise the importance of research performance for academic career progression.

### *Distribution of gender in management positions at the case study university*

Since 2013, the case study university has had a rather constant men-dominated management (see Table 2). For the most important position of rector, a male professor was appointed between 2013 and 2017 by the university board. Similarly, another important position, the vice-rectorship for research, has also been held

by a male professor. During the last couple of years in the studied period, some women vice-rectors were appointed. For example, the position of vice-rector for academic affairs was taken up initially by a man and later – by a woman professor. However, we find that women professors who are appointed by the rector for vice-rector positions, are predominantly engaged in tasks related to community and partnerships. These findings are in line with the literature on gender stereotypes in hiring processes, which show that women are appointed to positions that fulfil the care-oriented roles (Wajcman 1998; Charles/Bradley 2002; Barone/Assirelli 2020).

Looking at other important decision-making bodies, such as the university council and the university senate, we observe that key positions are overly dominated by men academics. Therefore, this university seems to elect men to the coveted leadership positions, while women are elected to less attractive and more service-oriented positions. In order to guarantee the anonymity of the analysed university, we present the gender composition of only key management positions in Table 2.

**TABLE 2** Gender composition of selected management positions at a managerial university

Managers	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Rector	m	m	m	m	m
Chancellor	-	-	w	m	m
Chairman of the University Senate	m	m	w	w	w
Vice-Rector for Strategic Development	m	m	-	-	-
Vice-Rector for Research Affairs	m	m	m	m	m
Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs	m	m	w	m	w
Vice-Rector for Administration	m	m	-	-	-
Vice-Rector for Community Affairs	-	-	w	m	m
Vice-Rector for Partnership Affairs	-	-	w	w	w

*Note:* w=women; m=men; -=no data available

Furthermore, the analysis of the gender composition of faculty level management structures shows vertical and horizontal gender segregation. While generally in 2018, more men than women professors are employed at the university, women are also not well represented in academic leadership positions of deans, departmental heads as well as among the professoriate and senior researchers. Although, we can find women deans and department chairs, about 70 % of these positions are taken by men. This vertical gender segregation is also dominant within the structures of each faculty board in the analysed case study university. Around 70 % of faculty board chairs as well as faculty board members were men. Thus, the vertical segregation by gender among university management is observed as similar to other studies in the Western European contexts (Sher-

er/Zakaria 2018; Treviño et al. 2018; Apostoaie et al. 2019; Park 2020). Also, this unequal representation of women and men in university management positions has not changed over time, which indicates that the managerial model of university has not alleviated this gendered managerial power imbalance.

Finally, we observe also stereotypical tendencies in the management composition in regard to disciplinary differences. Faculty management in chemistry, mathematics, computer science, and law, which are regarded as men dominated fields, are clearly overrepresented by men academics. In humanities, women academics dominate management positions. Thus, the vertical as well as horizontal gender segregation at the Lithuanian case study university persists. Hence, we verify the first hypothesis H1.

Barriers for promotion at the case study university

To answer the second question of the study, we were interested in understanding the barriers senior academics face in promotion procedures by gender. We focused on academics' views on HRM practices at the case study university. As shown in Table 3, we can see ambivalent results when it comes to the correlation between gender and satisfaction of the respondents with the recruitment practices, institutional support for professional development and promotion practices at the case study university.

TABLE 3 Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Correlations between Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Gender	1.49	0.50					
2 I am encouraged and financially supported to develop my professional skills (e.g. leadership, communication)	2.57	1.17	0.16				
3 My voice regarding my promotion is heard and acted upon in my faculty	2.95	1.04	0.17	0.61***			
4 The university has fair promotion policies	3.07	1.05	0.11	0.45***	0.61***		
5 The university has fair recruitment policies	3.53	0.89	0.12	0.08	0.13	0.47***	
6 The requirements for a positive performance evaluation are clearly communicated to me	3.14	1.07	0.18*	0.36***	0.28**	0.50***	0.32***

Note: n= 130–140; Pearson's correlation coefficient (2-tailed) are shown in the diagonal. Significance level: \*p <.05; \*\*p <.01; \*\*\*p<.001

Overall, we see that respondents seem neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with the situation of career progression. However, some trends between the individual aspects of career advancement can be identified. On the one hand, respondents were mostly satisfied with the university's recruitment policy. On the other

hand, they were least satisfied with the (financial) support for professional development in their workplace. Thus, entering an academic job at the case study university does not seem to be of concern, but rather the lack of opportunities for career development and promotion when already employed does.

When controlled for significance by gender (an independent t-test, see Table 4), we could find a statistically significant difference for the item “The requirements for a positive performance evaluation are clearly communicated to me”. More men respondents seem to be satisfied with the transparency of performance evaluation criteria and communication regarding them, than women respondents. This is in line with the literature, highlighting the lack of transparent and gender unbiased criteria in promotion practices within universities. These empirical findings reflect the well-known ‘glass ceiling’ culture (Acker 1990; Bain/Cummings 2000; Probert 2005; Hoobler et al. 2014; Hartlep et al. 2017), which constitutes an informal barrier, as women experience exclusion from the top positions, which maintains vertical gender segregation.

The standard deviation (SD) shows that the individual responses of academics are on average between 0.5 and 1.2 points away from the mean. Admittedly, we find evidence of differences between the surveyed academics regarding the evaluation of HRM practices and promotion policies at the case study university.

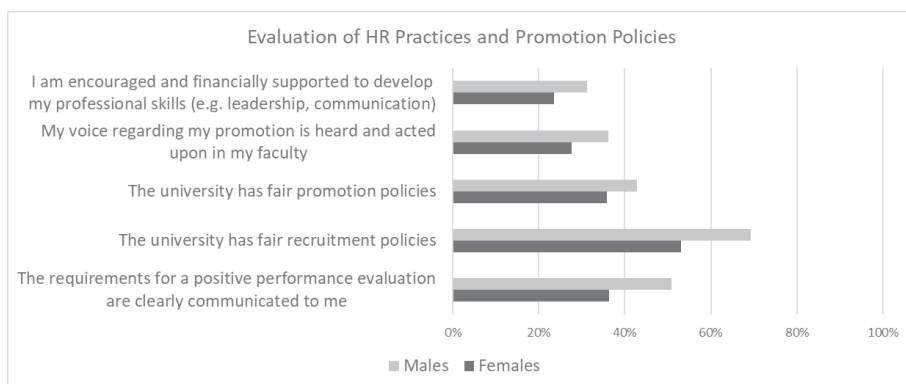
TABLE 4 Independent Samples Test

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differ- ence	Std. Error Difference
I am encouraged and financially supported to develop my professional skills (e.g. leadership, communication)	0.009	0.924	-1.800	130	0.074	-0.369	0.205
My voice regarding my promotion is heard and acted upon in my faculty	1.619	0.206	-1.857	121	0.066	-0.350	0.188
The university has fair promotion policies	0.255	0.615	-1.193	128	0.235	-0.220	0.185
The university has fair recruitment policies	0.456	0.500	-1.424	129	0.157	-0.222	0.156
The requirements for a positive performance evaluation are clearly communicated to me	3.133	0.079	-2.054	127	0.042	-0.381	0.185

Finally, we conducted a contingency table analysis (see Figure 1) to describe the relationship between the independent variable gender and the categorical dependent variables. The findings show that a minority of all academics surveyed are satisfied with the HR management practices and promotion policies. Less

than 40 % of respondents indicated to be satisfied with the encouragement and financial support for development of professional skills in their workplace, that their voice is heard and acted upon in the faculty regarding promotion. Also, only few respondents thought that their university had fair promotion policies (see Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1 Academics' Perception of HRM Practices by Gender (%)**



*Note:* Entries positive answers ("strongly agree" and "agree") combined in percentage. No statistically significant results.

Examining the responses by gender, we see a uniform pattern. Women respondents seem to experience promotion barriers to a larger extent than men respondents. In all studied promotion barrier categories, namely perceptions of 1) encouragement and support, 2) being taken seriously, 3) fairness and 4) knowledge of performance requirements, women academics agree with the statements to a lesser extent than men. Thus, we provided evidence that women respondents at the case study managerial university might be at a constant disadvantage in terms of their career prospects (which would be a management position), compared to men. Only 23 % of women academic respondents indicated that they are encouraged and receive financial support for the development of their professional skills, compared to nearly one third of men academics who agreed with this statement.

Overall, these findings show that the case study university invests little in professional development of academic staff and provides limited resources in this regard. Less than one-third of women indicated that their promotion request is heard, whereas 36 % of men indicated that their promotion requests are taken seriously. In terms of fairness of promotion and recruitment policies we can observe different perceptions. 36 % of women respondents indicated that promotion policies are fair compared to 43 % of men respondents. In comparison, 53 % of women indicated that recruitment policies are fair compared to 70 %

of men. This shows that most women academics perceive promotion policies as unfair and nearly half of women respondents also perceive recruitment policies as unfair. This is alarming and points to the possible strong biases in these two procedures, and thus, barriers for career advancement of women academics at the case university.

There is also a big gap in respondent views by gender, regarding transparency and communication between management and academic staff about the promotion procedures. Only 36 % of women respondents indicated that the requirements were clearly communicated to them, while more than half of the men respondents did. This points to the problems of communication regarding the performance evaluation criteria, especially among women academics at the case study university and relative intransparency of the promotion requirements.

Our analysis shows that the majority of respondents at the case study university are highly dissatisfied with the HRM practices, especially with the fairness and transparency of the promotion procedures. This is particularly true for women academics, who are expressing greater dissatisfaction compared to men. These findings confirm previous studies that point to micro-politics and networking as among the most important indicators for career advancement (Durbin 2011; Meschitti/Lawton-Smith 2017). In this respect, men outperform their women colleagues (Allen et al. 2019; Lundine et al. 2019).

Compared to similar studies in the Western European contexts, our study has underscored the importance of (financial) support for development of professional skills, such as leadership skills for career progression. This item correlated positively with nearly all other indicators. Accordingly, based on the empirical evidence, this study reveals that the lack of support and encouragement can be an important barrier for career progression, also in the Lithuanian higher education context. These findings partly explain the promotion barriers at the case study university for women respondents, even though also men respondents report facing biases as well. Thus, we partly verify the second hypothesis H2.

## Discussion

In this study, we aimed to understand how NPM inspired university HRM practices influence the progression of women academics to management positions. We did so by drawing on a case study of a Lithuanian university, examining the gender composition of management structures, as well as the views of academics regarding HRM practices for recruitment and promotion. Based on the results of our qualitative study, we verified the first hypothesis H1: Vertical gender segregation in management positions at a managerial university persists over time. In line with the existing literature, our findings support the view that men academic managers dominate university management (Acker 1990; Rindfleisch/Sheridan 2003; Leathwood 2005). The gender distribution shows a more

nuanced picture when exploring a broad array of management positions at various levels of the organisation – the top level, the rectorate and elected senate, at mid level – elected deans and appointed vice deans, faculty boards, as well as heads of departments at the sub-unit levels. We observe, that men academics dominate the elected and more powerful positions. Women academics in our case study tend to be in rather lower and subordinate management positions than men academics. This is on the one hand, in line with stereotypical gender role expectations, while on the other hand, the fact that some women can be found among managers at multiple levels points to the possible tokenistic treatment of women academics for legitimacy reasons or can be interpreted as NPM related HRM practices bearing fruit.

Thus, the next step of the analysis has probed the perceptions of academic staff regarding the HRM practices. We could partly verify the second hypothesis H2: Women academics are more likely to experience promotion barriers at a managerial university compared to men academics. In the study of practices and experiences with promotion barriers among our respondents, we can see that women perceive more barriers for recruitment and promotion compared to men. For women senior academics it is harder to be recognised and be promoted, the promotion criteria are not clearly communicated, as well as they receive less support for promotion compared to men. This is largely in line with the studies of the gender biases in the criteria for hiring and promotion in academia (Herschberg 2019). Gender vertical segregation seems to persist at the studied managerial university. Women respondents are appointed to the subordinate management roles that do not hold the same prestige and power as those positions held by men academics. The appointments could be interpreted as being a step forward towards gender equality in line with the transparent HRM promotion practices, but in fact they seem to be driven by legitimacy reasons of having 'token' women managers and beliefs of women excelling in care-related roles.

Overall, in practice, we observe both a managerial and collegial university model with the persistent masculine management culture that maintains vertical and horizontal gender segregation among the heads of departments, deans, collegiate bodies and the rectorate. The deeply entrenched beliefs about men as stereotypical leaders and high trust in men managers that dominate in the post-Soviet Lithuanian society, could account for this stability. Thus, even though the university is more managerial under NPM, as seen from the perceptions of senior academics, the gender composition of management remains largely men dominated following gender stereotypes (Barone/Assirelli 2020). Further, even though the university is more managerial and uses NPM oriented performance-driven HRM practices – this does not translate into more transparency in recruitment and promotion as expected and women academics remain disadvantaged in the face of performance pressures. This echoes the findings of

the recruitment and hiring barriers for academics and managers in the Western European countries (van den Brink/Holgersson/Linghag/Deé 2016; Plate 2018; Herschberg 2019). Women respondents are less informed than men and their voice regarding promotion is largely ignored (see also Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014; Stewart/Valian 2018). Finally, the identified lack of (financial) support for professional development among the respondents, especially among the women respondents, and the low levels of encouragement and transparency criteria can be interpreted as the persistence of the ‘glass ceiling’ at the case study university.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to higher education, gender and management research in three important ways. Firstly, it offers empirical evidence for the persistence of gender segregation at a university, despite the transformation of university NPM inspired HRM practices in the post-Soviet Central and Eastern European context. Further, it provides a more nuanced picture regarding gender and tokenism in university management, since the evidence is drawn from multi-level management positions’ dynamics over a period of time, when major reforms have been implemented to foster the university towards more professional management processes and structures. Finally, it points out that despite the long tradition of women’s employment in Lithuania, and despite the shift towards a managerial university and development of HRM tools, universities are still the bastions of masculine culture and power, where women academics face a ‘glass ceiling’ to reach management positions.

The study findings have several implications for management practice at universities or other professional organisations. Since university management in the studied university changed only in a tokenistic way, by including women academics in subordinate management roles, we advise university managers to proactively engage with the academic community, administrative networks as well as management in respect of awareness raising regarding the masculine culture and gender-biased HRM practices present in the university. Sharing good practices of gender parity in hiring committees across different faculties, as well as discussing the informal rules of management career progression in these committees, would be a way forward. Further, we recommend to revise promotion criteria for management positions to diminish possible gender biases and monitoring promotion procedures to ensure transparency of the promotion criteria and their enactment. We also advise to provide (financial) support for women and men academics, ensuring especially the participation of women academics in professional development programmes for leadership positions.

### *Limitations and suggestions for future research*

The study has several limitations regarding generalisation and interpretation. Our research focused on HRM practices at a case study university in Lithuania. For this reason, caution should be exercised in generalising the findings to other Lithuanian universities or universities in other post-Soviet countries. Moreover, the analysed data refer to different time frames, which may seem incompatible at first glance. Different timeframes for the study of management positions and the survey of senior academics provide a certain time lag, which is necessary in studying the dynamics of change in management positions. The survey data carried out later allows to ascertain the reasons behind gender segregation in the management of the organisation. Furthermore, our survey data had a relatively small sample size, therefore care needs to be taken in generalising the findings of the study. At the same time, our sample is representative of the total population of academics in Lithuania when it comes to spread over disciplines and gender, so this allows us to discuss some tendencies.

This study only scratches the surface of the dynamics of diversity management of universities in Lithuania. In the future, other aspects influencing gender segregation in organisations should be considered, such as the role of organisational culture and norms, informal codes of conduct and the role of networks in hiring and promotion to management positions.

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