Research Management and Administration:
A (developing) profession?

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Background

Research Management and Administration: a profession still to be formalized
Discussion paper supporting the framing and conceptualization of an educational programme for Research Managers and Administrators – prepared by HETFA Research Institute, beginning of 2019

Relevance:

1. Scarcity of literature
2. Huge differences among the recognition of the profession, educational and training opportunities
3. Increasing competition for grants supporting research, innovation and education at EU level
Who is an RMA?
Who is an RMA?

• develops, administers, accounts for and complies with requirements, guidelines and laws relating to research projects funded externally.

• includes different phases of the research, innovation and educational grants:
  
  • **before** the proposal: identification and dissemination of funding opportunities, advising,
  
  • **pre-grant** phase: proposal preparation and writing,
  
  • **contracting**: going through the conclusion of grant contracts, partnership agreements,
  
  • **post-grant** phase: administrative and financial management, communication and dissemination, reporting, liaising, etc.

„*be a jack of all trades but master of none*” (Kerridge, 2016)

„*a man in the middle*” (Spencer & Scott, 2017)

„*taking on the roles of manager, lawyer, financier, or quasi researcher*” (Tauginiene, 2009)
Main statements found in the literature

1. Short history of RMA profession
2. Lack of recognition and visibility
3. Ill-defined roles & responsibilities,
4. Lack of career path
5. Need for a wide variety of skills, competences as well as extensive knowledge
6. Continuous Change
7. Lack of specific educational programs & hard recruitment
8. Diverse educational background of RMAs
The misunderstanding: RMA and the word administration

The meaning of the word administration is sometimes misunderstood as a simple task by management.

The job of a research administrator requires a high skill level and expertise in most cases.

A lot of the work involves complex problem solving requiring a competent and confident person.

Such tasks include proposal writing, project management, exploitation, communication, finance, legal,....
Where are we now? Who are we?

Who are we as a community?

Where are we as a profession?

RMA is not a recognised profession in Europe
Where are we in regard to quality?
And consistency in services?

- Very different in different countries, organisations and faculties (from excellent to non-existent)
- No formal accepted standards
- No overarching quality control
- ARMA/EARMA collaboration for certification, standardisation and education (Professional Development Programme)
OUR SURVEY: methodology

- Online survey
- Disseminated through BESTPRAC mailing list, websites, social media platforms
- Available between 21 Feb 2019 and 13 March 2019

Content:
- Basic information (regional, demographic, educational and institutional background)
- The path becoming RMA
- Pros and cons of the profession
- Recruitment
- Skills, competences and knowledge necessary for the profession
- Education and training
- Professional associations
Our respondents

- 136 respondents (complete questionnaires: 89)
- Females in majority (72%)
- Aged between 31-50 (81%)
- Highly qualified: 90% Masters Degree, 30% PhD
- Experienced: 77% spent at least 5 years, 38% at least 10 years as RMA
Our respondents compared to RAAAP respondents

- 136 respondents (complete questionnaires: 89)
- Females in majority (72%) – RAAAP: 76.6% females
- Aged between 31-50 (81%) – RAAAP: between 35-54 (63.2%)
- Highly qualified: 90% Masters Degree, 30% PhD – RAAAP: 66.9 % Masters, 26.4% PhD
- Experienced: 77% spent at least 5 years, 38% at least 10 years as RMA – RAAAP: 74.4% at least 5 years, 45.9% at least 10 years

RAAAP survey

- High school degree
- Bachelor
- Masters
- PhD
- None

Research Management and Administration: a profession still to be formalized
Our respondents

- Work in 31 different European countries
- 10% leadership, 49% management, 18% counselling, 14.5% administrative position
- Institutional background: public (69%) non-profit private (27.5%), for profit (3.7%).
- The majority works in universities (60.5%), or in research institutes (25%).
Our respondents

- Work in 31 different European countries – RAAAP: 64 different countries
- 10% leadership, 49% management, 18% counselling, 14.5% administrative position – RAAAP: 20.8% leadership, 41% management, 35.2% operational, 3% not sure
- Institutional background: public (69%) non-profit private (27.5%), for profit (3.7%).
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OUR RESULTS: Advantages

RMAs are passionate about their job
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RMAs are passionate about their job

- Interesting, never boring
- Diverse, dynamic, challenging
- Opportunity for enjoying multicultural environment, travelling and networking
- Impactful, meaningful and rewarding

“It is a diversified profession as it holds a lot of different roles / functions and allows you to grow. You learn with every new project, funding programme, etc. As no project is like the one before, it is hardly ever boring. Depending on your position you get to travel a lot and you get in touch with a lot of people and interesting personalities. (Respondent, Germany)

“It is a very stimulating and rewarding activity; gives me an opportunity to stay up to date with excellent science and research ideas and surrounded by fantastic researchers; [...] research managers feel more as an integral part of institution, and part of something bigger and meaningful.” (Respondent, Portugal)
Where are we in now?

Yes

• Added value
• Great people and leaders
• More and growing communities
• Excellent research support in a lot of places

No or not sufficient

• Codified standards
• Sufficient and accredited training
• Sufficient investment
• Sufficient recognition of profession
• Understanding of added value by policy makers
OUR RESULTS: disadvantages

An almost non-existent and non-formalized profession
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An almost non-existent and non-formalized profession

• Lack of professional identity
• Lack of understanding of tasks and responsibilities
• Lack of recognition
• Uncertainty
• Stress

“In most countries RMA is not a profession. For this reason, there are many misunderstandings, salaries are not adequate for the skills and workload.” (Respondent, Croatia)

“Undervalued and underappreciated. Invisible.” (Respondent, Iceland)

“Dependent of external money flow and therefore the risk for unemployment/no permanent contract.” (Respondent, the Netherlands)

“Peak periods of proposal submissions can be hard to manage! (but this is the nature for any job, with busy periods)” (Respondent, Spain)
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OUR RESULTS: Pros & Cons

- Dynamic
- Diversity of projects, topics, people
- Relations with scientists and researchers

- Fluctuating workload
- Stress before deadlines
- Need for multitasking
- Need for continuous self-development
- Being undervalued, unrecognized

“You can hardly ever concentrate on only one topic and delve into it. You have to be able to always have many balls juggling, set new priorities and leave something you just started behind.” (Respondent, Austria)

“Constant need to be updated with the latest developments.” (Respondent, Cyprus)

“Its reputation (scientific staff might look down on you), salary (often not as much as it should be considering the amount of responsibility), hardly any training or knowledge that such a profession might exist, career opportunities limited.” (Respondent, Germany)
OUR RESULTS: the way becoming an RMA

- Low awareness of RMA as a profession
- Rarely really planned, many times it is rather a coincidence
- Complex history of respondents before and during their RMA career
OUR RESULTS: Recruitment

- difficult to recruit colleagues bearing the necessary knowledge and skills
- the training of newcomers is a long process
- strong need for a formal training

Figure 3. Regarding the recruitment of RMA staff, what are your experiences?

- The training of new colleagues is a long process and needs a lot of investment.
  - 7.0% strongly disagree
  - 12.8% disagree
  - 52.3% neutral
  - 27.9% agree

- It is difficult to recruit colleagues bearing the necessary knowledge and skills.
  - 4.3% strongly disagree
  - 9.3% disagree
  - 26.7% neutral
  - 34.9% agree
  - 26.7% strongly agree

- We have internal trainings for beginners to provide the necessary skills in a short period.
  - 16.1% strongly disagree
  - 26.4% disagree
  - 28.7% neutral
  - 21.8% agree
  - 6.9% strongly agree

- We receive a huge number of application for vacancies, so we are able to select among the best candidates.
  - 18.6% strongly disagree
  - 29.1% disagree
  - 36.0% neutral
  - 11.6% agree
  - 4.7% strongly agree

N=87
OUR RESULTS: Skills, competences & knowledge

- Useful background: business & management, communication, public administration, international relations and legal studies
- Scientific background $\leftrightarrow$ multitasking

“A person loses professional career development if he/she worked earlier as researcher. If a person has the only MBA education he/she can't understand the researchers' real needs, problems and queries” (Respondent, Ukraine)

“I would only recommend it [RMA job] to people with a particular set of soft skills, such as the ability to switch between tasks fast and efficiently; be extremely organized; work under deadlines; be a people-person; be a leader.” (Respondent, Portugal)
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OUR RESULTS: Educational programmes

- Only 6% claimed to have any kind of professional accreditation or certification related to RMA
- Only 36% of the respondents is a member of any associations (ARMA, EARMA, BESTPRAC)
- Problematic nature of setting a formal training
  - ill-defined and fast changing job
  - Fast changing knowledge and strong dependency on the host institution
  - Differing educational background of professionals
  - Importance of bearing necessary soft skills and competences

“I actually haven't had any education specifically for RMA, but possess a number of skills that are useful for the job. I learn as I go and am the only project manager in my group. I know some project managers within our organisation who I could contact if I needed help, but most of the time I have to figure it out myself.” (Respondent, the Netherlands)
Professional development training and certification

Masterclass for Early Stage Research Administrators (0-4y exp)

Certificate in Research Management (4-10y exp)

Leadership Event (leaders, future leaders)
OUR CONCLUSIONS

• RMAs in Europe deal with very similar issues regardless of the region or country of work.

• Lack of recognition seems to be an unsolved problem

• Results of the lack of professional identity: lack of knowledge and mutual understanding
  • In everyday work
  • In perspectives
  • In recognition
  • In recruitment
  • In professional networking
Our Conclusions

• An accredited under/post-graduate programme recognized at European or international level might contribute to:

- Clarifying and strengthening the RMA professional identity
- Reinforcing the recognition of the profession
- Raising awareness about the existence of the profession
- Setting the expectations about the job,
- Enhancing talent pool,
- Reducing the investment needed in newcomers.
OUR CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME:

- It is supposed to focus primarily on boosting the necessary skills and competences

- It is supposed to be:
  - Flexible, modular
  - Hands-on, practical and problem oriented

- It is supposed to be backed by coaching and mentorship

„the best way for a newcomer to learn the job is by doing it in the office, and by adhering to the advice from colleagues with a longer track record in RMA.” (Respondent, Belgium)

„...with my PhD background I find it difficult to judge what training or education is useful. I would say it depends on the type of RMA position as well as educational background.” (Respondent, the Netherlands)

„RMAs would need hands-on training with case studies, situation games - necessary knowledge cannot be efficiently transferred through the formal methods of education.” (Respondent, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
What is the future?

• Role for communities and associations to improve the situation
• Role of all RMA’s to improve this
• Convince your colleagues, researchers, stakeholders, funders and governments
  – By doing good work in the first place
  – But also by showing it and being pro-active
=> Training, networking, sharing => become part of the conversation
Seizing the momentum: opportunities

• Further strengthening of the European communities and associations

• Advocacy about the value we can add to all stakeholders
  – More research time
  – More responsible research and innovation
Micro – in the organisation

- Increasing efficiency
- Increasing research time
- Increasing research quality
- Attracting more funding
- Better proposals
- Better project management
- Reducing sunk costs

Macro – in the wider context

- Increasing efficiency
- Increasing research time
- Increasing research quality
- Better funder and gov compliance
- Better communication to stakeholders incl taxpayers
- Better quality control
1. Effectiveness vs Efficiency

Being **effective** is about doing the right things, while being **efficient** is about doing things right.

Moving a chair with your hand or with a bulldozer is both effective because the chair will move but only moving it with your hand is efficient because the effort and force is appropriate for the task.

2. Opportunity cost and specialisation
Effective but not efficient

- A research is good at administration
- But loses time for research (opportunity cost)
- At often a higher cost

Not effective and not efficient

- A researcher is not good at admin
- Loses time for research (opportunity cost)
- Higher cost lower quality than good administrator
What is the future?

- Strong community
- Recognition of the profession as a key enabler
- Standards for the profession
- Education and training to reach those standards
- Accreditation to check those standards

⇒ Long term future after increasing our credibility and visibility
  ⇒ By doing our job well
  ⇒ By increasing research efficiency
  ⇒ Improving research quality
  ⇒ Showcasing what we are doing
Questions?

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