Chapter 5.44

Reflections on Research Management and Administration in Various Countries Around the World

Simon Kerridge[a], Jan Andersen[b], Melinda Fischer[c], Mark B. M. Hochman[d], Fernanda Oliveira[e], Makiko Takahashi[f], Therina Theron[g] and Virág Zsár[h]

[a] 0000-0003-4094-3719, *University of Kent, Canterbury, UK;*
Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing
[b] 0000-0002-3750-0960, *University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Denmark;*
Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing
[c] 0000-0003-1503-3369, *Clemson University, Clemson, SC, USA;*
Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing
[d] 0000-0002-8885-2050, *Research Management Resources Pty Ltd, Tasmania, Australia;* *Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing*
[e] 0000-0002-6569-3480, *Embrapa Agroindústria Tropical, Fortaleza, Brazil;*
Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing
[f] 0000-0003-4355-3206, *Kanazawa Institute of Technology, Tokyo, Japan;*
Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing
[g] 0000-0002-2204-3947, *Stellenbosch University, South Africa;*
Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing
[h] 0000-0002-0537-3987, *HÉTFA Research Institute, Budapest, Hungary;*
Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Abstract

This part of the book has provided overviews of the current situation of research management and administration (RMA) in over 50 countries around the world

provided by a total of 96 authors. Thirty-eight chapters cover individual countries from six continents, with a chapter bringing together this situation in the three Baltic states, another covering the Western Balkans, one more focused on the Caribbean, and there is a chapter on the Catalonia region of Spain. Here, we attempt to draw out common themes and to highlight differences in RMA and of Research Managers and Administrators in different parts of the world. Further, more holistic, insights can be found in the final chapter of the book (Yang-Yoshihara, Kerridge, et al., 2023, Chapter 6).

Keywords: Research management and administration; regional variation; gender; age; qualifications; certification; internationalisation; recognition

History

Development of Associations

In broad terms, the research ecosystems in most countries are remarkably similar, featuring public and private universities and research institutes; but with many other actors involved such as government, businesses, and the third sector. The main research-performing institutions often receive core funding for undertaking research, and invariably supplement research activities with external project funding. Government funding for research projects is normally managed by 'at arms length' funders, often referred to as Research Councils, although many other types of funders exist, such as companies, foundations and charities, and international bodies. With ever-increasing demands for accountability of public funds, particularly when funding increases, there is increased bureaucracy and audit requirements; this coupled with the drivers to increase research funding means that many institutions now invest in research support. Over time these support staff developed networks and associations to share best practices and have attempted to define themselves as a distinct group of professionals. This development is described in various chapters in this section of the book, as well as in Section 1: History. One could imagine that the requirement for RMAs, and hence the existence of an RMA association, would be linked to research and development spend or spend per capita, but there are clearly other factors as not every country high on those lists[1] have prominent associations, India (volume), and Israel (per capita) being examples.

While some countries are undoubtedly more mature in terms of research support, it seems that the drivers and need for RMAs are ubiquitous.

Across the world, RMAs are predominantly (Oliveira, Fischer, et al., 2023, Chapter 2.2), but not exclusively (Santos et al., 2023, Chapter 2.5), to be found in research-performing organisations. Given the volume of research undertaken outside the higher education sector in some countries, it is possible that there may actually be more RMAs in the commercial sector (e.g. there are associations[2] for industrial research managers), but the focus of this book has been on the university and research institute sector. In almost all countries, females account for around four-fifths of the RMA workforce (Oliveira, Fischer, et al., 2023, Chapter 2.2); and this has not changed

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[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sovereign_states_by_research_and_development_spending
[2] Examples include: European Industrial Research Management Association – https://www.eirma.org/ and Innovation Research Interchange – https://www.iriweb.org/.

much in recent times (Kerridge & Scott, 2016), however, earlier in the history of RMA it was a male dominated profession (Shambrook et al., 2015), at least in the USA. It seems possible though that this was more a reflection of the gendered nature of the wider workforce in the Western world in the middle of the twentieth century, rather than being an RMA-specific phenomenon.

Current Situation

Gender

As mentioned above, overall the profession is around four-fifths female, and certainly appears gendered. Those countries and regions that are not female dominated tend to be where RMA is still emerging (e.g. Colombia, see Naffah & Calixo, 2023, Chapter 5.9, and Japan, see Takahashi & Ito, 2023, Chapter 5.12), and we might expect to see the gender balance drift towards the mean, although there may also be cultural drivers pulling in the other direction. Why females seem more attracted to the profession is discussed in Chapter 2.4 (Poli, Kerridge, et al., 2023). It has also been argued that this gendered workforce and support ethos contribute to the invisibility (Yang-Yoshihara, Poli, et al., 2023, Chapter 3.7) of the profession and the paucity of research into RMA.

Age

Another issue of the visibility of the profession, both in terms of the identity of individuals, and of the cohort of RMAs more generally is how people become RMAs. Internationally, there are very few RMAs under 25 years of age (Oliveira, Fischer, et al., 2023, Chapter 2.2), or who responded to the various surveys. Either those in this younger demographic are not finding the profession immediately, or perhaps do not realise they are part of the profession and therefore have not joined one of the multitude of associations that are often the conduit for such surveys.

Qualifications

The profession is highly academically qualified, although the propensity for master's level and doctorally qualified RMAs varies quite widely between regions, it is always well above the national averages of the working population. While much of this can be accounted for by the movement of researchers into RMA (Dutta, Oliveira, et al., 2023, Chapter 2.3), it seems that the profession also attracts those with an interest in research more generally, and indeed some also undertake further and higher degrees in their time as RMAs. It should also be noted that there are a few master's courses in RMA, particularly in North America, and some undergraduate options are appearing (see Ritchie et al., 2023, Chapter 2.7).

Regional Variation

In South America, RMA is very new in terms of association development with the Brazil Research Administration and Management Association (BRAMA), being created in 2013 (Juk & Baisch, 2023, Chapter 5.8), and the Colombian Research Management Association (COREMA) created in 2018 (Naffah & Calixo, 2023, Chapter 5.9). There are also intracontinental initiatives such as Mimir Andino[3] bringing RMAs together to share

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[3] https://mimirandino.org/

good practice. This is also the model in Africa with the various RIMAs (see Kirkland, 2023, Chapter 1.1) and Australasia (Hochman et al., 2023, Chapter 1.4). Across Europe, as well as the pan-continental EARMA, most countries, at least in the North-West, also have national associations, whereas in the Southern and Eastern parts, associations tend to be relatively new or do not yet exist (Marčić & Pepić, 2023, Chapter 5.26). The USA, perhaps due to its size and length of RMA history, has more than one association (Monahan et al., 2023, Chapter 1.2), some having an overtly international focus (such as NCURA and SRAi), and others focussing on a specific sub-part of the RMA profession, for example, NORDP with its community of researcher development professionals. In other countries, such as Canada, Japan, and Malaysia, there are strong national associations, whereas in the Middle East, there are no formal associations, and networks tend to be centred on individual institutions. There is certainly no 'one size fits all' model for RMA associations in terms of geographic or functional scope, the communities develop organically to meet their own needs. Most associations see a benefit in joining INORMS, giving weight to the premise that RMA flourishes with international links.

Certification

As discussed by Ritchie et al. (2023, Chapter 2.7), there are varying approaches to certification ranging from a well-established externally credentialed exam-based North American approach, to the more project/assessment-based systems in Europe and Southern Africa, to the association based self-accreditation model found in Australasia incorporating an 'at arms length' Accreditation Council. Like the development of the associations themselves, the need for certification and the method of delivering that need varies considerably by region. When it comes to academic RMA qualification, a few countries offer master's degrees, but as yet there is no undergraduate degree to prepare people for the profession more generally, although there is an offering in the more specialised field of clinical research administration.

Future Direction

Breadth of RMA

The definition and scope of RMA varies depending on the context, but there are certain aspects which are universally agreed upon: pre-award and post-award support. Similarly, ethics and compliance are almost always considered part of RMA, as is researcher development. Whereas scholarly communication is often seen as in the domain of the library, similarly, research student administration also often has its own identity. In some countries, there are separate tribes that support the commercialisation end of the Research & Development spectrum, whereas, for example, in Africa, individuals tend to identify as supporting research and innovation equally.

Overall it seems that the scope of RMA is growing. While ethics and integrity have long been associated with RMA in many regions, now most would also include compliance, support for open research, and more recently, research culture. As these spheres of interest expand it seems likely that there will be more interactions between RMAs and those in adjacent professions, such as Librarians and Organisational Development. The scope of RMA is directly related with how RMA processes are tailored by the research institutions which also impacts how the organisational structure for research support services is designed by them (Oliveira, Trentini, et al., 2023, Chapter 3.3).

Depth of RMA

With ever more focus on value for money, transparency, and accountability, it is inevitable that RMA will also increase in complexity in order to cope with the increasing regulation and reporting, as well as the need to address more non-research-specific requirements of funders (Zsár & Angyal, 2023, Chapter 4.2). The depth of knowledge required in particular sub-areas of RMA will only increase, and with this the likelihood that particular sub-areas will start to create their own sub-cultures. Many associations already have special interest groups, and some groups have felt the need to create their own associations, examples include NORDP in the USA (Shaklee, 2023, Chapter 5.7) and PRISM in the UK (Kerridge, 2023b, Chapter 5.40). Where there is a critical mass it seems likely that these new sub-RMA associations will flourish and create their own identity.

Internationalisation

Just as research has no national boundaries and is becoming more international (Rostan et al., 2014), with more internationally collaborative research projects being funded to address global issues such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs),[4] so is the importance of international RMA (White-Jones, 2022). Many of the chapters in this section have highlighted the increasing importance of international networks and contacts for RMAs, emphasising the need for RMAs to possess not only technical skills (Poli, Oliveira, et al., 2023, Chapter 3.2) but also soft skills such as communication and cultural awareness (Christensen & Smith, 2023, Chapter 4.8).

Recognition

One of the main observations of RMA is the invisibility of the profession and the individuals, which may be exacerbated by the gender balance. Many of those undertaking research support do not even realise that they are RMAs, leaving little hope for those with influence over RMAs to understand what we do. But slowly, as the profession develops, the visibility grows and it is becoming more commonplace for RMA associations to be brought into conversations on initiatives and potential initiatives that might impact the research ecosystem, as seen with the Federal Demonstration Project (FDP)[5] in the USA. The recent support for the European Commission (2022f) Action 17 on research management is another indication that the importance of RMA to research is becoming more recognised. The moves in various countries to recognise all contributions to research, for example, the promotion by UK Research and Innovation (n.d.) of *101 jobs that change the world* is also welcome. This has also translated into the research publishing arena with one of the 14 CRediT (Allen et al., 2014) roles being Funding Acquisition[6] which RMAs are often heavily involved in.

Differences

While many countries have professional associations, there are definite differences in professional maturity level in the country (Poli, Oliveira, et al., 2023, Chapter 3.2). Two associations in the USA are over 60 years old, but some other high income countries,

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[4] https://sdgs.un.org/goals
[5] https://thefdp.org/default/
[6] https://credit.niso.org/contributor-roles/funding-acquisition/

in Europe, for example, have only formalised an association in the last few years, while others have yet to do so at all. In most cases, these associations have developed bottom up, but in some cases, for example, in Africa (Kirkland, 2023, Chapter 1.1), and Japan (Takahashi & Ito, Chapter 5.12) some external stimuli helped to initiate the process.

In many countries and regions, professional development frameworks have been created (Romano et al., 2023, Chapter 4.4) with the intention of defining the skills and expertise of the profession; these have often led to credentials that RMAs can obtain (Ritchie et al., 2023, Chapter 2.7). However, the approach in the USA is a little different with certifications there being exam- rather than portfolio-based, and continuing professional development is required to retain those credentials once earned. Conversely, the US boasts more academic master's programmes than anywhere else, indeed most countries do not have any RMA-related academic qualifications.

Summary

In terms of the demographics of RMAs around the world, the RASPerS (Research Administration Stress Perception Survey, Shambrook et al., 2015), and RAAAP (Research Administration as a Profession, Dutta et al., 2023, Chapter 2.3; Kerridge & Scott, 2018a, 2018b; Kerridge, Ajai-Ajagbe, et al., 2022; Oliveira, Fischer, et al., 2023, Chapter 2.2) datasets provide an amazing resource. However, the data need to be looked at within the context of the country in question, and in many cases, the response rate is too low for statistically robust analyses.

Overall the chapters in this section confirm that in most parts of the world the profession is predominantly female, and this is reflected on in some of the chapters in the other sections, for example, Poli, Kerridge, et al. (2023, Chapter 2.4). In addition, the profession is highly academically qualified, and while this can be partly explained by some RMAs having previously been researchers; as well as high levels of doctorates, there are also many with master's level degrees as their highest qualification. The latter seems less likely to have moved from research and more likely to have been attracted to RMA for other reasons (see Dutta et al., 2023, Chapter 2.3; Yang-Yoshihara, Poli, et al., 2023, Chapter 3.7).

The importance of collegiality and networking for RMAs is demonstrated by the large, and growing number of RMA associations. This is being explored by the NCURA funded RAPIDS (Fischer, 2023) project which is developing a professional identity values scale for RMAs. Movement towards structured professional development (Romano et al., 2023, Chapter 4.4) and even accreditation (Ritchie et al., 2023, Chapter 2.7) are explored elsewhere in this book.

Overall, just as research is not constrained by national borders, neither is the support for research – RMA is a global undertaking. Hence, RMA professionals can learn from each other, not just within their own institution, region, and country, but across the continents and the entire globe. Similarly, groups of RMAs and fledgling RMA associations can reach out for guidance and help in establishing and growing their own networks. The creation and growth of the International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS, see Kulakowski, 2023, Chapter 1.7) is a testament to this, and also discussed by Andersen and Romano (2023, Chapter 2.8).

Acknowledgements

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