Chapter 5.28

The Profession of Research Management and Administration in Denmark

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Abstract

The creation of the research management and administration (RMA) profession in a small country is probably well exemplified by the development of the Danish Association of Research Managers and Administrators (DARMA). Many external factors in Denmark are similar to other European countries (like the growth of research, international cooperation, and competitive funding for research). The crucial point is how universities and especially staff react to the need for development and professionalisation. It takes committed and visionary individuals to kick-start the movement. Equally important is the buy-in and engagement from many colleagues necessary to make real change. This can only happen by

finding enough volunteers to build and run a professional society. Furthermore, international networking and conference participation is crucial to get relevant inspiration for this development.

The next step for a society like DARMA is to move towards a commonly recognised job function or title. This could also mean certification or at least a comprehensive, national training programme.

Research Ecosystem – Denmark

Research Policy

The Danish government sets the general direction and priorities for research in catalogues, published every five years and established by a process involving a wide variety of stakeholders. The current version is *RESEARCH2025* (UFM, 2018), outlining national research priorities until 2025. A similar process relates to the European Commission's framework programmes, where the Ministry of Higher Education and Science plays a coordinating role. In the research council system, the Danish Council for Research and Innovation Policy is officially tasked with furthering the development of Danish research, technology, and innovation.

Major Funders of Research

Like most other countries, research in Denmark is funded by both public and private funders. Public research funding has undergone substantial changes over the past two decades, with a tendency towards more coordination and more political control, although with broad involvement and dialogue between stakeholders. An unusual Danish feature is the significant role played by private research foundations.

Public research funders: The Danish research councils were established in 1968, and the five councils reflected the universities' division into faculties. After numerous reforms, the modern public research funding system in Denmark is designed to cover the entire value chain of research, from idea to product/benefit for society, or as one minister of research put it: 'from research to invoice'.[1]

The main Danish public funding agencies are (total awards in 2020 in brackets, sourced from the respective websites):

1. *Independent Research Fund Denmark (DFF)*[2] was formed in 2003 by merging the original five research councils. DFF funds specific research activities based on researchers' own initiatives, that is, bottom-up, investigator-initiated research. DFF is the only public funding agency that retains a role of counselling the government in science matters. DFF's main funding instrument is individual research projects (€200 million).

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[1] The point being that the title presents a push towards understanding research as instrumental to economic development.
[2] https://dff.dk/en/

2. *Danish National Research Foundation (DNRF)*[3] funds outstanding basic research of the highest international level within all research fields, with the aim to strengthen the development of Danish research. DNRF's main funding instrument is Centres of Excellence (€45 million).
3. *Innovation Fund Denmark (IFD)*[4] strengthens and fosters strategic research and innovation in Denmark, supporting projects with a strong emphasis on benefit for society. IFD's main funding instrument is large collaborative development projects (Grand Solutions) (€304 million).

Private research funders: According to the overview of European foundations for research and innovation – the EUFORI Study (Karamat Ali et al., 2015) – Denmark has the highest amount of private research funding per capita in Europe, with Novo Nordisk, a private foundation, being the largest research funder in the country. A particular Danish legislation: the laws on industrial and non-industrial foundations provide important benefits for companies owned by charitable foundations. The legislation was established in the 1980s, but the tradition of charitable foundations originated in the Catholic social institutions of the Middle Ages. The Carlsberg Foundation, founded in 1876, was the first Danish industrial foundation, focussing on research and development. The Danish legislation on foundations has multiple purposes, including tax benefits, better protection for creditors, for other partners, and for employees. Donations are encouraged by the laws, and foundations can deduct 125% of their charitable expenses.

There are about 1,300 industrial and over 10,000 non-industrial foundations, and more than half of their donations go to research. Private funding is rapidly growing in importance in Denmark, and in 2020, the total amount donated by private foundations was €2.635 billion. The three large, public funders have an annual budget of around €550 million.

According to the organisation for collaboration between Danish foundations, *Fondenes Videnscenter*,[5] the six largest Danish private foundations, based on their total donations to research in 2020 (in brackets) are:

1. Novo Nordisk Foundation[6] (€731 million).
2. A.P. Møller og Hustru Chastine McKinney Møllers Fond[7] (€157 million).
3. LEGO Foundation[8] (€155 million).
4. Villum Fonden[9] (€135 million).
5. Carlsbergfondet[10] (€99 million).
6. Lundbeck Foundation[11] (€81 million).

Research-performing Institutions

From 1479 until 1928, when Aarhus University was established, Copenhagen University was the only university in Denmark. More universities and research institutions were

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[3] https://dg.dk/en/
[4] https://innovationsfonden.dk/en/about-innovation-fund-denmark
[5] https://fondenesvidenscenter.dk/ (In Danish only).
[6] https://novonordiskfonden.dk/en/
[7] https://www.apmollerfonde.dk/the-ap-moller-foundation/
[8] https://learningthroughplay.com/about-us/the-lego-foundation
[9] https://villumfonden.dk/en/about/fondsfamilien
[10] https://www.carlsbergfondet.dk/en
[11] https://lundbeckfonden.com/en

founded in the second half of the 20th century. A major revision of the Danish University Act in 2003 (Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2011)[12] changed the universities away from the traditional and collegial management with elected officials, towards a more streamlined (and at the time controversial), business-like model where rectors, deans, and department heads are employed on regular contracts. The University Law also defines universities' status as self-owned public institutions. The Danish university system was further consolidated by large-scale mergers in 2006–2007, resulting in the current eight public universities. There are no private universities in Denmark.

Approximately half of all Danish high school graduates attend college or university.

Research is also performed at hospitals, government-approved institutes, the so-called Approved Technological Service Institutes (GTSs, *Godkendte Teknologiske Serviceinstitutter*), university colleges, and other types of institutions.

Evolution of the Profession

In Denmark, there has always been a culture of cooperation (ScienceNordic, 2020). Being a small country with a limited number of universities, the notion has always been that we need to cooperate and not compete at the national stage to be successful on the international stage. Hence, there has been a long tradition of running national expert groups focussing on subject matters like EU funding or specific funding tools. Typically, administrative staff did not have a job title to identify their profession. Instead, there was a generic title covering general administration. In the 1990s, two administrators (Jan Andersen and John Westensee) started the first expert group (EU ERFA, Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2022) with a focus on EU funding. From the outset, all Danish universities participated. The group has grown ever since and is still in existence. The Danish Ministry of Research has recognised the group and acts as a secretariat for the group.

Over the years, it became evident that Denmark needed to identify RMA as a profession. One of the main drivers for this was the growth in competitive funding. It was of marginal importance in the beginning, but now it is a crucial driver for the development of universities. Therefore, DARMA started its operations in 2008 to support the development of the profession. Now, we see job titles like research support officer, research advisers, etc.

The main driver for this development has been soft skills: the willingness of people to get involved and take the initiative.

Current Community – Denmark

Danish Association of Research Managers and Administrators

The purpose of DARMA[13] is to support Danish research through the professionalisation of RMA. DARMA is active in establishing RMA as a recognised profession in Denmark. DARMA, with more than 300 members and still growing, is for any individual with a professional interest in support, administration, and management of research. DARMA is driven by volunteer engagement by members. DARMA hosted the INORMS 2012 Conference in Copenhagen.[14] The research management community in Denmark beyond the higher education sector covers hospitals, regional

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[12] https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2019/778 (in Danish only).
[13] https://Darma.dk
[14] https://web.archive.org/web/20120120213439/http://www.inorms2012.com/programme.html

authorities, and funding bodies – both private and public. Even though there is an increase in RMAs in these sectors, this is not significant. There might be a significantly larger number of RMAs especially in industry, hospitals, and regions, who are not aware or do not have the possibility of organising themselves yet. This has led to a discussion in DARMA on how to broaden training and how to facilitate and support the problems and needs from these sectors. Despite good daily working relations with the ministry and public and private funding bodies, this is not yet reflected in the membership composition. Occasionally members move to the private sector and maintain DARMA membership, but there is no real stronghold in the private sector. This might be caused by the Danish industry sector being dominated by small- and medium-sized companies. Even though the membership in funding bodies (public and private) is very low, less than 5%, the connections between the foundations and funding agencies are more or less formalised, with an annual meeting (the Funding Forum) at the DARMA Annual Meeting, an informal working group between the major research funders and DARMA, discussing issues of mutual interests, like indirect costs, administrative procedures, coherence between the funders and its uptake in the research community (e.g. complementarity to EU funding).

The EU ERFA Networking Group is a group for administrative staff in the public sector working with Horizon Europe. The purpose of EU ERFA is to enhance knowledge about Horizon Europe among administrative staff members at public research institutions. This activity has been supplemented by the *EU-DK Support*[15] network, where there is a much broader membership.

NUAS – the Nordic University Administrator's[16] *collaboration* is a member-driven collaborative organisation established in 1976. NUAS's membership base includes 65 universities and university colleges from the seven Nordic countries: Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. NUAS has 14 interest groups that focus on specific administrative disciplines, with a total of 125 active members.

None of these communities offer certification. Recently DARMA has reached out to the Graduate Schools and our colleagues working in PhD Administration. The kick-off meeting on a SIG for this segment had nearly 70 people attending and thereby showing there is a need for network in this area of RMA as well.

Demographics

The typical Danish RMA is a 45-year-old woman, who has been working in the central research office for the last eight years. She has been employed in a permanent position in a public higher education institution, most likely a research-intensive university, her major task is proposal development. She has a master's degree from the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) but is working in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medicine (STEM). She stays in RMA, mostly because she enjoys working with scientists, but also because she likes her work and thinks it is fun. She speaks two foreign languages, and if she could, she would like to improve her communication skills. She is of course a member of DARMA, and also of EARMA and sees active participation in the national and international research management and administrator network as a benefit for her personal development, data based on Kerridge, Dutta, et al. (2022) (*n*=54).

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[15] https://ufm.dk/en/research-and-innovation/funding-programmes-for-research-and-innovation/eu-and-international-funding-programmes/horizon-2020/About-eurocenter-and-eu-dk-support?set_language=en&cl=en
[16] https://www.nuas.org/group/research-and-innovation/

Almost two-thirds of the RMA community is female, but when looking at the roles, less than one-third women are in leadership positions, so there is a clear gender bias, regarding career perspectives. Almost all RMAs in Denmark are Danish, but there seem to be an increasing number are internationals, partly due to international job advertisement and an increased number of international PhDs and postdocs choosing to stay in Denmark. Normally, the working language is Danish, but in offices with non-Danish speaking colleagues English would serve as a second working language. With an increasing number of researchers being recruited abroad, strong language skills are required to be able to work in research support.

Almost all Danish RMAs have an academic background at master's or PhD level. Less than 10% have a different background, such as a bachelor's degree or clerical background. There is no tradition for blended professionals in Denmark, so very few combine a career in research with a career as an RMA.

The number of RMAs with a doctorate degree has been growing in the last five years. These RMAs are often employed by research departments and thus work close to the researchers. The fact that many RMAs with graduate degrees, particularly in the STEM field, choose to work close to research environments indicates that the RMA career is a viable and attractive alternative career path for this group of academics (Poli, Kerridge, et al., 2023, Chapter 2.4).

Most RMAs work in Science, Health Sciences, and Technology while SSH only represent a small part of RMA positions. The educational background of RMAs often mirrors the kind of research they support. The very high emphasis on the STEM areas comes from the fact that most Danish private foundations funding research are in the areas of STEM. Especially within Health, Biotechnology, and Science, the private funding of research is significant. For some universities, funding from private foundations exceeds funding from public bodies. This also means that relation building and communication play a more important role, which also has translated into a demand for training in communication and working with impact.

RMAs work across the country, reflecting the geographical spread of higher education institutions. Due to the small size of the country, it is easy to meet and share knowledge and know-how.

Most RMAs have been employed for less than 15 years, following the emergence of jobs defined as research support. It seems that the community in recent years has grown, with almost 24% of RMAs being in their positions for less than five years. This can probably be traced back to reforms in the higher education sector, with mergers of smaller research organisations and universities forming larger institutions and departments, thus enabling more professional and visible research support functions.

The profession of RMAs in Denmark is not well defined, so research support offices will have varying names across institutions and departments. There is no formal recognition of the profession, meaning that recruiting new RMA staff depends on ad hoc formulated needs for skills and competences. Only very few have a formal certificate in research management from the EARMA Certificate for Research Managers[17] or other providers. The motivation to become a research manager does not come from the profession itself, only 20% have directly chosen to become a research manager. Asked if formal recognition would have changed their view on the profession and getting into it, less than 20% agree. The reason for this is probably that RMAs like to have a high degree of freedom to shape their own job.

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[17] https://earma.org/media/documents/crm-brochure.pdf

Almost two-thirds of the community define themselves as working primarily in pre-award functions: research policy, funding information, and project development. As the post-award functions are more often placed in research departments and research groups, there is a tendency that post-award RMAs have a number of different functions, for example, in finance, communication, HR, or graduate schools. Therefore, there might be a discrepancy between the number of actual RMAs working in pre- and post-award, because some post-award RMAs could see themselves as more generalist administrative support staff rather than identifying themselves as research managers. Being an RMA is also an issue of identification, and feeling being a visible part of the profession, enabling commitment (Yang-Yoshihara, Poli, et al., 2023).

RMAs in Denmark are very active in the international community of RMAs and volunteer as chairs, presidents, and board or committee members in international associations like EARMA,[18] SRAI,[19] NCURA,[20] and INORMS. Many have several international memberships, enhancing cross fertilisation of new concepts and ideas.

Despite the fact that many RMAs are happy with their jobs and functions, Jensen and Korsgaard (2013) report that almost one-third were considering leaving the RMA profession, primarily due to lack of career perspectives or progression.

In order to help mitigate this, DARMA has initiated work towards a revised strategy for the development of DARMA, some perspectives on the future of the profession, and its implications for the working conditions for RMAs in Denmark were discussed. These are listed in the next section.

In response to these challenges, DARMA has a focus on the creation of communities of practice and platforms for collaboration; support career development and best practice; secure relevance and engagement of members; and continue the strong international profile of DARMA. The goal is to respond to the challenges in an ever more complex research and innovation sector through innovation in research management.

The profile of the RMA has changed radically over the last 20 years of the profession, and new challenges in research and for researchers will have an enormous impact on the future of the profession. The core of the research management profession in Denmark, with a flexible and adaptable approach to what RMA is, will be a cornerstone in the continuation of the profession.

Directions/Future

DARMA adopted its new strategy in December 2021,[21] and an important aspect is the involvement and engagement of the membership. There are five strategic priorities for the near future:

1. Creating communities of practice and platforms for collaboration.
2. Supporting career development and best practice.
3. Relevance and engagement of volunteers.
4. Internationalisation.
5. Innovation in research management.

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[18] https://earma.org/
[19] https://www.srainternational.org
[20] https://www.ncura.edu/
[21] https://darma.dk/wp-content/uploads/DARMA-Strategy.pdf

We see two major trends in the future, which require a broader/new set of competences in a research support office:

1. Increased scope and complexity in research administration – for example, open science, data management, inclusiveness, bibliometrics, open innovation, extra large and complex projects, many compliance issues, impact, and linking research and innovation. Closer cooperation with technology transfer officers, and many other experts.
2. Massive use of artificial intelligence where expert knowledge will be replaced by skills like strategic thinking, networking, relationship building, handling of complex processes, and negotiation. Standard processes and projects will be completely automated. Research and especially data analysis will be affected as well.

Summary

In this chapter, we presented the development of the professional society of research managers and administrators in Denmark towards the formation of the DARMA, and the profile of the archetype research administrator. We have presented the current trends in research and research administration as a vehicle for a DARMA strategy towards the future. Finally, we have touched upon the necessity of being integrated into the international community of research management of administration.

Acknowledgements

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