

Chapter 6

Emerging Trends and Insights in Research Management and Administration

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Abstract

This final chapter, presented by the book's three Editors, provides a reflection and discussion of the key findings presented throughout the book. First, it delves into the book's vision and the process of creation. The findings in the book affirm the continuous growth of the field, highlight the diverse nature of the RMA landscape, and reveal the substantial variation in the status of the profession and the availability of data among regions and countries. To understand the unique features of the RMA profession from multitude of angles and in each country's context, the Editors emphasize the importance of inviting authors to share their perspectives in their own voices and styles, which became central to the book's mission. Second, this chapter presents discussions on pivotal findings in four areas: (1) growth of the RMA profession in specific countries and regions, (2) crucial contribution of professional associations to advancing RMA, (3) essential soft skills for RMAs and promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and (4) advancing RMA through increasing training and capacity-building initiatives.

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This chapter also alludes to potential policy implications and concludes with the Editors' hope that the book serves as a catalyst for further exploration of the RMA field and RMA professions.

Keywords: Profession; professional associations; soft skills; training and development; policy; gender; mental health legitimacy; Global North-South; diversity, equity, and inclusion; accreditation programmes

Reflection

The Emerald Handbook of Research Management and Administration Around the World was born out of an idea shared by the three editors to create a book that captures the state of the emerging profession of the RMAs globally. We first met at an international conference in early 2020 and continued our conversation online as the COVID-19 pandemic began. What started as a simple idea to combine our research into a paper quickly evolved into a more ambitious plan to involve authors from around the world. In retrospect, it may have seemed a little foolhardy, but we were determined to put our idea into action. The pandemic's global quarantine and subsequent remote platform innovation led to an increase in online meetings, which helped us to bridge geographical distance and encouraged us to reach out to a wider audience.

Our primary goal was to understand how research activities were managed and administered in various regions of the world, with a particular focus on identifying any cross-national differences and similarities in the evolution of the field. To achieve this, we collaborated with seven regional editors who would facilitate communication with the authors contributing to the country-specific chapters. The process was initiated with an online meeting in August of 2021, where the book's vision was conveyed to the regional editors. We also aimed to ensure a comprehensive perspective on research administration by extending invitations to both practitioners and researchers, allowing for insights from multiple viewpoints. Over the course of the following months, the potential authors were identified and requested to submit an abstract for peer review, followed by a fuller manuscript that went through several revisions.

During this time, the editors worked on securing publishers and potential sponsors, and upon receiving positive peer reviews of our proposal, Emerald Publishing came on board. Though the process sounds simple and linear, given the book's scope, the journey was anything but that. To capture snapshots of RMAs across the globe, authors were solicited from eight regions – Africa, Asia, Australasia, Middle East, East and Central Europe, West Europe, North and Central America, and South America. The various Research Administration as a Profession (RAAAP1) survey data made it possible to make comparisons across regions and generate local insights. The resultant studies presented in this book confirmed that the data availability varied greatly across regions and countries. A project of this scale required a sincere collaboration, tenacity, grit, and cross-cultural understanding among all of us. With existing theories and frameworks being predominantly produced from North American and Western European scholarship, one of our objectives was to reach regions where studies on RMAs were previously not reported, at least in the English language, and allow authors to provide their own stories in their own voices. This achievement was particularly vital to our mission.

There are a total of 77 chapters from 127 authors from over 40 countries, which is unprecedented in RMA scholarship. Given the diversity in RMA activities and the

availability of data and scholarship across regions, we anticipated a variation in each country's contribution. Some authors had to rely on anecdotal information, but such variation in methodology was considered a healthy reflection of the current state of the discipline. Another issue we encountered was the concept of objectivity, which may vary across regions. To address this, we adopted a policy where authors were encouraged to write in a style that felt most authentic and relevant to their analysis. While the editors provided guidelines, we allowed for flexibility in writing styles, including the use of a first-person point of view. Again, this was seen as a valuable reflection of the state of the profession in each country.

Throughout the book, it became evident that the increasingly global nature of research activities presents both challenges and opportunities for the professionals in this field – facilitating collaborations between institutions, navigating new funding mechanisms, and ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements that transcend national boundaries. The varying accounts presented in the book on the history, current status, and potential of RMAs around the world provide valuable insights into the emerging field.

Emerging Trends and Insights

In the following sections, we will summarise and discuss four key findings that we believe are particularly noteworthy, along with their potential policy implications.

Growth of RMA Profession in Specific Countries and Regions

As we traverse the pages of this book, a recurring theme emerges: RMAs (Research Managers and Administrators) are steadily gaining recognition on both national and international fronts, solidifying their status as vital components of the global research effort. In the preface of a reference book that covered research administration and management in the United States up to the early 2000s, Kulakowski and Chronister (2006) highlighted a noteworthy observation. They pointed out that many individuals step into the role of an RMA without even realising that they are embarking on a distinct profession. This serendipitous career path and the relatively inconspicuous presence of RMAs in higher education were recurrent findings in various studies by Western European researchers during the late 2000s and throughout the 2010s. However, the landscape is evolving. The chapters within this book provide compelling evidence that the role of RMA is gaining greater prominence as an emerging profession, and becoming increasingly visible in countries and regions such as North America, Western Europe, and some parts of Eastern Europe (Hungary, e.g., see Chapter 4.2, Zsár & Angyal, 2023), Australasia, and some parts of Africa (South Africa, e.g., see Chapter 5.4, Labuschagne, 2023) and Asia (Japan and Malaysia, e.g., see Chapters 5.12, Takahashi & Ito, 2023; and 5.13, Ibrahim & Wei, 2023). While these findings certainly present an encouraging trend, it's important to exercise caution and refrain from drawing excessively optimistic conclusions prematurely. Observations in this book from various other parts around the globe – including the South America, the Middle East, and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe as well as Africa – indicate that individuals involved in research administration often remain invisible and their roles are largely unrecognised. In fact, despite the growing demand for the RMA expertise, a well-defined and structured career path for those seeking to enter the field remains a work in progress in any country. This sentiment was captured in the open-ended responses

in the RAAAP-3 survey (Kerridge, Dutta, et al., 2022); while a significant number of participants reported a strong sense of affiliation with their respective institutions, they also expressed the feeling that their actual role within the institution is not entirely understood and that they felt more connected with their broader RMA communities.

We would like to emphasise that the lack of recognition and understanding of the role RMAs play in research poses significant policy implications, both at institutional and national levels. Without clear professional trajectories for them institutions may struggle to find the right candidates to manage complex research programmes. Furthermore, this invisibility of the RMA profession could lead to a loss of talent in the field, as individuals may not consider this as a viable career option. As research activities continue to globalise, institutions may face significant challenges in keeping up with the ever-changing governmental regulations and funding requirements. The long-term research competitiveness of institutions, and even entire nations, may hinge on their ability to attract and retain a highly skilled workforce with expertise in navigating these challenges. Therefore, it is crucial for policymakers to recognise the vital role that RMAs play in facilitating global research collaborations and to take proactive measures to continue raising awareness of the profession, thereby encouraging top talent to pursue careers in this field.

Crucial Contribution of Professional Associations to Advancing RMA

Another key finding of this book is the increasing prominence of professional associations in the development and advancement of the RMA profession. The chapters in Section 1 of Part 1 have emphasised the essential roles played by various associations in North American (Chapter 1.2, Monahan et al., 2022), Western European (Chapter 1.6, Groeninx van Zoelen, 2023), some parts in South American (Chapters 5.8, Juk & Baisch, 2023; and 5.9, Naffah & Calixo, 2023), and Australasian countries (Chapter 1.4, Hochman et al., 2023), while also highlighting the emerging trend of professionalisation in regions like Africa (Chapters 1.1, Kirkland, 2023; and 5.4, Labuschagne, 2023) and Asia (Chapters 1.3, Takahashi, 2023; 5.12, Takahashi & Ito, 2023; and 5.13, Ibrahim & Wei, 2023). There are also early indications of the emergence of such associations in some parts of the Central and Eastern European countries (Chapter 1.5, Zsár, 2023a) as well as in the Caribbean (Chapter 5.6, Ivey, 2023).

Professional associations provide social and cultural capital that can help individuals working in the field to feel a sense of affiliation and foster a supportive community. While there may be variations in the specific roles and activities, intra-national associations provide understanding and networking among RMAs within particular regions and help them address localised challenges, opportunities, and solutions (Chapter 4.4). Some regional associations, such as European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA) (Chapter 1.6), Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS) (Chapter 1.4, Hochman et al., 2023), and the Southern African Research and Innovation Management Associations (the RMA) (Chapter 1.1, Kirkland, 2023), as well as international organisations such as National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) and Society of Research Administrators International (SRAi) (Chapter 1.7, Kulakowski, 2023) offer a sense of belonging that transcends national boundaries, contributing to the elevation of the legitimacy and mobility of RMAs.

Importantly, professional associations serve as a critical platform for RMAs to share and disseminate knowledge on emerging topics including their own identity (Chapters 3.6, Zsár, 2023b; and 3.7, Yang-Yoshihara, Poli, et al., 2023). Many of these associations hold meetings and conferences, where members can address topics that

are pertinent to the individuals working in this field. Gender and diversity may be one of the emerging topics of importance. As various chapters in the book point out, there is a large concentration of female RMAs, particularly in regions where this profession is more established. Yet, there can be a skewed representation of women when it comes to leadership and opportunity. This point will be elaborated in the next section, but the professional associations help elevate the discussions and debates to ensure that the profession advances as an equitable and inclusive field. Another area that needs attention might be mental health. Chapter 4.5 (Shambrook, 2023) addresses the demanding nature of RMA work that can take a toll on individuals working in the field, and professional associations can play an important role in supporting the health and well-being of their members. Through programmes and research, these associations can help recognise and address areas for improvement, advocating for national and institutional policies, and initiatives that raise awareness of the important role that RMAs play in the research ecosystem. Furthermore, international associations offer a vital forum for addressing global challenges. At the INORMS 2023 congress in Durban, South Africa, one of the key topics of discussion was the disparities between the Global North and South. Scholars, policymakers, and practitioners discussed the possible consequences of imbalanced partnerships, which could lead to research dependency in the Global South (Nicholson, 2023).

Essential Soft Skills for RMAs and Promotion of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The book also highlights the importance of soft ‘transferable’ skills in RMA (see Chapters 2.3, Dutta et al., 2023; 2.8, Andersen & Romano, 2023; 3.1, Poli, Oliveira, et al., 2023; 3.7, Yang-Yoshihara, Poli, et al., 2023; 4.1, Dyason & Pillay, 2023; and 4.4, Romano et al., 2023). Expertise in communication, collaboration, and cross-cultural understanding are crucial for professionals who manage and administer research. Effective RMA requires a workforce equipped not only with hard technical expertise but also with the ability to convey complex information and to negotiate agreements between parties with different, and sometimes conflicting, interests. In today’s global research landscape, where international collaborations are often vital, it is essential to establish strong relationships and partnership with key stakeholders, including researchers, funders, and institutional leaders. Research management is a dynamic profession that requires tenacity, adaptability, and empathy. Despite discussion about Artificial Intelligence (AI) making some professions obsolete, it is important to recognise that soft skills essential for effective research management may not be easily substituted by AI technologies.

Soft skills are a critical force in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in research organizations and higher education institutions (HEIs), by fostering understanding, open communication, and collaboration among individuals from diverse backgrounds. Raising awareness about DEI helps to address the systemic inequities and underrepresentation persisted in research and scientific training, and gender is one area that can be particularly pertinent to the field of RMA. The profession is predominantly female in most parts of the world (see Chapter 5.44, Kerridge, Andersen, et al., 2023), especially in the United States and Western Europe, where RMA is more established as a profession (see Chapter 2.2, Oliveira, Fischer, et al., 2023). One can argue that gender discrimination in workplace, including Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) (see Chapters 2.6, Junqueira & Bezerra, 2023; and 3.7, Yang-Yoshihara, Poli, et al., 2023) could have contributed to the invisibility of the RMA workforce. While

78% of the RAAAP-3 survey respondents were female, we realised that they represented only 63% of the authors in this book. Prioritising DEI, efforts can enhance research management while fostering a culture of respect, collaboration, and belonging within organizations (see Chapter 4.8, Christensen & Smith, 2023). Interestingly, the RAAAP-3 survey results from Asia and Africa show a different RMA landscape, with more advanced degree holders and fewer females (see Chapter 2.2, Oliveira, Fischer, et al., 2023). This suggests a completely different RMA landscape emerging in regions where the profession is still relatively new. Tailored training and education programmes are vital to equip researchers, administrators, and policymakers with the knowledge and skills needed to promote DEI.

Advancing RMA through Increasing Training and Capacity-building Initiatives

With the growing globalisation of research, there is a pressing need to nurture and support individuals pursuing careers in research management. Establishing a clear and structured professional path for RMAs can accelerate the advancement of the field. This entails implementing capacity-building initiatives with a multidisciplinary approach, covering areas such as fundamentals of research, project management, regulations and compliance, communication skills, financial management, teamwork and leadership, data management, and professional development. Some educational programmes offer master's degrees in RMA, especially in North America. In addition, many professional associations such as the US-based NCURA and SRAi, the EARMA, the UK-based Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA), the International Professional Recognition Council (IPRC) associated with SARIMA, the Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association, and the ARMS in Australasia, offer accreditation or certificate programmes (see Chapters 1.2, Monahan et al., 2022; 1.4, Hochman et al., 2023; 1.6, Groeninx van Zoelen, 2023; 2.7, Ritchie et al., 2023; 2.8, Andersen & Romano, 2023; 4.4, Romano et al., 2023; 5.4, Labuschagne, 2023; 5.7, Shaklee, 2023; and 5.40, Kerridge, 2023b). Accreditation programmes may vary in their approaches and frameworks (see Chapters 2.7, Ritchie et al., 2023; and 4.4, Romano et al., 2023), however, they all provide professional development that can provide legitimacy to the field as a whole. Legitimacy elevates the mobility of RMAs, allowing them to move up the ranks within and across institutions and pursue new opportunities.

However, it is important to recognise that the benefits of professional associations and their accreditation programmes may not be evenly distributed across the globe. While accreditation programmes can help build a clearer path for RMAs and promote mobility of these professionals, they can also contribute to a widening gap between resource-rich and resource-poor institutions and nations. As discussed earlier, this book confirmed that in many countries in Eastern and Central Europe, and the Middle East, some parts of Asia and Africa, and Central and South America lack mature professional associations. The limited representation of these regions in this book perhaps reflects the state of development of the RMA profession in those areas. Institutions and countries with access to resources may be more likely to participate in accreditation programmes, harness global funding opportunities, and increase their visibility. Conversely, those without resources may lag behind, perpetuating global inequities in research resources situation could further expand inequity in research resources across the globe, and there is a need for increased efforts to reduce the potential for further widening of the gap between institutions and across countries.

Final Remarks

We hope that this book provides an insightful examination of the evolving RMA profession, drawing on the perspectives of researchers and practitioners from diverse regions and disciplines. Its primary aim is to increase the visibility and recognition of RMAs while raising social awareness about the crucial role they play in facilitating increasingly globalised research and cross-national collaborations. We encourage all those who are committed to the development of the profession to engage in education, practice, and research to help advance the field further.

As the profession of RMAs continues to grow and evolve, the book captures a snapshot of its current state. However, this is just the beginning, and ongoing dialogue and collaboration are necessary to continue to drive the field forward. It is our sincere hope that readers use this book as a platform to engage in discussions that can help shape the future of RMAs. By working together and sharing ideas, we can effectively address the challenges and capitalise on the opportunities presented by this emerging field.

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