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A stylized world map in shades of blue, overlaid with a network of white lines connecting glowing white circular nodes. The map shows the continents of North America, South America, Europe, and Africa. The network overlay consists of numerous white circular nodes of varying sizes, connected by thin white lines, creating a global web-like structure.

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# Research Administration Around the World

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## Research is international, so is Research Administration\*!

As we start the third decade in the third century of our calendar, I appear to be entering the “third age” of my life (I am hoping for a good few more to allow, perhaps, more time to reflect).

While, undoubtedly, research administration emerged over 60 years ago (Kaplan, 1959), probably first in the U.S., it has now developed in many other parts of the world—however, not always by that name. For example, in most of Europe the term “research management and administration” is more common, and “research advisor” is also used. Whereas in Africa, “research management” is prevalent.

It is perhaps more useful to look at the scope of what we do—what is research administration? We could look at the knowledge required for certification, such as by the U.S.-based Research Administrators Certification Council (RACC, 2020). Or, perhaps better is to look at the approach taken, for example, by the U.K. Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA, 2011) with their Professional Development Framework. Or, to look at the competencies required to undertake these tasks, a theme picked up in the last issue by Williamson et al. (2020) as they explored the Professional Competency Framework (PCF) established in Southern Africa. Some recent work from Portugal (Agostinho et al, 2020) has introduced the term “Professionals at the Interface of Science (PLoS)” to encompass broader areas of activity, and this has been built on by Santos et al (2021) to specifically include those who work in research funders and policy organizations.

It seems that, like so many things in life, Research Administrators are difficult to pigeonhole. Personally, I would vote for “Research Management and Administration” or “RMA” as the name of our profession. But, I suppose I am biased as I’m from the U.K. and RMA is part of the national association title. Although other parts of Europe have

taken a similar nomenclature, with the Danish, Dutch, European, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian associations being, respectively, DARMA, ARMA-NL, EARMA, Finn-ARMA, IceARMA, and NARMA. Further afield, in Brazil, BRAMA is the Brazilian Association of Research Managers and Administrators; and RMAN-J is the Research Manager and Administrator Network Japan. But, there are counter examples, and I suspect that internationally the debate will continue long after my third age has passed (and, yes, I am hoping for a fourth, at the very least).

Nevertheless, whatever our titles and perceived professional nomenclature, we are all as Stackhouse (2008) defines it, undertaking work that "... embraces anything that universities can do to maximise the impact of their research activity. It includes assistance in identifying new sources of funds, presenting research applications and advice on costing projects and negotiating contracts with external sponsors. It incorporates project management and financial control systems. It also involves help in exploiting research results—through commercialisation, knowledge exchange and dissemination to wider society", although, as noted above, we are not to be found only in universities! While there is a lot of variation in structure and scope across countries, often due to the size and nature of the institution, there do appear to be broader differences between regions of the world. For example, in North America, it is very much seen as a professional role, whereas in Africa, it is often a role taken on as part of academic duties. Similarly, the perceived breadth of the profession can be region-specific—in some parts of the world, research student administration is seen as in scope, in other areas it is not. You can read more about these differences and much more in the excellent, although I do say so myself, article by Kerridge & Scott (2018).

It can be argued that these differences in research support are due to the history and environment in which research has developed and is supported in different regions. Far from being a homogenous bunch, we adapt to the environment in which we find ourselves, and as Kaplan notes there is a certain ambiguity to the role. This can often mean that although we are all doing the same thing, we often speak different "languages" and have different drivers. In order to best support our researchers, we need to better understand how our research management and administration counterparts work—and what better way than to experience it? I have been fortunate to attend many international conferences and have taken the opportunity to visit various research institutions around the world, sometimes for extended visits (I wholeheartedly recommend it, you always learn something new). Failing that best option of immersing yourself in different cultural contexts for a few days or longer, the next best thing is to read about it. On that note, you might be interested in the forthcoming results of the largest ever survey of research management and

administration around the world, the INORMS RAAAP-2 Survey. You can keep up to date at <https://inorms.net/activities/raaap-taskforce/raaap-survey-2019/> or watch this space.

So, while much research being undertaken is clearly international—and becoming more so, research management and administration (or whatever you might wish to call it) is perhaps lagging behind a little. As professionals, we need to broaden our horizons in order to provide the best support possible. If our “clients” are working internationally, then so should we—or at the very least, we need an understanding of the additional issues involved in (supporting) international research. There are many things in your national context that you probably take for granted (if you will excuse the pun), but things may well be different for your overseas peers in their national context – the ensuing misunderstandings can cause real issues. If you do not have the opportunity to network internationally, then the very least you should do is keep abreast of developments by reading about them. So, I hope you enjoy this internationally-flavored issue of the Journal of Research Administration!

And, finally, on a related note, perhaps you have considered writing an article, but never quite got up the courage to do so. There is no time like the present; research management and administration is an under-researched field, why not contribute? Help is at hand, while the fifth cohort of the JRA's Author Fellowship Program has just started (see: <https://www.srainternational.org/resources/journal/author-fellowship>). The sixth will be open for applications towards the end of the year, so start preparing now. It is your opportunity to be paired with an experienced peer advisor to help you along the way to scoping, writing, and submitting an article—and best of all, the program is international, so you just might be paired up with someone from another part of the world.

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