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Research Administration as a Profession (RAAAP) - a snapshot of research administrators and their skills from around the world.

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Funded by the NCURA Research Program



INTRODUCTION

The Research Administration as a Profession (RAAAP) project, funded by the NCURA Research Program*, includes a worldwide survey of research administrators, which:

- Provides a global snapshot of the profession; and
- Examines the key skills necessary to hold a leadership position in research administration.

The aim of the project is **to provide Leaders with guidance on how best to support and develop their staff in their careers, and for junior staff to be able to map their own professional development.** For the purposes of this study, we define a research administrator as someone whose role is devoted to, or includes support for, some part of the research lifecycle. Research administrators mostly work in universities and research institutes, but many also work in hospitals, charities, private foundations and government.

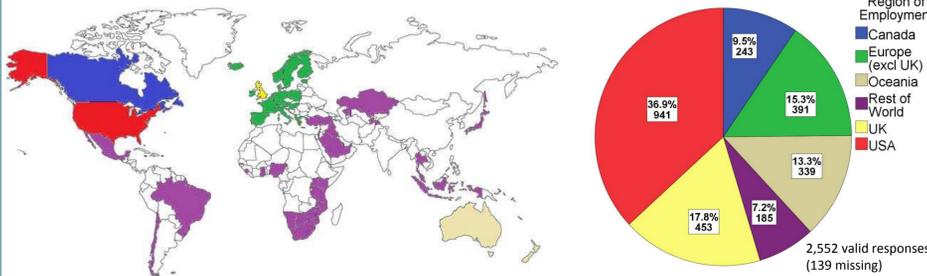


Figure 1: Where do the Research Administrators who took our survey work?

Hypothesis: Soft skills (such as communication and adaptability) are more important than hard skills (such as proposal development and costing) for those in leadership roles in research administration.

METHODS

The investigators developed a cross-sectional, **online questionnaire**, with the input and advice of an advisory group of six senior individuals** from several international professional associations, and surveyed research administrators around the world. The questionnaire comprised of three broad sections:

- What role do you currently have and why did you join and stay in the research administration profession?
- What skills (hard and soft) are important in your current role, and what level of expertise is needed?
- What formal training have you received, and what associations do you belong to?

The survey was released on May 20th 2016 and closed on September 7th 2016. Eleven professional associations*** distributed the survey to their membership. We received **2,691 responses** with over 200 data variables.

“Although the skill set was existing, developing the confidence to act and direct others comes with time and respect from Senior Leadership and the Board of Directors.”
– survey respondent

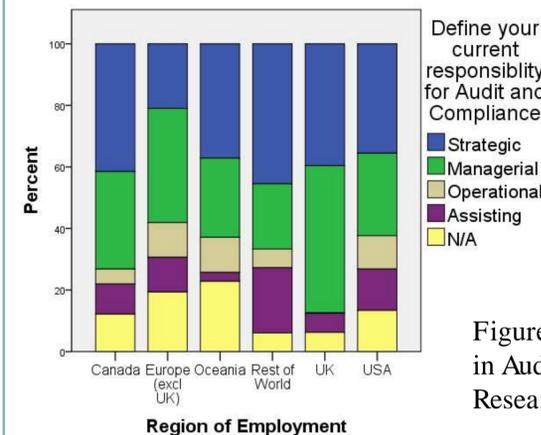
RESULTS

Basic demographics of the respondents were collected to provide a snapshot of the profession for each region. Figure 1 shows the number of responses received across the world from various areas; responses from areas with lower response rates such as Asia, Africa, and South America were combined in the region “Rest of World”. Given the high number of responses from the UK, this region was pulled out separately for analyses from the rest of Europe.

“RA is a neat niche profession and RAs are unsung heroes.” – survey respondent

“I didn’t realize that what I was doing was research administration initially”
– survey respondent

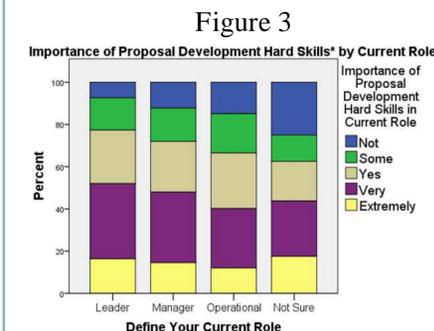
Respondents were asked to select their **level of responsibility** (Strategic, Managerial, Operational, Assisting or N/A) against ten different areas of **research support and administration**. Looking at self-reported **Leaders** who responded to the area of **Audit and Compliance** (n=450) by region, we can see there are differences (figure 2, below).



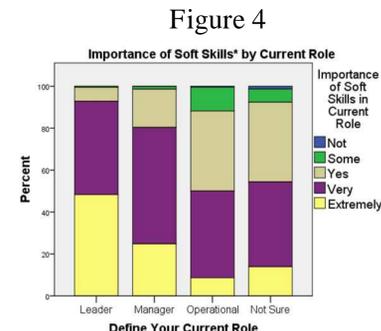
A lower proportion of **Leaders** in Europe (excl UK) have **Strategic** responsibilities in **Audit and Compliance** than in other regions around the world. Over 20% of **Leaders** in Oceania are not involved in this area of research support at all (reported N/A).

Figure 2: Level of responsibility in Audit and Compliance for Research Administration Leaders

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of various hard skills and soft skills needed to perform in their current role. A comparison of the average of three **Proposal Development** hard skills versus the average of all of the soft skills rated in the survey (figures 3 and 4) displays a **marked difference** in responses for Very and Extremely important (purple and yellow bars).



*The importance of three hard skills were averaged, includes identifying funding opportunities, proposal preparation, and budget development.



*The importance of all soft skills on the survey were averaged.

CONCLUSIONS

Leaders and **Managers** reported higher importance of soft skills as compared to the proposal development related hard skills, as depicted in figures 3 and 4. Whereas **Operational** roles reported a higher proportion of their hard skills as being more (extremely) important than their soft skills. Indeed, the **increasing importance of soft skills when progressing from Operational to Managerial to Leadership roles is marked.** This suggests that **those in Leadership positions in research administration place more importance on their soft skills**, such as communications, project management, and conflict resolution, **than hard skills** in the profession.



“I am a perfect fit, and damn good at the role.”
– survey respondent

FURTHER WORK

More analysis with the datasets can be conducted by those interested in exploring, for example: how long **Leaders** have been in the field, the professional associations they belong to, and the training they have received. This should assist those in more junior positions (and their mentors) to map their careers toward a leadership path.

The investigators and the project advisory group strongly **suggest** that a shortened version of the **survey** be conducted, perhaps **every two years**, to obtain further snapshots of the profession and provide longitudinal data.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*NCURA Research Program: <http://www.ncura.edu/MembershipVolunteering/Programs/NCURAResearchProgram.aspx>

**The Advisory Group is comprised of:

- Patrice Ajai-Ajabe, Programme Officer, ACU (UK)
- Jan Andersen, Senior Executive Advisor, TUD; past president EARMA (DK)
- Janice Besch, Managing Director, Alzheimer’s Australia NHMRC; President, ARMS (AU)
- Cindy Kiel, EAVC for Research at UCD; President, SRA-I, (US)
- Susi Poli, University of Bologna; EARMA Board Member (IT)
- Deborah Zornes Director, Research Services, RRU; President, CARA (CA)

***ARMA (UK), ARMS (Australasia), BRAMA (Brazil), CARA (Canada), EARMA (Europe), NCURA (USA), NORDP (USA), RMAN-J (Japan), SARIMA (Southern Africa), SRAI (USA), and WARIMA (Western Africa). EARMA extended the survey to other members of the Leiden Group (including the Austrian, Danish, Finnish, German, Icelandic, and Norwegian associations) of European associations of research administrators.

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