THE ROLES OF A RESEARCH ADMINISTRATOR AT A UNIVERSITY

Loreta Tauginienė

Mykolas Romeris University
Ateities str. 20, LT-08303 Vilnius, Lithuania

This article reveals research management as a complex, constantly changing process faced with numerous challenges. It also addresses the importance of a research administrator in the areas of research management and research administration, underscoring the research administrator's impact on the research culture in the institution. There is an ongoing debate on how to administer research in the context of institutional management of growing complexity, changing economic conditions and increasing political influence on research. The article emphasizes that the main roles of the research administrator are helping faculties carry out research and representation of university's interests. However, the conditions for the implementation of research vary, new challenges and opportunities continually arise, and thus the competences of the research administrator must change to reflect these transformations: he/she must take on the roles of manager, lawyer, financier, or quasi-researcher.

Keywords: research management, research administration, research culture, research administrator.

Raktažodžiai: mokslinių tyrimų vadyba, mokslinių tyrimų administravimas, mokslo kultūra, mokslo administratorius.

Introduction

The development of knowledge management, knowledge economy and knowledge society fosters innovation. The implementation of such innovations attracts more and more debate on study and research systems. It must be noted that a lot of

Loreta Tauginienė – Mykolo Romerio universiteto Strateginio valdymo ir politikos fakulteto Valdymo teorijos katedros doktorantė. Mykolas Romeris University, Faculty of Strategic Management and Policy, Department of Management Theory, Post-Graduate Student.
e. paštas / email: lotaugi@mruni.eu

American researchers (T. N. Atkinson, L. E. Miner, J. T. Miner and others) [1; 2; 25] have studied factors that influence research management, emphasizing the distinguishing features of research administration. There are a number of Lithuanian surveys on the institutional evaluation of the quality of studies. G. Viliūnas, L. Juškevičienė (Kraujutaitytė), K. Pukelis have examined research management systems in Lithuania and aspects of institutional evaluation [5, p. 104-112; 27, p. 26-37; 28, p. 15-16].

As Z. O. Atkočiūnienė notes, "a strategic aspect of knowledge management is knowledge economy" [3, p. 28] based on the fact that educational and research systems play an important role in this area. Meanwhile, J. Kvedaravičius and I. Dagytė formulate and specify concepts central to the field of research management, reveal the connection between research management and scientific sociology, provide an overview of research reorganization from the restitution of Lithuanian independence until the country's admission into the European Union. They also examine the applicability of socio-cultural and socio-economic management models in creating a conceptual model for management of transformations in research systems. As a scientific problem, the researchers emphasize the identification of subjects in professional research management, the search for solutions and their implementation [20, p. 93-116]. They point out that "knowledge economy operates efficiently only in the presence of a concerted system of educational, research and technologies development, innovations and business" [20, p. 93-116]. Furthermore, they discuss the modern concept of science and recognize, as does G. Dobrov [10], that nowadays, science reflects both bases of scientific thought, the logical and the social. J. Kvedaravičius and I. Dagytė affirm that complex meta-science is a study of science which establishes an understanding of the scientific system, distributing subjects internal to science studies into logical science studies and social science studies. These scholars identify the main principles of organized research: freedom and free will, openness, discipline, dynamism, independence, cultural continuity, competence, etc. [20, p. 93-116]. They recognize research management as a subject of science studies and an integral element of management theory and practice. They conclude that research management, based on the results of the sociology of science, should be able to create, adapt and apply different models for managing research systems.

All of the above theoretical reflections had gone unanswered for two years. In 2008, problems concerning organization and funding of research in Lithuania were addressed by Z. Lydeka, P. Zakarevičius and P. Žukauskas [23]. These scholars insisted that the research system in Lithuania was in need of reform. Today, Lithuanian universities are undergoing reform as well. It is not still clear, however, if this reform is favourable to Lithuanian researches. It is also important to note that there is no discussion regarding research administration in university managerial structures. Most attention is focused on solving financial and research implementation problems. Are we moving forward or backward, or are we standing still? Such are the questions for the nearest future.

Research management is a complex process, compounded with constant change and numerous challenges. Issues pertaining to this new concept are now coming un-

der exhaustive examination. The concept evokes various notions. Supposedly, research management encompasses a variety of factors and problems: principles of active cooperation between research and private sector to foster innovation; research policy; research culture; research careers; the potential "leak" of scientific potential into more developed countries, etc. [15; 7]. In modern scientific literature, the definition of research management and its constituent parts still remain unclear. Therefore, it is frequently assumed that interaction between research and the private sector is a fundamental factor in research management [22]. It is argued that research should adapt to economic and social changes, with an aim towards progress, publicity, recognition, etc. The role of the research administrator and the problem of research administration are practically unaddressed in Lithuanian scholarly literature: e.g. K. Kriščiūnas, J. K. Staniškis and V. Tričys assume that the main actors of research are individual researchers and research groups [19, p. 381-382].

It should also be mentioned that a problem of polysemy was encountered while preparing this article. There are multiple translations of the Lithuanian term into English: "scientific management" and "management of science" (mostly related to Taylorism, presenting a scientific view of the system of work organization and production management), or "management of research" and "research management" (which encompasses more than Taylorism). Therefore, it was quite difficult to find more studies in such fields such as research management and research administration.

Currently, research management has become a more expansive concept. Therefore the article aims to theoretically analyse the established concepts of the research administrator, demonstrating the interaction between research management and research administration, and examining the interaction between the research administrator and the research culture. The article also aims to determine the role of the research administrator in the areas of research management and research administration, demonstrate the relationship between the research administrator and the research culture, and survey changes in the concepts of the research administrator, in the context of economic and social changes in research management.

This article is divided into three sections. The first discusses the variety of concepts defining the research administrator and his/her roles at the university. The second section discusses the role of a research administrator in the area of research management, and the third section deals with the research administrator in the context of research culture and research administration.

The concept of research administrator

Many scholars, especially those cited in this article, predicate the existence of research management on functions performed by the research administrator.The role of the research administrator, even if the term of "research manager" is more common, is mainly seen as entailing the following functions: to render assistance to faculties in carrying out research, to represent university interests. As the changing conditions surrounding research present new challenges and opportunities, the compe-

tences of the research administrator must change accordingly: he/she must be able to simultaneously take on the roles of manager, lawyer, financier, and quasi-researcher. Already in the 1950s, N. Kaplan noticed that the most restricted definition of a research administrator was that of a business manager [18, p. 22-23], but later studies have demonstrated that the concept of a research administrator has widened.

M. Landen and M. McCallister point out three main qualities and skills that a research administrator should possess [21, p. 77]:

- Every research administrator generates and/or interprets information, and his/her ability to interpret and find meaning in textual or numeric data is fundamental;
- A research administrator isa communicator at many levels, i.e. communication between researchers and research administrators, among and between research administrators, etc.;
- Research administrators are problem solvers who reveal a high level of honesty, integrity, and ethics.

These scholars also mention the research administrator's traditional roles [21, p. 75]: understanding the nature of the principal investigator's (PI) research; assisting the PI with pending funding opportunity information; promoting positive relationships between the PI and research sponsors; helping the PI apply for a grant or contract, especially through assistance with budgets, forms, deadlines, approvals, and signatures; recording and reporting on related institutional information; ensuring that the PI's proposal complies with institutional policies and sponsor requirements; assisting the PI with the financial and managerial aspects of awards; ensuring the integrity of the institution's financial and nonfinancial processes related to the research function.

The above scholars provide no estimate of human resources needed to accomplish these traditional roles, while this is one of the most frequent problems confronted by universities. Certainly, the distinction of research administrators requires gradation by levels. Since the number of traditionally prescribed roles is a heavy burden for any one person, there has to be some sharing of responsibilities.

Considering the role of the research administrator in the context of managerial cycle, the principle of planning and forecasting includes future control and scenario formulation. In such cases, universities create work groups to formulate scenarios. Such work groups also include a representative of the administrative unit responsible for research. The principle of organization is implemented by devising or optimizing the university managerial structure, selecting human resources. Herein the role of the research administrator takes shape in relation to the chosen managerial structure at the university. Limits defining the activities of the research administrator are further established when implementing the principles of leadership and coordination, when activities and efforts for achieving common aims are negotiated. Certainly, oversight is a crucial part of research administration: research administration is not a unidirectional process and feedback is indispensable. The role of the research administrator varies across all steps of the managerial cycle, hence becoming multifaceted. There-

fore, this section of the article will mostly focus on how the research administrator is and has been perceived.

O. Hensley identifies four main categories of people with distinctive roles at a university: 1) students, 2) researchers, 3) research support personnel and 4) sponsors [17, p. 1]. He proposes thirteen functional classes of research support personnel and demonstrates research administrators to be an integral part of the university research culture, working with faculties directly as well as indirectly.

In 1942, R. K. Merton attempted to define science as a profession. He suggests certain "norms" that should guide the professional behaviour of scientists [24, p. 115-126]:

- Universalism, which prescribes peer review and scientific merit and denounces such factors as race, nationality, class, or personal traits;
- Communality: research findings must be published and findings distributed for the whole scientific community to scrutinize and, if found worthy, the originating scientist should receive the appropriate credit for that work;
- Disinterestedness, which prohibits a scientist from doing research to seek fame alone—science should be performed for the sake of disseminating new knowledge;
- Organized scepticism: results of experiments should never be accepted without empirically and logically based methods.

Today, a fifth "norm" of science is also recognized. Authorship thereof is attributed to T. N. Atkinson. He supplements R. K. Merton's "norms" of science with shared organizational leadership [1, p. 25]. By this "norm" he emphasizes that scientists cannot work effectively without the support of research administrators.

It should be noted that the concept of research administrator and issues pertaining to his/her role in research administration are not widely discussed in Lithuanian literature. K. Kriščiūnas, J. K. Staniškis and V. Tričys have sporadically published some thoughts on the concept of the research administrator. These scholars remark that certain experience and competence should be required of the research staff to effectively conduct research. They point out that research departments and other administrative units contribute to the development and implementation of scientific and research strategies [19, p. 381-382]. However, there is no further analysis of the roles and functions performed by the said administrative units, or of their importance in research management and research administration. These authors, in contrast to other scholars mentioned in this section of the article, assume that the sole actors of research are individual researchers and research groups.

The research administrator in the context of research management

Although research management as a branch of science has existed for over a century, it constantly faces various dilemmas in its development which prompt one to glance back at its history. Fundamental research management principles formulated in the past no longer satisfy the changing research environment of today. These

changes are effected by social, political and economic factors that influence the values and goals of higher education. Changes must therefore reflect the essential principles of research management (as related to research administration), as defined after World War II [16, p. 44-45]:

- The first principle was formulated by A. Eurich [12], who wrote that research administrators must serve as a kind of oil in a complex mechanism, especially when there is a clash of interests among faculty, university or sponsors. The core of their work consists of reducing friction and keeping the process moving.
- The second principle was articulated by K. L. Beasley [6, p. 1-4] who argued that research administrators should serve as "mediators-expeditors": to mediate between the interests of the researcher and the demands of an outside agency.
- The third principle's author is R. Woodrow [29, p. ix], according to whom the purpose of research administration is "management *for* research, not *of* research". What R. Woodrow meant by this, is that research administrators must make it possible for faculty to do research by managing the grants process for investigators, including all regulatory and fiscal matters. He emphasizes that research administrators should not be involved in determining the direction or the state of the research.
- J. Rodman and M. Dingerson offer a fourth principle [26, p. 6-9], that research administrators must have the trust of the faculty and represent the voice of the faculty when mediating between the interests of the sponsor and the university.

These four principles have been dominant until the 1980s. At this point, debate turned to questions of how to administrate research in the context of institutional management of growing complexity, changing economic conditions and an ever stronger political influence on research.

We should also briefly review issues of institutional management complexity. S. Hansen and K. Moreland suggest four institutional management models aimed at improving research administration [16, p. 48-49]:

- *The Stanford University model*, aimed at making research administrators more "responsive, timely, and accountable". This University declared that the mission of the research administrator consists of supporting outstanding sponsored research and education by providing service, expertise, innovative leadership, and by promoting a collaborative model of stewardship among all faculty and staff. This University adopted a "portfolio" approach that has the research administrator focus on individual researchers.
- *The Dana-Farber Cancer Institute* provides a second model: it abolished its old divisions, de-centralized grants management and re-defined administrative roles. Its goal was to create a "seamless" grants process for investigators by making the departmental research administrator the "facilitator" for the researcher and the central administrator—the "mediator" among the various interests.

- *Washington University* reorganized institutional management in such a way that research management be centralized under the "one stop shop" principle, i.e. a single office is charged with administrating the grants process, with each staff member having clearly defined responsibilities.
- *The Centre for Technology in Government at SUNY Albany* drafted a recommendation to manage the direction of research rather than the processes for facilitating research. An ideal research organization is one able to identify emerging issues, develop human capital, and take investment risks.

The above-mentioned institutional management models illustrate that research management and research administration must be dynamic and adaptive to the changing environment on the one hand, and remain cautious on the other hand, mindful of the four essential research management principles: facilitation of research activity, mediation, support of the faculty and administration of research [8, p. 18].

Furthermore, an analysis of the relationship between national research strategy and institutional research strategy is lacking, while the described models of institutional management are not effective, even if they emphasize the importance of the research administrator. Thus, the first step towards the creation of successful research administration should be the development and implementation of a strategic plan [11, p. 4-10].

According to A. Augustinaitis, "knowledge society and knowledge economy increasingly require not only improvement of information processes, but also effective ways of imbuing these processes with meaning, which, on the managerial level, increasingly implies the inclusion of such elements as irrationality and mysticism into models of modern activity and management" [4, p. 33]. Further, he examines the conditions and features of decision making in knowledge society.

Briefly summarizing the research administrator's role in research management, it should be pointed out that the research administrator and the faculty should view each other as a team working to achieve common goals.

The research administrator in the context of the research culture

An analysis of development factors in organizations by P. J. Di Maggio and W. Powell in "The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis" provides a definition of the origin and development of institutionalized research management, identifying a number of factors [9]. Meanwhile, T. A. Atkinson applies the above theories of New Institutionalism to the university [2]. However, this institutional perspective is quite general and may be applied to any kind of institution, not specifically to a research institution or university.

R. L. Geiger presents the market phenomenon as a factor, which affects the creation of specific organizational forms, especially university research administration [13; 2, p. 1-7]. According to Geiger, universities have created research administration and transformed it according to market conditions.

P. Germain, in contrast to R. L. Geiger, analyses the historical development of scientific disciplines, relating them to the formation of research culture. He emphasizes that research culture experienced a "crisis" in the 1970s because of contemporary economic and social transformations [14, p. 157-170].

In 2003, researchers L. E. Miner, J. T. Miner and J. Griffith conducted a survey on the current state of research administration in American universities and identified the best and worst practices. According to their study, there are four essential factors distinguishing the best research administration practices from the worst ones [25, p. 11]:

- culture;
- change;
- competence;
- and communication.

They also identify at least three specific organizational behaviours that describe a research culture: hiring practices, administrative financial commitment and enforced reward systems. In reference to hiring practice, the study focuses on how an institution recruits new researchers, two points being essential – the job description and the interview process.It was found that the job description is predominantly characterized by a requirement for scientific productivity, but interviews usually lacked a clear explanation of the opportunities for scientific productivity. Interviews usually reflected little concern for why a researcher failed in implementing a project, how a researcher arrived at a solution in a difficult situation, or why a researcher was not familiar with certain documents that may have proved indispensable in his/her work.

A few examples of best practices in Lithuania may be provided. Lithuanian legal acts establish specific criteria for some research positions at the university. All these criteria are based on scientific productivity during the last five years: scholarly articles referenced in international databases; monographs (at least 140 pages per author); textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education and Science; etc. These formal requirements are strict and must be observed by all Lithuanian universities.

Among the worst practices are unclear or non-existent policies, especially in defining teaching and research responsibilities, lack of written expectations for research activities in the job description, etc.

According to L. E. Miner, J. T. Miner and J. Griffith, it is recognized that administrative financial commitments are an adequate motivator for seeking grants. However, in the USA, practices such as the return of indirect costs or sabbatical leave, whereupon a researcher is not encouraged to continuously renew his knowledge, are seen as detrimental. These authors emphasize that the policy of indirect cost returns weakens the motivation of researchers to seek out research grants [25, p. 13-14].

Reward systems vary across universities that possess a strong research culture. A strong research culture is reflected in the recognition of non-financial rewards: some researchers want to be appreciated for their educational contributions in teaching and training; others feel satisfaction in being unique and irreplaceable in the faculty, or in achieving some specific reform or specialization programme in their department.

Conversely, worst research culture is seen in such conditions where training and teaching become a more important priority than research, or when publications are the prime determinant of career progression rather than acquisition of grants for research.

Research administrators devote a lot of time to encouraging submission of proposals, strengthening of institutional research culture and introducing personnel to active research fields, policies and procedures. All these activities reflect frequently resisted changes. Resistance is usually encountered because of personal interests, fear of the unknown, general distrust, fear of failure, or bureaucratic inertia.

L. E. Miner, J. T. Miner and J. Griffith distinguish five features which describe institutions as successfully able to implement changes [25, p. 16]:

1) Emphasis on planned change—emphasizing the necessity of change and proper planning thereof. In this instance there are two essential elements—financial imbalance and a desire to create a new mission and vision that would impact research and even scholarly activities. These elements determine changes in the management of institutional structure and various resources.

2) Social-psychological focus—the impact of change occurs on many levels: individual, interpersonal, departmental, interdepartmental, and university-wide. This includes faculties, chairs, deans, central administrators, students, post-docs, etc.

3) Attention to comprehensive change—the necessity of changes and their benefits must be constantly and coherently explained, relating them to the representative function of research in a competitive marketplace.

4) Long-range orientation—the institution must make a long-term commitment to implementing change.

5) Guidance by change agents—effective change agents may be external or internal to the university; this is linked to long-range planning strategies.

Among the worst practices are such as inadequate or ineffective communication of the necessity of changes to the research community, or the imposition of "top-down" change with little input or "buy-in" from the researcher community.

Competence, as one of the main factors of research administration, is always in need of improvement. The research administrators must provide information on grants, financial opportunities for research; distribute such information by various means; help researchers prepare proposals, budget drafts; resolve legal questions [25; 19].

Information flow within an institution is a complex phenomenon. Answers to the following questions might help better understand it: *Who* has the knowledge? *Where* is the knowledge? *What* is the knowledge?

A successful research administrator is one who knows **where** the newest information can be acquired, i.e. *who* is the knowledge holder. The location knowledge must correspond to its purpose, i.e. *where* knowledge should be effectively directed and dispersed [25, p. 18-19].

The primary organizational problem identified by L. E. Miner, J. T. Miner and J. Griffith is that there is a lack of communication among faculties, between faculties and research administrators, and among research administrators. Secondly, they emphasize that the majority of problems arise because of poor management of information flow, i.e. inefficient dissemination of information. For example, a dean or a chair may receive an email on new financial opportunities, but fail to forward it to units that would find it useful; the presented information is not attractive, fails to attract the interest its addressee, making it inadequate to simply cite a web link in the message or paste a paragraph of informative text.

As L. E. Miner, J. T. Miner and J. Griffith remark, research administrators are a guiding power that can influence research culture within an institution.

Conclusions

Based on the above analysis of literature, we may conclude that:

There is debate on how to administer research in the context of institutional management of growing complexity, changing economic conditions and increasing political influence on research. For the moment, the Lithuanian research management system cannot align itself to any theoretical research management model because guidelines governing its reform are as of yet undefined.

There is no strict definition of a research administrator, though it can be determined based on the research institution's mission and values. Surely, the concept of a research administrator is wider than that of a research manager as defined in the private sector.

The research administrator, according to the Lithuanian practice of research management and research administration, can be defined as a person, not necessarily a scientist, with some specific administrative skills and human qualities necessary in carrying out the university's mission in the field of research by acting as a mediator among various actors in research management.

The essential function of the research administrator consists mainly of rendering assistance to faculties in conducting research and representation of university interests. However, the conditions for the implementation of research vary, new challenges and opportunities continually arise, and thus the competences of the research administrator must change to reflect these transformations: he/she must take on the roles of manager, lawyer, financier, or quasi-researcher. The role of the research administrator varies across all steps of the managerial cycle, hence becoming multifaceted. The research administrator's explicit responsibility is to promote research at the university. Research administrators are an integral part of the university research culture, working with faculties directly as well as indirectly.

The above-mentioned institutional management models illustrate that research management and research administration must be dynamic and adaptive to the changing environment on the one hand, and remain cautious on the other hand, mind-

ful of the four essential research management principles: facilitation of research activity, mediation, support of the faculty and administration of research.

The flow of information within an institution is a complex phenomenon. One of the main institutional problems is a lack of communication among faculties, between faculties and research administrators, and among research administrators. Furthermore, the majority of problems arise because of poor management of information flow, i.e. inefficient dissemination of information.

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MOKSLO ADMINISTRATORIAUS VAIDMENYS UNIVERSITETE

Loreta Tauginienė

Santrauka

Straipsnyje mokslo vadyba parodoma kaip kompleksinis, nemažai iššūkių keliantis ir nuolat kintantis procesas bei atskleidžiamas mokslo administratoriaus vaidmuo mokslo vadybos bei mokslinių tyrimų administravimo procesuose. Akcentuojama, kad mokslo administratoriai daro didelę įtaką mokslo kultūrai institucijoje. Todėl nuolat kyla diskusijų, kaip administruoti mokslinius tyrimus vis sudėtingėjant instituciniam valdymui, keičiantis ekonomikos sąlygoms ir stiprėjant politinei įtakai mokslinių tyrimų srityje. Pabrėžiama, kad pagrindinėmis mokslo administratoriaus funkcijomis laikomas pagalbos fakultetams vykdant mokslinius tyrimus teikimas bei atstovavimas universiteto interesams, tačiau mokslinių tyrimų atlikimo sąlygos kinta, atsiranda vis naujų iššūkių ir galimybių, todėl ir mokslo administratoriaus kompetencijos turi kisti: jis turi sugebėti būti ir vadybininkas, ir teisininkas, ir finansininkas, ir kvazimokslininkas.