

Research Management Associations in small countries: challenges and opportunities

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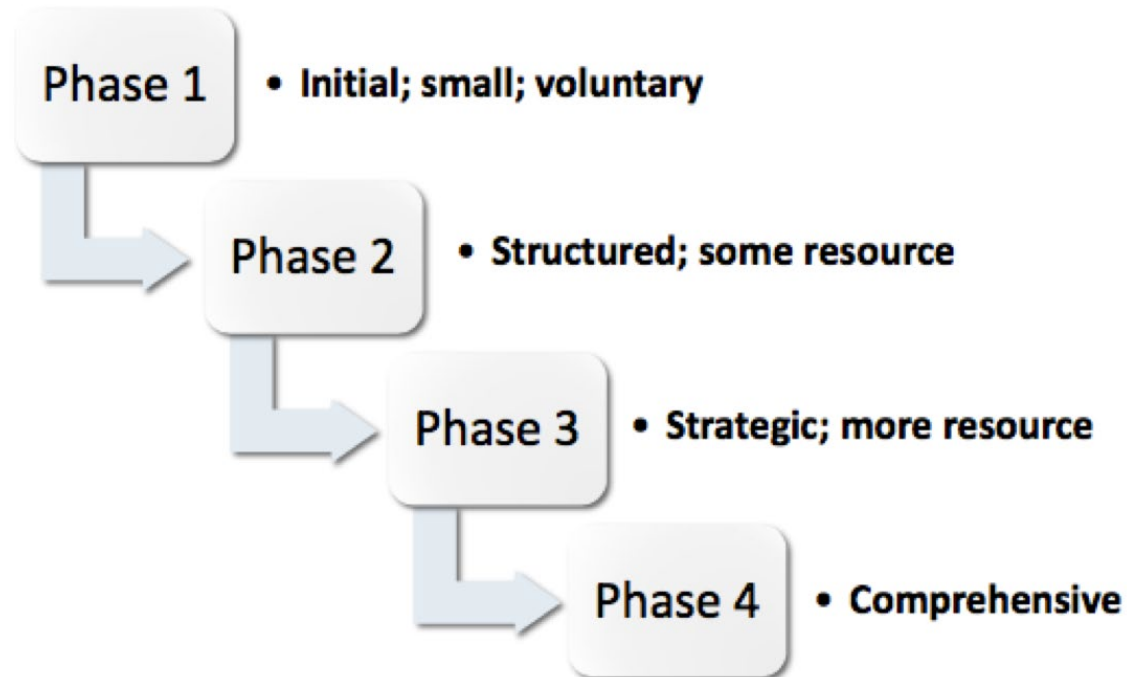
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Modified from presentations by the DARMA Board
at EARMA 2017 in Malta, and
INORMS 2018 in Edinburgh



Background 1

This presentation was hatched when the DARMA Board discussed INORMS webinar on RMA board effectiveness, particularly this “taxonomy” of associations:



The Board considered the question: how generally applicable is this taxonomy...?

Background 2

Research Management Associations (RMA's) in Europe have grown in numbers and sizes over the past decades.

The Nordic countries as examples:

Denmark – DARMA (2008)

Finland – FinnARMA (2012)

Iceland – IceARMA (2012)

Norway – NARMA (2013)

Sweden – SWARMA (2020-21)

Leiden Group of RMAs...

...is an informal group of European RMA chairs, meets at each EARMA Annual Conference. Learning points from the LG include:

- Substantial variation in size, organization, setup...
- RMA's can be controversial...



DARMA as an example

History:

- 2008 – founded, first GA
- 2009 – courses developed, annual Brussels study tour
- 2010 – Nordic NIH conference
- 2011 – US East Coast study tour
- 2012 – INORMS in Copenhagen
- 2014-15 – Fully legally and financially independent association
- 2016-now – Ladder of involvement, strategy, growth

DARMA member offerings:

- [Annual Meeting](#) and General Assembly
- [Professional development](#): training courses; study tours (Brussels every year, other international); travel grants; and more...
- [Networking](#): Special Interest Groups; thematic workshops; funder dialogue workshops; social media; and more...
- [Online/web](#): News and views; national & international events calendar; job ads; contact with other members; and more...

Ladder of member involvement:

- # Website and social media (LinkedIn)
- # Annual Meeting; Hot Topic Round Table discussions
- # Thematic workshops (by members, SIGs, or board)
- # Special Interest Groups (e.g., impact, indirect costs, US funding)
- # Ad hoc working groups (e.g., strategy development)
- # Board membership



Challenges for RMAs in small countries; DARMA's experience

- ▽ Member base: c. 375 members, limited potential for growth.
- ▽ Limited (but healthy) financial turnover constrains hiring staff.
- ▽ Dependence on member engagement: initial euphoria often fades quickly.
- ▽ Professional development offerings from larger associations (EARMA, ARMA, SRA, NCURA); competition or cooperation...?
- ▽ Small and voluntary board is sensitive to external pressure on board members: job shifts, stress, health problems, private life crises, etc.
- ▽ The board is – by necessity – operational, leaving less room for strategic development.



Observations 1: **BIG** vs. small

Big associations...

- ...larger, more formal distance between members and board/office.
- ...require more bureaucracy.
- ...can hire staff for operations.
- ...can have a board focusing more on strategy and strategic development.

Small associations...

- ...have less distance between members and board, "everybody knows everybody".
- ...can easier tailor activities to special needs.
- ...are more dependent on an operational board and sensitive to external disturbances.



Observations 2: informal network vs. Formal Association

Advantages

Network:

- ✓ Informal communications.
- ✓ No or small responsibilities.
- ✓ Low costs at network level.
- ✓ Not a threat... (?)

Association:

- ✓ Economy → security → long-term planning.
- ✓ Name recognition → collaborations and partnerships.
- ✓ Structure → larger range of possible activities.
- ✓ Clear position → influence where appropriate.
- ✓ Efficient communications.



Observations 2: informal network vs. Formal Association

Disadvantages

Network:

- ✓ Dependent on volunteers, who don't get (formal) recognition.
- ✓ Large workload for volunteers...
- ✓ No economy → long-term planning challenging.
- ✓ Limited range of possible activities.
- ✓ No name recognition → collaborations and partnerships difficult.
- ✓ No influence...

Association:

- ✓ Certain level of bureaucracy is required.
- ✓ Higher expectations, leading to...
- ✓ ...higher stakes; failure is always an option...



Conclusions

- ✓ Although informal networks are beneficial, forming an association creates new, other, and more possibilities.
- ✓ Name recognition provides outward visibility and credibility → opens new doors → influence where appropriate.
- ✓ Economy allows long-term planning, better structure.
- ✓ Cycle of recurring events provides stability in activities.

INORMS RMA "taxonomy"

- ✓ Does not necessarily apply to associations in small countries.
- ✓ "Taxonomic evolution" not necessarily linear: steps could be eliminated, taken in another order, etc.



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