

Everyone knows what a researcher, a doctor or a professor does – but almost no one can tell us what a research manager/research manager administrator does. The profession of a research manager administrator is very underrated in our society, which is why I am going to explore following question:

Can I Become A Good Research Project Manager?

foRMAtion project

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	Topic	Page
	Project Management	3
1	What is Project Management?	3
1.1	What does a Project Manager do?	3
1.2	What is a Research Project Manager?	4
2	Portfolio of myself / Critical Assessment	5
3	Interviews with Research Project Managers	6
4	Conclusion	7

Project Management

1. What is Project Management?

Project management is a fast-evolving field, with notable advancements in the last years. More companies and organizations recognize the importance of well-managed projects, which means that experienced project managers are in great demand.

Project management is the process of initiating, planning, managing, and delivering specific projects to meet their objectives on time and within budget. As part of the process, project managers will often use a variety of approaches and technologies which consist of soft and hard skills. Hard skills are abilities that can be taught and measured, such as writing, reading, math, and the ability to operate computer programs. Soft skills, on the other hand, are the characteristics that make you a successful employee, such as manners, communication and listening, as well as getting along with others.

1.1 What does a Project Manager do?

From conception to completion, a project manager is responsible for planning and overseeing initiatives within an organization. They manage people and processes to complete projects on schedule, on budget, and with the required outputs aligned with the goals.

Project managers also serve as a point of direct communication for senior management and the project team. They plan, monitor, and report on the project's progress to stakeholders using project management tools.

Identifying and mitigating risks that may affect project delivery is an important element of a project manager's job.

Responsibilities of a project manager:

- Defining project goals, scope, and roles and duties.
- Defining resource requirements and managing internal and external resource availability and allocation.
- Creating a budget based on criteria and tracking costs to complete the project on time.
- Creating a thorough project plan including major project milestones, workstreams, and activities.
- Managing the project's completion by following the plan.
- Keeping track of the project and sending regular status reports to the project team and key stakeholders.
- Managing and adapting to changes in the project scope, timeline, and/or money.
- Detecting and reducing potential dangers.
- Managing the client's and other stakeholders' relationships and communication to ensure the project is completed to their satisfaction.

Skills of a project manager:

- General understanding of business cases and risk management
- Strong leadership skills
- Self-management skills and team-management skills
- Capability to work and make decisions under pressure
- Ability to monitor and control budgets
- Great social and communication skills

Qualifications of a project manager:

- Any relevant project management related experience
- Project Management Professional (PMP) certification is preferred (relevant especially in the States)
- Bachelor's degree in business management

1.2 What is a Research Project Manager?

The research project managers are also called research administrators or research managers and administrators (RMA). An RMA has the same responsibilities as a 'normal' project manager. However, the research project manager's main task is to support a researcher. That means that research managers develop proposals, support the whole project lifetime, do translations (most of the researchers use scientific language which must be translated into a language that every normal person can understand), postgraduate researchers, monitor policy and governance, manage information, and overall service and organization, which turns out to be one of the most important tasks. Every task mentioned has three levels of responsibility: operational, management and leadership.

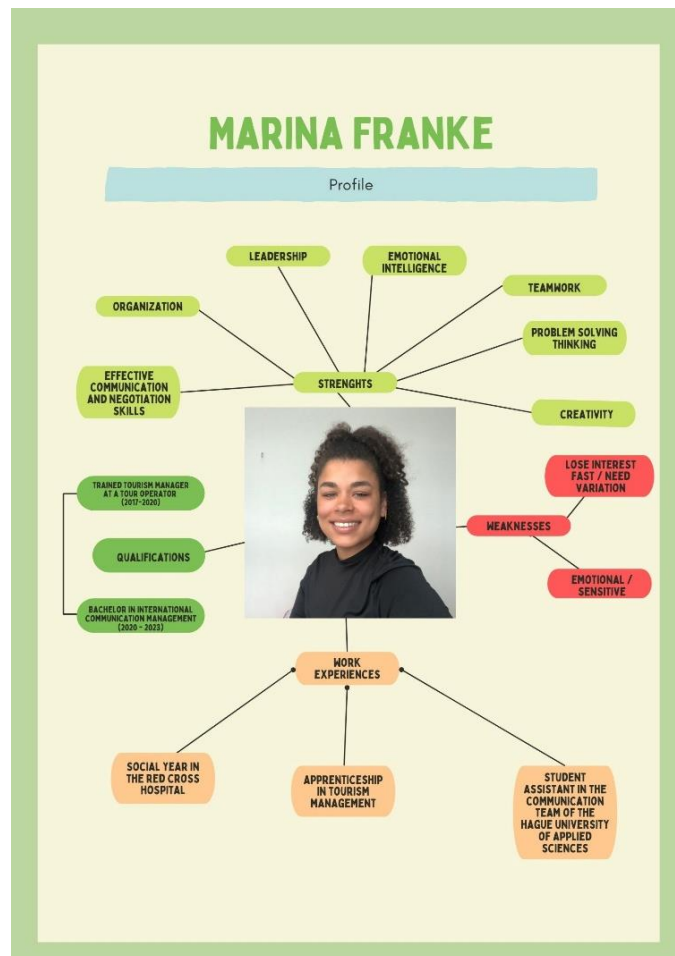
In the profession of a research manager, we can find many different professionals like funding advisors, lab managers, research policy advisors, ethics advisors, science communicators, research grant writers, IP managers and project managers. All of these professions are active in different kinds of moments of a research lifecycle.

The research lifecycle:



In the class on the RMA profession, we had the chance to talk to a research manager Carolina Varela and researcher Ana Ferreira about their profession. What was most striking during the conversation is that Carolina Varela stated that the most important skill for a research manager next to reading framing your work into different contexts and management, is keeping the team together and being emotionally balanced to support the researchers in their pressured workload. The researchers must read a lot and make use of data which can sometimes take years. That is why research managers have the task of being solid as a rock for the researchers.

2. Portfolio of myself / critical assessment

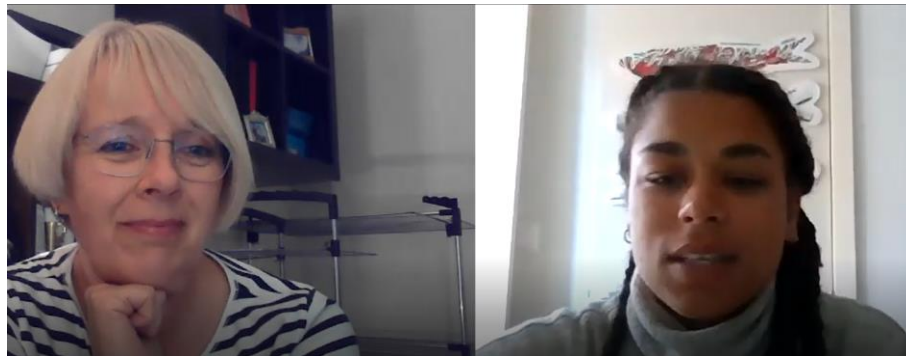


I am an extroverted person who, since my young years been very creative which makes it very easy for me to solve problems in general. Moreover, I am a super emotional person who has both sides, positive and negative, as I think that I am quite sensitive, so emotions can lead me very quickly but on the other hand, this sensitivity I have makes it is quite easy for me to understand/read people and behave appropriately in situations/show empathy. Through the apprenticeship to become a tourism manager, which finished in 2020, I gained a lot of knowledge and skills that are important for my future career as well as my being. Having worked three years in a large office mainly in customer service made me very organized, having good teamwork skills and overall effective communication and negotiation skills, which were strengthened as well due to the international communication management bachelor's programme. What I already know, is that in the future I need a job that has some variations. Every day the same tasks and routines are something that would not fulfil me. In my latest job as a student assistant for the marketing and communications team I used and strengthened many skills like planning and organization of events and fairs, planning and controlling the budget for those, as well as contacting and keeping a good relationship with partners and agents.

3. Interviews with Project Research Managers

To find out more insights into the RMA profession, I invited three research managers for an interview. The first interviewee was Ellen Schenck who is working voluntarily in a Dutch

association of research managers and administrators. Moreover, she has been a research manager for over 20 years. In the association, she is helping young professionals to become good research managers. Ellen states that the job is very undervalued and unappreciated. When she started there was not this classic job profile of a project or research manager. However, researchers nowadays have it very hard to get funding for their work. Ellen says, “getting funding has become an expert on its own – and that is why the research managers are needed!”. She worked to make this profession more salient in our society, which is the reason she is helping voluntarily. She loves to share her knowledge and expertise with young professionals. She also mentioned that EARMA is really growing and that they even have an annual conference in Oslo, where 11.000 research managers will participate. The RMA profession has still not a position family, which makes it hard to develop a clear career path to become a research manager. But still, the ARMA and EARMA association is creating a big community for all the research managers which can also help with supporting scientist expertise. Additionally, it is very interesting that a couple of years ago were no qualifications needed to become an RMA, nowadays we see in the vacancies that most people with experience are needed. She suggested finding an internship with a senior project manager to gain more knowledge about the lifecycle of a project and HORIZON Europe the biggest funding organization, and after doing an SRA Masterclass.



After that, I had two interviews with full-time research managers. Loredana Marmora is an Italian project manager from Italy currently working in a company that offers the services of consultancy and research project management. Zsuzsanna Angyal is a project coordinator for the formation and works also at Leiden University as a grant advisor in the pre-award phase. I asked both of them the following questions:

1. What do you do as a project manager? What does your daily work life look like (how and where do you work)?
2. Can you tell me more about your academic life cycle? What did you study and why?
3. Did you become right after your studies a project manager? If not, what did you do before your current job?
4. When and how did you realize that the profession as a project manager was the right fit for you? Why do you think this job is right for you? / Does the job fulfil you?
5. What are the needed qualifications and requirements for your job as a project manager? Which personal soft and hard skills do you need and use daily?

Zsuzsanna works on individual projects in EU research and in that profession she does mainly budget administration and IRC extending. She has a bachelor's and master's degree in International Relations. She came into the RMA profession through Erasmus+ in Hungary and then because of a collaboration she came into the foRMAtion project. Zsuzsanna likes research and education penchant, and that is also why she loves her profession. For an internship, she recommended ERMA and ask Christina about her contacts from Oslo. Zsuzsanna believes that soft skills and networking are the most important points to being a good RMA.

Loredana works as an RMA for the foRMAtion project. She builds up proposals and if the project gets funded, she supports the whole project from the implantation phase until the evaluation. She works for easy nova which is a research and consultancy company. She is working always on different projects from different fields like urban mobility and public health.

She does not have a daily life routine because there is always variation in her tasks, and she underlines that she needs to understand a little bit of everything. Before becoming an RMA, she studied international economy in Italy and through Erasmus, she noticed that she likes the international environment. Finally, she did her masters in Brussels in European Research Project which is similar to the RMA curriculum the foRMAtion project is creating. Lastly, Loredana also took the PMP (Project Management Profession) certificate from the States. She underlines the importance of soft skills. Of course, an RMA needs to understand cases and tools, but from her point of view, hard skills are skills you can always learn and understand. Since the guidelines change a lot, it is always needed to study. Soft skills on the other hand are more important because you must manage people from different cultures and backgrounds.



4. Conclusion

This intense research about the RMA profession was very interesting and helpful to find out what I want or do not want to become in the future. I thank the foRMAtion project for the opportunity to deal with this kind of important topic.

I can see myself in the future in the position of Research Manager Administrator. I think that what interests me the most about this job, is that I work with humans that are doing good for the overall society. I would say that I am looking more for a job that does good for humanity and the world in general, than just having a job that supports profit hence capitalism. The fact that the soft skills are the most important competence an RMA should bring and that the job has a lot of variety, made me believe that I am going to do my internship next year in February in that field.

The question “Can I become a good research project manager” I would like to answer as follows:

My strengths and my interest in doing good for our world and society are competencies and skills that an RMA needs. I still must learn to deal with my emotions and time management, however, this is achievable. I can become a good RMA.

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