foRMAtion

Lesson 3: Project management integration

Keywords

- Project management plan: the plan of all plans
- Kick-off meetings: setting the tone
- Internal and multi-sectorial meetings
- Communication management
- Communication styles
- Conversational basics
- RMAs as advisors
- RMA knowledge competences
- RMA attribute competences

Learning Objectives

⑤⑨⑪⑫

Scan for complete LOs

Go to the exercise
https://learningapps.org/watch?v=pub6xm8b222

Go to video
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLVttRWcD2g&t=3s

Project Integration Management

Planning, integration and execution are the most relevant responsibilities of RMAs. R&I projects normally have a short life span (e.g.: on average 3 years duration) and need controlled and specific resources for their development; hence, to successfully develop an R&I until its completion requires a **formal and thorough planning** (Kerzner, H. 2003; Westland, 2020).

As mentioned before, the ten project management knowledge areas occur in any of the sequential phases of an R&I project (project management process groups). One of the most important areas is **project integration management as it holds a project together**. Project integration management is based on management actions that allow the **coordination of multiple activities** of the project, making them work together in an organized way. Project management integration is present in all project process groups (project life cycle phases) and includes the actions below (Westland, 2020).

Preparation of the project's charter/application - Planning phase

The project charter justifies the **reasoning behind project initiation** and serves as a base for the **scope definition**. The charter outlines the reasons to develop the project but also tackles the following elements: objectives, deliverables, task list, resources, and financial and quality plans. After the establishment of the project charter, the **project boundaries** are defined and all the following processes (planning, executing and controlling) can successfully take place.

Preparation of the project's scope statement - Initiation and planning phase

The scope statement defines what is part of the project and what isn't. It lists all **actions and work** to be developed during the project lifecycle, setting the **project deliverables** and **defining criteria** that can measured the project's success.

Preparation of the project management plan - Planning phase

The project management plan is a **formal document** that will guide the project's execution and control and should be revised during the project lifecycle. The RMA is responsible for the development of this plan, which will **consolidate all project management plans** (scope management plan, cost management plan, quality management plan, process improvement plan, human resources plan, communication management plan, procurement management plan).

Management and control of the project work/activities - Execution phase

In the execution phase, the deliverables are already being developed and the RMA must manage **technical and organisational aspects** of the project, to ensure that the goals are achieved with success.

Monitoring of the project work/activities - Monitoring and control phase

Monitoring and controlling processes are crucial as they allow an **early detection of potentially negative impacts** on the project and a prompt implementation of changes, if required.

Project closing procedures - Project closing phase

At the end of each phase, **experiences and lessons learnt** by the team should be duly documented and registered, regardless of whether they were successful or not. This information coming together during the closing phase can be aggregated and serve as **support for future projects**. This practice is also relevant for the consolidation of the team and/or organisation and to increase the know-how in addressing certain challenges and applying **good practices** to future R&I projects.

As stated above, project integration management is a set of **inter-linked management processes** that are carried out throughout the project lifecycle. These management processes allow RMAs to successfully manage project development by integrating all management plans and involving all project stakeholders.

To set the right tone for this project integration phase it is a good idea to carry out a **general revision, involving all project participants**, of all processes implemented to date and an outline of future inputs expected from every partner.

Project management plan

The project management plan is a central document when it comes to the management process of a project. In some European Commission-sponsored projects it is **required as a project deliverable** to be presented by the 6th month of the project's implementation. Within the project management plan all project components are defined, coordinated and integrated into a **single plan**. The project management plan is a formal and essential document for the project team, since it establishes the **basis for all project activities** and how these will be developed, by defining how the project is to be executed, monitored, controlled and closed (PMI, 2017; EU, 2016).

The **project management plan integrates all other project management plans**, namely the ones listed below (PMI, 2017).

- **Scope management plan** - describing how the scope framework of the project will be defined, developed, monitored, controlled, and validated. This plan can include the following components: a) Process for preparing a project **scope statement**; b) Process enabling the **tasks' distribution** (e.g.: **Work Breakdown Structure**) from the detailed project scope statement; c) Process establishing how the **scope baseline** will be approved and maintained and e) Process specifying how formal **acceptance of the completed project deliverables** will be obtained.

- **Requirements management plan** - defining how the project requirements will be analysed, documented, and managed. This plan can include the following components:
    - a) How **requirements activities** will be planned, tracked, and reported;

- b) **Configuration management activities** such as: how changes will be initiated; how impacts will be analysed; how these will be traced, tracked, and reported, as well as the authorization levels required to approve these changes;
- c) **Requirements prioritization** process;
- d) **Metrics** that will be used and the rationale for using them, and
- e) **Traceability structure** reflecting the requirement attributes captured on the traceability matrix.

- **Schedule management plan** - outlining the **roadmap for project execution,** including the criteria and activities to develop, monitor, and control the project schedule.

- **Resources management plan** - detailing information regarding the rates (**personnel and other resources**), estimation of travel costs, and other foreseen costs that are necessary to estimate the overall project budget, guiding how project resources should be categorized, allocated, managed, and released. This plan can include the following components:
  - a) **Identification of resources** - Methods for identifying and quantifying human and physical resources needed;
  - b) **Acquiring resources** - Guidance on how to acquire the human and physical resources needed for the project;
  - c) **Roles and responsibilities** – The function assumed by or designated to a team member, including the rights to apply project resources, make decisions, sign approvals, accept deliverables;
  - d) Project **team resource management** - Guidance on how project team resources should be defined, staffed, managed, and eventually released;
  - e) **Training** - Training strategies for team members;
  - f) **Team development** - Methods for developing the project team, and
  - g) **Resource control** - Methods for ensuring adequate physical resources are available as needed and that the acquisition of physical resources is adapted to the project needs.

- **Costs management plan -** detailing how the **project costs** will be estimated, budgeted, managed, monitored, and controlled. It also stipulates **team members responsible** for the controlling tasks. This plan may also define an internal strategy for the **money transfer between partners** that differs from what is stipulated in the GA, but that is essential to be established in the CA.

- **Communication management plan** - focusing on how project communication will be planned, structured, implemented, and monitored to **ensure maximum effectiveness**. It may also detail specific **communication tools and technologies** that are required by the project.

- **Quality management plan** - identifying the quality requirements and/or standards for the project and its deliverables and documenting how the project will demonstrate **compliance with quality requirements and/or standards**.

- **Risk management plan** - defining how to conduct **risk management activities** for a project, and how these will be structured and performed. This plan can include the following components:

  - a) **Risk strategy** - Describes the general approach to how the project risks will be managed;
  - b) **Methodology** - Defines the specific approaches, tools, and data sources that will be used to perform project risk management
  - c) **Roles and responsibilities** - Defines the lead, support, and risk management team members for each type of activity described in the risk management plan and establishes their respective responsibilities and
  - d) **Timing** - Defines when and how often the Project Risk Management processes will be performed during the project, following the project schedule.

- **Procurement management plan** - defining activities to be undertaken during the procurement (purchasing) process. Normally, **each institution already has its procurement procedures** clearly defined and based on the applicable national law; therefore, it is common for this plan not to be detailed, or even included, in the project management plan.

- **Stakeholder management plan** - defining and documenting the **approaches and actions that will increase support and minimize the negative impacts** of stakeholders throughout the project development. This plan should also clearly identify key stakeholders, along with the level of power and influence they may have on the project.

Overall, the project management plan can perform as a **detailed resume of all actions to be undertaken during the project** management processes. Each **topic-specific management plan integrated into the master project management plan** should be detailed according to the project's specific needs. For instance, smaller projects might need less detailed plans, as opposed to larger projects, involving a significant number of entities, which might need extended and more comprehensive plans. Apart from the details and specificities of each project, the project management plan must be **robust but flexible** enough to address a project that may mutate and suffer alterations during its development (PMI, 2017; EU, 2016).

Kick-off meeting

Although several meetings will be held during a project's lifecycle, the kick-off meeting (KOM) is vital because it **sets the tone** for the entire project. The KOM's main purpose is to communicate the objectives of the project, establish the commitment and bonding of the team and explain roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder (PMI, 2017).

Normally, **the KOM gathers all project participants**, such as the project coordinator, the project manager and team members from both the coordinator's organisation and the partners' organisations. The participation of the partners' organisation managers should be encouraged since a **physical meeting** will make communication regarding the more administrative and financial aspects of the project easier (PMI, 2017; Usmani, 2020).

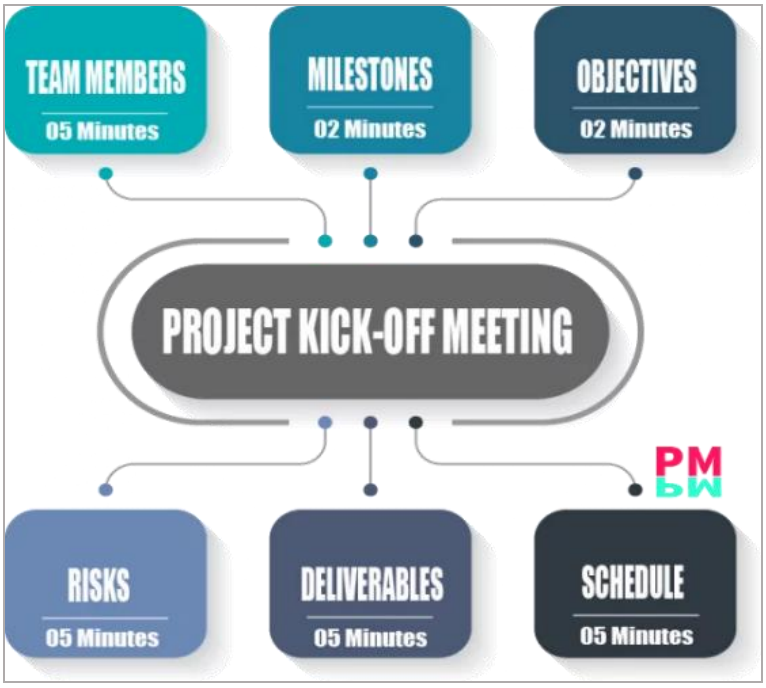

Figure 29 – Main points to consider in a project Kick-off-meeting
(Source: https://project.pm/kick-off-meeting/)

Good practices at Kick-Off meetings

The KOM represents a great opportunity to **brief all partners** (research and management team) on the **scientific and financial obligations** of the project and on the management of the communication between the coordinator and the partners. It is recommended to ask the project manager and the financial manager to **prepare a presentation** detailing the following topics:

- financial rules stated by the EC/Funding agency to define **eligible costs**;
- deliverables and/or financial reports **submission dates**;
- implementation of internal scientific and **financial reports** - why, how and when to submit them;
- **budget distribution** presentation - how and when the instalments will be paid to the partners;
- **contact points** at the coordinator organisation - who the partners should contact for scientific or financial queries or support.

Internal and multi-sectorial meetings to kick-off a project within an organisation

Apart from the Kick-off meeting, where all project partners and other relevant stakeholders gather, it is also recommended to set up an **internal meeting within the organisation** participating in a project. This represents a chance to bring together all **potential departments** bound to have some influence on the project, such as Human Resources and Acquisition and Procurement Departments. At this meeting, the RMA should moderate the communication between the mentioned departments and the needs of the research team members directly involved in the project. For example, at this meeting, the RMA should share the procedures and bureaucracy the Human Resources and the Acquisition and Procurement Departments will have to comply with to contract new staff members for the project or simply to acquire goods and services necessary for the project's development. This **sharing of information** at this stage is intended to **create an internal awareness among the project team** about the need to initiate a determined process of recruiting or acquisition in due time, avoiding delays in the project execution.

Communication Management

Managing an R&I project combines overseeing the **work and activities** to be developed, and a collaboration with the different **actors** involved (who may have different roles, levels of commitment and may participate at different stages of the project's implementation). Working closely with the research team, the RMA must provide advice and support to the **Principal Investigator (PI)** and his/her team in managing the planned research activities. In addition, the RMA must also connect with different actors, such as the **funding agency** (and its contact points), the **consortium partners** (in case of collaborative projects, different management teams must liaise effectively), as well as all the **institutional structures** involved in management tasks (such as HR, Procurement, Financial offices, etc.). Mastering communication skills is vital to perform such tasks.

Interpersonal communication

Communication is recognized as a key competence in every situation and is especially relevant when managing teams. Two aspects are particularly significant in developing effective communication: **knowing your audience** and **choosing your approach**.

On top of understanding the ***Dos and Don'ts* of a winning communication** with each individual (sensible matters or preferred approaches to topics), the key skill is to learn how to **adapt your communication** style for any scenario that may come your way. A self-assessment of one's communication style and an analysis of other communication styles and techniques available may be useful to develop a powerful approach.

Communication styles

A scan of the literature on the topic yields several **models that acknowledge and categorize different communication techniques and styles**, such as the DiSC® Model which is based on the work of psychologist William Moulton Marston in the 1920s. This model classifies people's behaviour into four types (**Dominance**, **Influence**, **Steadiness** and **Conscientiousness**) by looking at their preferences on two scales:

- **Task** versus **People**
- **Fast-Paced** versus **Moderate-Paced**.

Connecting the behaviours and preferences identified by the DiSC model yields the representation in Figure 30.

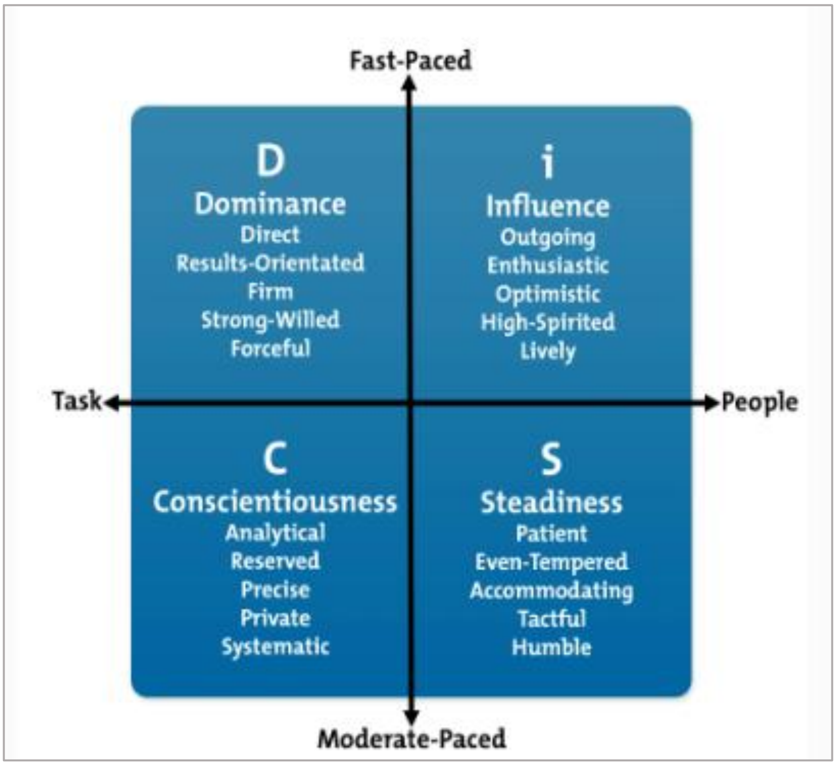

Figure 301 – The DiSC Model for communication styles
(Source: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCDV_92.htm, reproduced with the permission of http://www.everythingdisc.co.uk.)

Dominant style approach:

- Don't ramble on or waste time.
- Stay on task.
- Be clear, specific and to the point.
- Don't try to build personal relationships or chitchat.
- Come prepared with all objectives and requirements in a well-organized manner.
- Present facts logically; plan your presentation efficiently.
- Provide alternatives and choices so people can make their own decisions.
- If you disagree, focus on the facts.

Influencer style approach:

- Talk and ask about their ideas and goals.
- Plan interaction supporting their goals and ideas.
- Allow time for relaxing and socializing.
- Don't drive to facts, figures and alternatives.
- Help them get organized and put details in writing.
- Don't leave decisions in the air.

- Provide ideas for implementing action.
- Provide testimonials from people they see as important or prominent.
- Offer incentives for their willingness to take risks.

Steady style approach:

- Don’t rush headlong into business or the agenda.
- Be interested in them as people.
- Draw out their personal goals and objections.
- Don’t force them to make a quick response.
- Present your case logically, non-threateningly and in writing.
- Break the ice with some personal comments.
- Ask specific questions. (How?)
- Don’t interrupt as they speak. Listen carefully.
- Look for hurt feelings if the situation impacts them personally.

Conscientious style approach:

- Approach them in a straightforward, direct way.
- Recognize they may be uncomfortable speaking to large groups.
- Ask them if they see the issue the same way as you do.
- Provide them with information and the time they need to decide.
- Don’t be informal, casual, or personal.
- Build credibility by looking at each side of the issue.
- Don’t force a quick decision.
- Be clear about expectations and deadlines.
- If you disagree, prove it with data and facts or testimonials from reliable sources.

Conversational basics

In all cases and for all communication styles, several principles can empower fruitful communication. One possible approach can be summarised as the LSD method - Listening, Summarizing and Disquisition:

- **Listening**: pay attention to nonverbal signs; perform active listening.
- **Summarizing**: repeat, in your own words, the most important message, leaving room for corrections and/or stimulating the audience to add more.
- **Disquisition**: ask questions to get a better understanding; they can be closed questions, open questions and/or follow-up questions.

Figure 31 - The LSD method
(short video available at https://www.goodhabitz.com/en-gb/online-courses/categories/communication-and-languages/conversation-technique/)

The University of Technology of Eindhoven developed a Hand-out Interview Technique that summarises these different **conversation stages** and provides concrete examples for each of the 3 steps (Listening, Summarising and Disquisition).

Communication effectiveness is not only about choosing your words carefully. **Body language** is also a relevant factor, as your body can either help you get your message across or send the wrong message entirely.
In this regard, a list of **tips and good practices** were shared in the BESTPRAC Training school *Leaders for the future: knowledgeable and successful leaders in Research Administration*, such as:

- If you have an important request, don't send an email. It's best to ask **face-to-face**.
- Your passion and emotions are more contagious in person. Persuading over the phone presents similar hurdles; you may not have their full attention and you won't have the
- opportunity to see the **facial expressions or gestures** of the person on the other side.
- So, if you're asking something of someone, ask to **meet in person**. Go to them.
- Your **posture** will send an instant message to your listener.
- Stand up tall! It does make a difference in perceptions of **confidence**. Before you even open your mouth, you've made the first impression.
- **Eye contact** is an important tool to increase the perception of trustworthiness.

- Use **hand gestures** to support and emphasize your main messages and have a natural smile, which makes you more likeable and believable. When you are confident, your audience is more relaxed, open, and ready to listen.
- **Be consistent with body language and words**. If your body language and words conflict, the listener must decide which to believe.
- The listener almost always relies on **nonverbal cues** to make his/her decision.

RMAs' role in advising and influencing

Advising is an important RMA role that requires a diverse set of skills to deal with expectations, boundaries, pitfalls, emotions and confidence. Advising can be done without consciousness but, for an efficient and fair team management, it should **be considered a skill to train and develop**.

To this end, in 2017 NACARA, an association of professional advisors, counsellors, faculty, administrators, and students working to enhance the educational development of scholars developed its Academic Advising Core Competencies Model to identify the broad range of understanding, knowledge and skills that support **academic advising**. The aspects identified by the model are all transferable to the RMA context and can be useful in clarifying the RMAs' advising roles and responsibilities and in highlight the contributions given by advising activities in an R&I setting. This framework looks at advising in **three content components**:

- **Conceptual component** - provides the **context** for the delivery of academic advising. It covers the ideas and theories that advisors must understand to effectively advise their students.
- **Informational component** - provides the **substance** of academic advising. It covers the knowledge advisors must gain to be able to guide the students.
- **Relational component** - provides the **skills** that enable academic advisors to convey the concepts and information from the other two components to their audience.

A brief summary of the three components above is available at NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies Guide (PG23) (Abridgement).

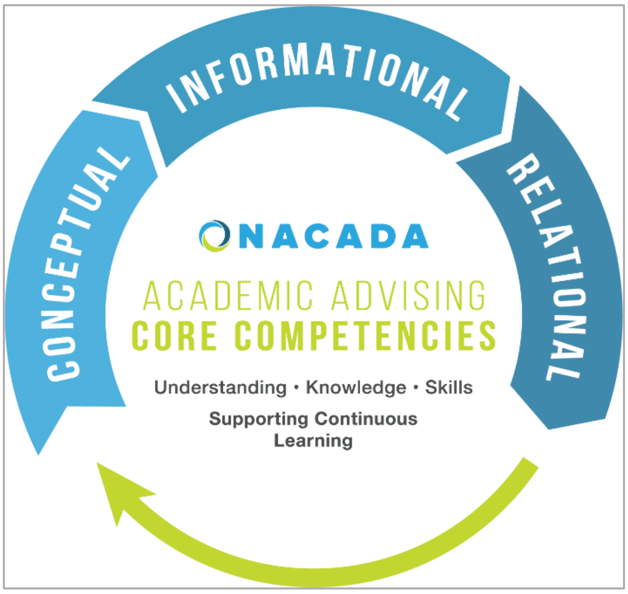

Figure 32 - NACADA Academic Advising Core Competencies Model (source: https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Pillars/CoreCompetencies.aspx)

Transferring this model to the specific roles of RMAs, allows to highlight the following aspects:

Knowledge competencies

1. Advisors (or RMAs) must be **familiar** with the history, values, vision, mission, goals, and culture of the institution in which they work.
2. Advisors must possess intimate knowledge regarding their **institution's internal specific policies**, procedures, rules, and regulations and know whom on site to contact when clarification is needed.
3. **Credibility** is critical for an advisor role, as the advisor must never provide an un-researched answer and must know where to find the vetted source.
4. The confidential and trust-based nature of the advising relationship requires advisors to acknowledge the **legal guidelines of advising practice**, including privacy regulations and confidentiality.
5. Advisors must understand the characteristics, needs, and experiences of the **R&I community.**
6. Collaboration with other institutional departments, getting **deep knowledge about the R&I facilities and resources** available for R&I activities is key.

Attitude competences

1. Articulate a **personal philosophy of advising**, since advisors bring with them values, beliefs, and assumptions that can have a major influence on their performance.

2. Develop **interpersonal interactions** that promote understanding, learning, and trust through active listening, clear verbal interchange, and body language that is consistent with the speaker's words.
3. Communicate in an **inclusive and respectful** manner.
4. Facilitate **problem-solving**, **decision-making**, **meaning-making,** planning, and **goal setting**.
5. Engage in **ongoing assessment** and **self-development** of the advising practice.

Regarding the attitude competencies, the BESTPRAC Training school *Leaders for the future: knowledgeable and successful leaders in Research Administration* identified the **following skills as pertinent for RMA advising**:

- **Communication skills**: explaining, arguing, presenting, influencing, and being able to give feedback.
- **Listening skills**: listening to what others say, what others mean and also what others do not say but still mean; keep asking questions.
- **Conflict resolving skills**: understanding resistance and reluctance in yourself and in others. Insights in conflict styles: compromising, problem-solving, avoidance, forcing.
- **Relationship skills**: Building a relationship, understanding others, respect, positive approach, interest, collaboration, and understanding responsibilities.
- **Personal skills and insight**: Resilience, relativizing, self-reflection, letting go, insight into qualities, pitfalls and irritations.
- **Empathic skills**: Placing yourself in other's shoes, understanding stakes and needs.
- **Analytic skills**: Being able to analyse the problem, distinguish between cause and effect, see connections, and propose solutions.

Advising and influencing go hand in hand, especially in those areas related to project implementation for which the RMA is not directly responsible but still needs to push decisions in a certain direction. As such, influencing is also a crucial and instrumental role.

To settle an **advisory/influencing plan**, the RMA must:

- Have a **clear opinion** about where to go and how to get there (it can involve making a point, promoting a solution or placing a boundary).
- Be honest and based on expertise, using **evidence-based rational arguments** (such as facts, information and numbers)
- **Build a collaboration**: understand what others think/want/feel (because it is also about building a commitment and an agreement)
- Know his/her boundaries: identify the correct **timing and the willingness** of the target audience and put the **adequate communication strategy** in place.

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