



Danish Association of Research
Managers and Administrators



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Research Management Associations in small countries: challenges and opportunities

Presented by the Board of DARMA:

Olaf Svenningsen, Karam Sidaros, Lone Varn Johannsen,
Marianne Gauffriau, Karen Slej, Jakob Feldtfos Christensen, and Stine Bjorholm

Please note: the full presentation is only – but permanently – available online at:

<https://goo.gl/JOxS1N>

Background

- Research Management Associations (RMA's) have grown in numbers and sizes over the past decades
- The Nordic countries as an example:
 - Denmark – DARMA (2008)
 - Finland – FinnARMA (2012)
 - Iceland – IceARMA (2012)
 - Norway – NARMA (2013)
 - Sweden – informal network, EU/FoU-nätverket

Leiden Group of RMA

Informal group of European RMA chairs, meets at each EARMA Annual Conference. Learning points include:

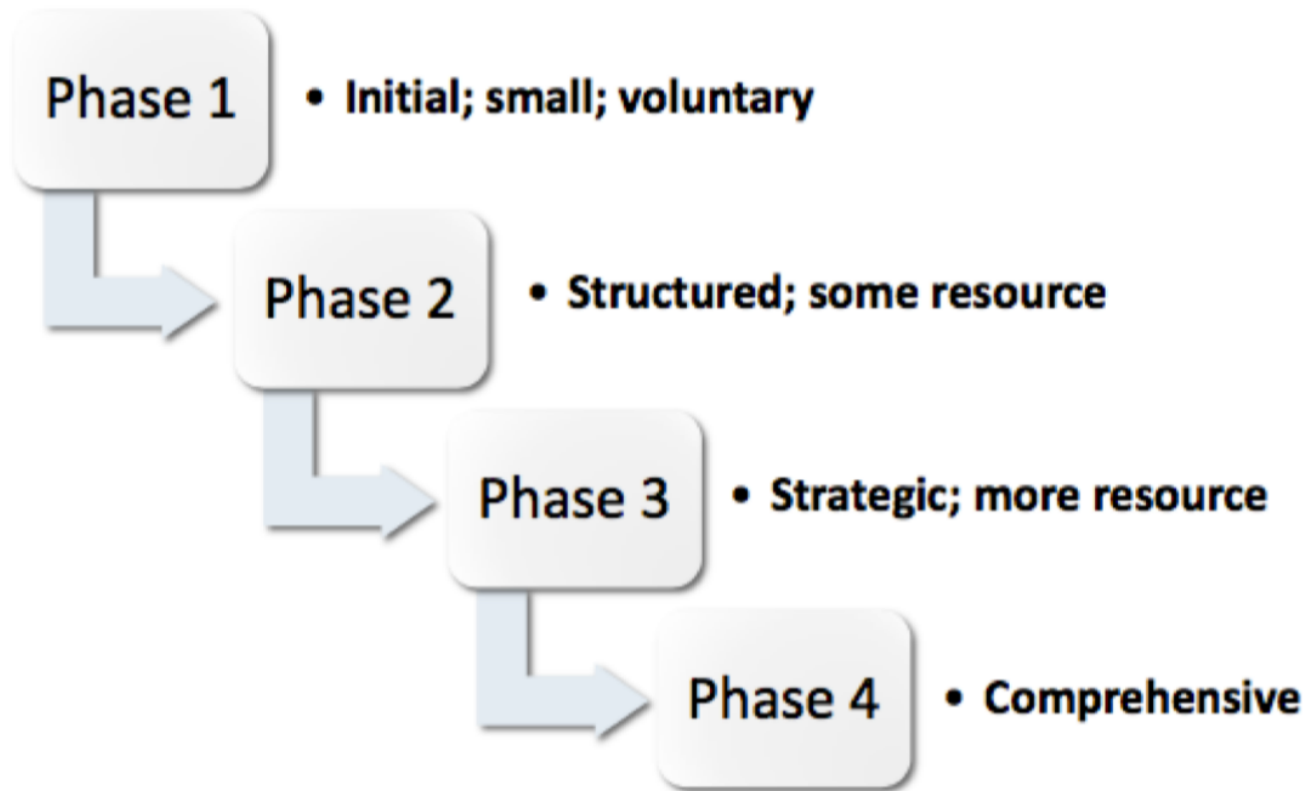
- Substantial variation in size, organization, setup.
- RMA's can be controversial...

INORMS – International Network of Research Management Societies

- INORMS was formed in 2001 to bring together research management societies and associations from across the globe.
- The objectives of INORMS are:
 - to internationalise the body of knowledge on research management
 - to exchange best practice
 - to develop international approaches to supporting the research enterprise
- Currently 17 member associations, counting at least 20,000 members worldwide.

INORMS webinar on RMA board effectiveness

A "taxonomy" of associations:



How generally applicable is this taxonomy?

DARMA as an example

DARMA's development:

2008 - founded, first GA
2009 - courses developed, 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, Special Interest Groups and Westensee Workshops launched



Delegates at DARMA's Annual Conference 2016 in Nyborg



Ladder of member involvement

- Online web forums @ DARMA.dk
- Hot Topic Round Table discussions at annual meetings
- Westensee workshops (members organize, DARMA pays, shared logistics)
- Special Interest Groups
- Ad hoc working groups
- Board membership



What DARMA offers:

- Annual Meeting and General Assembly
- Study tours (Brussels, Copenhagen, Eastern US, UK, Munich, and more)
- Courses (two: introduction to RMA, strategy)
- Westensee Workshops
- Special Interest Groups
- Funder workshops
- Travel stipends
- Website:
 - News and views
 - Events lists
 - Job ads
 - Contact w. other members



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Challenges for RMA's in small countries

(DARMA's experience)

- Member base: c. 300, 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 association (EARMA, ARMA, SRA, NCURA).
- 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

Small vs. BIG

- 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.
- Big associations...
 - ...require more bureaucracy.
 - ...can hire staff.
 - ...can have a board focusing more on strategy and strategic development.

Informal network vs. association

Advantages

Network:

- Low admin workload.
- Informal communications.
- No or small responsibilities.

Association:

- Name recognition; formal collaborations.
- Economy - security.
- Long-term planning.
- Larger range of possible activities.
- Efficient communications.

Disadvantages

Network:

- No formal structure.
- No economy.
- No name recognition.
- Collaborations difficult (who represents?).

Association:

- Certain level of bureaucracy is required.
- Expectations...
- Higher stakes; failure is always an option...

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Conclusions

- Although informal networks are beneficial, forming an association creates new possibilities.
- Name recognition provides outward visibility and credibility – opens new doors.
- Economy allows long-term planning.
- Cycle of recurring events ("årshjul") 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.

Questions for discussion

- Do you agree with us...? How have these issues been addressed in your country?
- Do you recognize "quickly fading initial euphoria"? How can it be dealt with?
- Could and should criteria be defined for how and when an informal network is ready to become an association?
- How can associations in small countries collaborate with each other and the "big elephants" to best serve the RMA community?



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