What are the factors that shape university research management within small contexts?

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17/04/2018
General objectives:

**EXPLORATORY:** instigate a discussion

**COMPARATIVE:** compare structures, challenges and strategies

Specific objective:

to identify factors that shape research management within three universities
Conceptual Framework

3 Pillars:
(a) Context
(b) Relationships
(c) Structures
Overall Question:
*What are the factors that shape research management in national, universities in three European small island states?*

3 Research Questions:

RQ1: *How is the research management function organised?*

RQ2: *What are the key challenges in managing research?*

RQ3: *What strategies do these universities have in place to address the research management challenges?*
# Factors shaping university research management

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1. Factors relating to the external context

Embeddedness of research in the people’s mindset

• Historical development and tradition

• Geographical location

• Attitudes and perceptions
1. Factors relating to the external context

Status of the university

• Call for transparency and public scrutiny

• Balance between university missions

• Cosiness, comfort, personal grudges
Research funding

- a major limiting factor

- Benefits: access to wider networks; reputation; essential source of funding

- Risks: strings attached; competitive; not guaranteed; bureaucratic; externally-driven
2. Factors relating to the internal context

University strategies and performance evaluation

• Formality

• Selectivity

• Proactiveness/Reactiveness
2. Factors relating to the internal context

Research Support Structures (RSS)

- Can shape and be shaped by research mgt
- Direct implications: e.g. rational/relational
- Indirect implications: e.g. availability of resources specific events; understand the need for RSS
3. Research management and RMA-related factors

Nature of the job and recognition

- Need for experience

- Extent of investment in training

- Recognition and perception
Trust building

• RMAs & researchers speaking the same language

• Origination (academic end vs. admin end)

• Servant leadership
4. Resilience factors

University resilience

- Policies and procedures
- Brain circulation
- Collaboration + benchmarking with strong partners
4. Resilience factors

RMA resilience

• Extent of ‘fit’ with the organisation + group

• Self-regulation

• Institutional intervention
Implications for universities

- Context moulds national universities uniquely
- Structures develop according to the path of each university
- The role of RSS in building trust between RMAs & researchers
- Universities’ role in the development of RMAs
Implications for RMAs

- Contextual adaptation – a specific profile
- Creativity to do more with less
- RMAs can be present all along a researcher’s career
- RMAs engaging in Research Management Profession
Implications for the Profession

• Tailoring academic preparation for contextual realities

• Profession reaching out to RMAs

• Transferability of knowledge is not automatic to small contexts
The Research Management Profession in small island states/jurisdictions

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Contextual shaping of university RMAs

The university RMA in a small island state:
- Multi-functional administrator
- Breadth specialisation
- Need for creative thinking to address the peculiar context
- Support through most milestones of a researcher’s university career
- Mediating, reducing friction, conflict resolution
- Continuous professional development and training
- Focus on external funding
- Array of skills

Characteristics of the research management profession:
- Facilitator of research
- Mediator-expeditor
- Trust-building
- Several points of entry into the profession
- Range of specialist skills
- Diversity of tasks
- Stakeholder perceptions

Characteristics of small island states:
- Lack of critical mass
- Restricted specialisation
- Closely-knit relationships
- Strong social cohesion
- Limited control on agenda-setting
- Multi-functionalism
- Restricted job mobility
- Limited resources
Conclusions

• Context plays a determinant role in the way behaviours are moulded

• Research management built in small steps

• Knowledge from one context cannot be transferred blindly on to other context without understanding the idiosyncratic characteristics