

The Roles, Responsibilities, and Professional Identities of Research Ethics Administrators in Canadian Universities

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REA: An Emerging Profession

University REAs play an integral role in protecting individuals from the potential risks of participating in research by coordinating institutional human research protection programs. As the Canadian research regulatory environment evolves, so do the responsibilities of university REAs.

REA: An Emerging Profession

However, there is not much information available to define the emergent roles, responsibilities, and professional identity of this unique occupational group and its important contribution to Canada's research enterprise.

REA: An Emerging Profession

- Specialized role: evolved from more general support positions – often administrative assistants of VPs of Research .
- Increased volume of research and levels of regulatory requirements, educational mandates of HRP programs, and the desire to foster a supportive culture of research have all resulted in university REAs assuming more responsibilities.

Phase I: Quantitative On-line survey

- What does the **everyday work-world** of research ethics administrators (REAs) look like in terms of roles and responsibilities?
- Does the profession of research ethics administration lend itself to **standard occupational definitions** of roles and responsibilities?
- (N=33; 25 institutions; 7 provinces; 27 F, 6 M)

Survey Respondents: Job Titles



Phase II—Qualitative Interviews

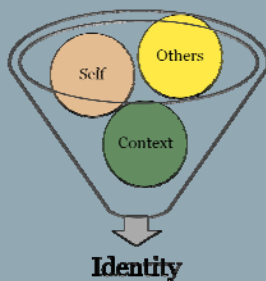
- How do **ambiguities** in professional roles and titles influence the professional identity of REAs?
- How do REAs view **themselves** as members of a profession, how do they perceive that **others** view them, and how does the academic **context** in which they function shape these views?
- (N=5; 2 provinces; 4 F, 1 M)

Focus of Presentation

- Professional identity issues and tensions in the subset of:

Research Ethics Officers, Coordinators and Administrators

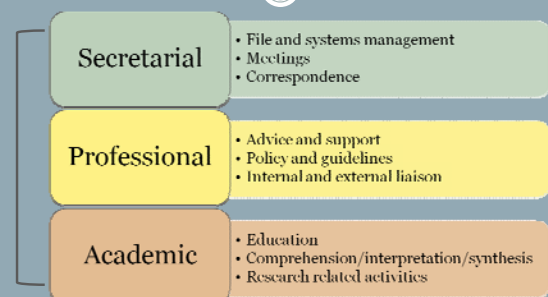
Professional Identity



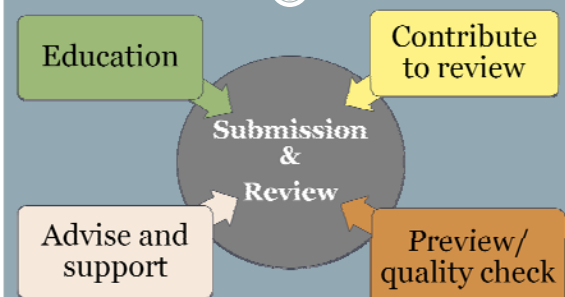
Job Titles/Designations

- Fail to capture scope and impact of job
- Lack of common vocabulary (officer/coordinator/administrator)
- Institutions downplay higher level functions

Scope of Position



Impact on Quality of Submissions/Reviews



Contribution to Minimal Risk Review

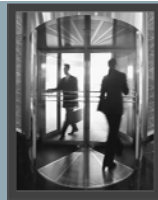
How do you conduct minimal risk review?	Professional Titles					
	Officer	Coordinator	Ethics Administrator	Research Administrator	Manager	Director
Do not participate in reviews		5%			5%	5%
Compile comments only	5%	9%				
In addition to other reviewers and chair	14%	9%	5%	5%		5%
In addition to other reviewers no chair		9%				
With chair only		5%				
Sole reviewer on behalf of chair				5%	9%	9%

On Behalf of the REB Chair: Minimal Risk

- 59% of REAs “approved” responses from researchers on clarifications
- 59% - modifications
- 64% - continuing reviews
- 68% - final reports
- 12% of REAs were voting members on board

Atmosphere of Constant Change

- VP Research – Term-position
- Chair – Volunteer, term-position
- REB - Volunteer, term-position



REA – Permanent, employed by institution
Consistency = institutional memory

Areas of Tension

- Workload – vacation, sick time, no succession plan
- Dual/split roles
- Coercion and bullying (VP, Researchers)
- Lack of clear boundaries (Chair)
- Inadequate supervisory support (VP)
- Reporting structure = potential conflict
- Allegiance: Chair/REB vs. VP/Institution
- No recourse when problems arise
- Invisibility - cursory mention in TCPS

Career Outlook

- 85% of survey respondents did not feel that there was an opportunity for them to advance in their current position
- 18% reported they would retire within five years
- 18% reported that they would leave research administration within five years

The Good News

- Interview respondents reported that they felt valued and respected by their REBs and researchers at their institutions
- For the most part, REAs reported positive, supportive, collaborative relationships with REBs, Chairs and researchers.
- REAs reported that they were intrinsically motivated, enjoyed their jobs, and felt that they made a difference in terms of PP.