

Peer Review

Review of: "Negative Risks in Academic Research Projects: A Retrospective Analysis of Data from a Convenience Sample of Hundreds of Research Team Members"

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Thanks for conducting interesting and important research on what works or should work for research teams on research projects, what are identified as main negative risks, and a thorough investigation using facilitated sessions to identify the key negative risks. On the basis of working with 500 individuals over 15 facilitated brainstormed sessions, the authors have found that there was a motif to the identified negative risks, mainly categorised into five groups: funding uncertainty as the highest identified risk, followed by personnel availability throughout the life cycle of the project, and followed by partnerships, data access, and other issues. In contrast, what appeared to be identified as key issues in research literature identified in terms of uncertainty, complexity, and creativity as three aspects of any research project identified by experts in the literature did not seem to come out as top priorities in the sessions or votes.

This divergence is important for the conclusions we can draw from this study, but before we accept that the apparent divergence is real, we need to consider a few aspects of the research. The context of this research was about HERD projects or large international projects that tend to attract large funds. Yet we find that researchers identify continuity of funding as a key negative risk. Is it possible that in the sample of researchers identified for this study, the researchers themselves may not be part of large multinational research teams but perhaps were on research teams for projects that had to play with smaller and highly competitive pools of funds that led to this anxiety and negative identification? This will point to the generalisability of the study findings themselves. If the sample did indeed consist of a

large number of researchers who were not part of large international projects, perhaps a future study that may have a mix of multicountry large projects may yield different priorities. It seems from the nature of the negative risks identified that personnel, partners, and data access issues might also be associated with the funding issue, which, undoubtedly, is a major issue in any research project. So, while the research has indisputably identified core issues in the conduct of day-to-day research, which also correctly conflicts with the “perceived” risks, the prioritised order may change in the future depending on the context in which such research is conducted. With respect to whether the methods can be replicated for other research teams, while I agree with the methods and procedures as such, I believe the exact questions can be tailored to specific research contexts.

In summary, while this is a preprint article, during submission to a journal, the author(s) may want to consider adding to the discussion/conclusion section that there is no real “mismatch” between the theoretical perceived risks on the basis of uncertainty, complexity, and creativity, as these might be distinguishing features of academic research, not necessarily negative risks as such, but the empirical findings suggest that project management issues in academic research are in essence not really different from industrial project management. This itself is an important aspect and merits urgent communication to the scholarly community. I look forward to seeing this or a version of this research credited in an indexed peer-reviewed journal beyond the preprint stage.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.