

THE UNIVERSAL RESEARCHOPS CAREER LADDER



Use this ladder to write clear job descriptions, provide direction, advocate for promotions, and manage performance—build a thriving ResearchOps team that can supercharge research.



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Self-Oriented Impact

Impact Within the Team

Cross-Functional Impact

Company-Wide Impact

Executive-Level Impact

LEARNING THE BASICS

BECOMING A MASTER OPERATOR

DRIVING FOR MEASURABLE RESULTS

ELEVATING THE CRAFT

A FORCE MULTIPLIER

THE INNOVATOR

IC1

IC2

IC3

IC4

IC5

IC6

RESEARCHOPS ADMINISTRATOR

Administration | Support | System & Service Design

RESEARCHOPS COORDINATOR

Administration | Support | Project Coordination | System & Service Design

RESEARCHOPS LEADER

System & Service Design | Programme Management | Leadership | Strategy

SENIOR RESEARCHOPS LEADER

System & Service Design | Programme Management | Business Management | Leadership | Strategy

RESEARCHOPS PRINCIPAL

System & Service Design | Programme Management | Business Management | Influence | Leadership | Strategy

DISTINGUISHED RESEARCHOPS PRINCIPAL

Innovation | Influence | Business Management | System & Service Design | Programme Management | Leadership | Strategy

SCOPE & COMPLEXITY

In this entry-level role, you complete tightly scoped, low-risk projects with regular supervision. Your role is focused on project coordination, handling administrative tasks, and maintaining and supporting existing systems. This may include executing basic data protection processes, providing how-to support to people who do research (PWDR),^{*} maintaining documentation and templates, monitoring and reporting operating metrics, handling routine procurement tasks, administering participant recruitment, and supporting ad hoc projects such as event organisation. You also design and deliver end-to-end solutions to simple operational problems.

You autonomously prioritise your day-to-day work and, with limited supervision, ensure the execution and measurement of a portfolio of two to three well-defined projects. You independently design and deliver scalable solutions to moderately complex, mid-risk operational opportunities. Your role includes stakeholder and vendor management, as well as project planning and delivery. Fifty percent of your role is dedicated to administering existing systems; the remainder is committed to designing (or redesigning) and delivering new systems.

At this level, you do more than complete discrete projects; you own end-to-end services, spot opportunities for operational efficiencies and cross-functional impact, and autonomously gain buy-in to deliver solutions. You lead at least one moderate-to-high-risk programme that aligns with the ResearchOps strategy. You demonstrate autonomous problem-solving and creativity, and determine your own methods and procedures to deliver on your remit. You typically design and deliver scalable solutions that improve the efficiency and impact of multiple teams or departments. Your role is now entirely focused on designing (or redesigning) and delivering research systems.

Your work is now highly strategic. You lead multiple high-risk programmes that deliver operational efficiencies across multiple functions. You autonomously design and deliver systems that resolve complex challenges or unlock valuable business opportunities. You consider how each system you build interoperates with the broader research operating system and its long-term cost-benefit ratio. You're responsible for autonomously defining and executing a medium- to long-term strategy in line with business needs, and determine your own methods for delivering on your remit.

You lead programmes of work that directly and measurably contribute to the executive's strategic priorities. You autonomously define and prioritise operational challenges, digest them into executable components, and gain buy-in from stakeholders, decision makers, and resource providers, including executives, to achieve your goals. You're a force multiplier: you amplify your impact through collaboration and partnership by proactively seeking and creating opportunities to deliver measurable value beyond your own capacity.

You're accountable for defining, driving, and delivering enterprise-wide initiatives of critical business impact. You work on unprecedented, ill-defined challenges that require innovative paths to resolution. You partner with cross-functional stakeholders to identify and secure buy-in for major new business opportunities. You play a significant role in setting the ResearchOps agenda within the organisation. Poor execution at this level can result in substantial business risk or the loss of significant opportunities.

CRAFT

You're developing an understanding of the fundamental principles of ResearchOps, the remit of ResearchOps within the organisation, and industry-specific requirements.[†] Though your role is generalist, you're proactively developing expertise in one of the eight elements of ResearchOps. You're also building foundational knowledge of service design and a basic understanding of the craft of user experience research (UXR).

Your role is evolving from an administrative to a project-based role. You have an intrinsic and up-to-date understanding of ResearchOps, can clearly articulate the team's remit, and understand industry-specific requirements.[†] You're mastering a ResearchOps speciality and you're proactively expanding your expertise in the craft of user experience research. You regularly use service design techniques to define and deliver scalable solutions and employ fundamental research techniques, such as user interviews, to understand your operational audiences. You have a growing understanding of the key decision-makers and strategies driving activities, and how your work contributes to the ResearchOps strategy. A reliable project coordinator, you're adept at managing (or surfacing) risks, blockers, dependencies, and misalignments to achieve your goals.

You're an expert in the field of ResearchOps. Though your work spans the eight elements of ResearchOps,[‡] you've mastered at least one element. You're a master service designer, have a rich understanding of user experience research techniques, and a thorough understanding of the remit of both research and ResearchOps within the organisation and industry. You leverage input from product stakeholders to determine the approach that will provide the most business value. You keep yourself, your stakeholders, and your collaborators focused on critical business outcomes and use metrics to demonstrate your impact.

Your work measurably elevates the craft of research and ResearchOps across the organisation. You're responsible for securing the funding and buy-in required to achieve your priorities. You own strategic metrics and use them to inform operational decision-making for research across the organisation. You may manage the annual budget for user experience research (e.g., tooling, contractors, and incentives), making deliberate trade-offs and clearly communicate prioritisation decisions. You may manage aspects of the research tooling stack and oversee vendor relationships related to those tools.

You demonstrate deep expertise in ResearchOps. In partnership with leadership, you define your own strategy, aligning across multiple programmes or operational areas, and gain the buy-in to deliver it. You're responsible for managing entire operational areas using service (or product) management skills to succeed. You create effective, scalable systems that level up other functions within the organisation through influence and knowledge sharing. You may manage the entire research tooling stack and all vendor relationships, have a significant impact on the research (or managing department's) team's budget, and play a key role in defining and changing corporate strategy or policy around new initiatives.

You're actively evolving the practice of ResearchOps. You deliver research systems that unlock novel, highly effective ways of working and provide significant, measurable benefits and cost savings for the business. You deliver end-to-end solutions that are broadly adopted across the organisation; your systems measurably (and visibly) contribute to achieving executive-level priorities.

IMPACT

By providing reliable administrative and how-to support, you're supporting the ResearchOps team's impact and efficiency. Through one-on-one interactions, you're building rapport with colleagues, stakeholders, and vendors, positively impacting the ResearchOps team's reputation. By surfacing repetitive or critical operational issues, you enable the ResearchOps team to respond to otherwise hidden problems and opportunities—you are the eyes and ears on the ground.

Your work typically contributes to achieving a strategic priority set by ResearchOps leadership. You have a reputation for credible, timely execution, and influence managers' and stakeholders' decisions on resource allocation and project pivots. You effectively communicate sensitive information and resolve contentious issues. You can confidently and accurately represent the perspective and initiatives of ResearchOps cross-functionally and externally—you sell the work of the team. You live the mantra "ResearchOps is a team sport" and expand your expertise and impact through co-creation and feedback with immediate stakeholders and colleagues.

Your work achieves defined strategic priorities and directly impacts the effectiveness of ResearchOps and cross-functional teams. You drive for measurable results and leverage your understanding of the business, research metrics, and organisational context to inform the research and ResearchOps strategy. You build and grow the ResearchOps team's reputation across the organisation, influencing decisions at management levels. Your work delivers measurable results.

The systems you design deliver measurable (and visible) business value and elevate the impact of research and ResearchOps within the broader organisation. You evangelise the ResearchOps team's work and objectives, building productive relationships. You're proactive in positioning ResearchOps as a strategic, system-oriented function rather than an administrative partner. The business intelligence, including metrics, generated by your work informs the ResearchOps strategy.

You're a force multiplier who amplifies impact through other people and teams, creating opportunities to be effective across the entire organisation. You're seen as a critical strategic partner by other functions, with influence and impact extending well beyond your "home" organisation. You identify and advocate for filling skills gaps and drive the continued maturing of ResearchOps within the organisation.

You have strategic impact across functions and at the executive level, contributing measurable improvements to key business metrics. You amplify your impact not only through the entire company but also beyond it. You're considered an industry expert and utilise your reputation and network to increase the recruitment and retention of talent.

LEADERSHIP

You're learning to be a productive, self-reliant ResearchOps professional with little supervision. You receive general instruction on routine work and detailed instruction on new projects. With guidance, you've set educational goals, which you're achieving with commitment.

You're a productive, self-reliant ResearchOps professional and need limited supervision to achieve predefined goals. Your work is reviewed regularly, but you require minimal input to succeed. You've set educational goals suited to your chosen area of specialisation, achieve them with commitment, and share your learnings with team members. You mentor more junior team members and onboard new team members, interns, and graduates.

You serve as a subject matter expert and emerging thought leader on ResearchOps internally. You mentor, onboard, and train less experienced team members, and manage contractors contributing to your programmes of work. You actively share knowledge across the organisation, elevating the ResearchOps team's capability.

You're a ResearchOps thought leader within the organisation. You impact hiring decisions, mentor and develop junior team members, and demonstrate the ability to influence across the organisation. You influence the research and ResearchOps strategy. You may manage an intern seasonally, or oversee an employee during a transitional period or as a path to the manager track.

You're a vocal ResearchOps evangelist within the organisation and externally. You manage interns and contractors and oversee employees during transitional periods or as a path to the manager track.

You influence decisions at the highest levels of the organisation and represent ResearchOps in executive forums and strategic planning. Executives rely on you to drive knowledge and insights initiatives that amplify the organisation's success. You set the industry standard and establish new frameworks and approaches within the organisation and in the ResearchOps profession.

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 user interviews

* PWDR (pau-duh) stands for "people who do research" and includes researchers, designers, product managers, and marketers—in short, anyone who conducts research as part of their job.

† Different industries place different requirements on research operations. For instance, the financial and health sectors often have stricter financial, ethical, and data governance requirements. ResearchOps professionals must understand these nuances.

‡ The eight elements of ResearchOps as defined by Kate Towsey in *Research That Scales* (Rosenfeld, 2024) is an update to the eight pillars of user research as defined by Emma Boulton in 2019. Towsey's eight elements include three critical areas of focus—money and metrics, onboarding and support, and programme management—which are all crucial to good operations and aren't represented in the eight pillars. Also, "Scope" and "Environment," which are discrete in the eight pillars, are excluded from the eight elements as they're seen as intrinsic operational factors.

A ResearchOps professional should understand each of the eight elements of ResearchOps and be a specialist in at least one element.

M1

M2

M3

RESEARCHOPS MANAGER

Business Management | Leadership | Strategy | People Management

You're responsible for the impact of a small team of three to four individual contributors (ICs) working on similar or related areas. You empower your direct reports to deliver impact by defining a strategy for your team, managing resources effectively, and providing coaching and support. At this level, you're learning to shift your method of impact from "I can do this" to "I can teach my team to do this." You may manage direct reports across various ResearchOps specialities. While you needn't be an expert in all the specialities you manage, you have basic knowledge of each speciality, and you're aware of your blind spots: you seek out advice when providing training, assigning work, or evaluating your direct reports.

SENIOR RESEARCHOPS MANAGER

Business Management | Influence | Leadership | Strategy | People Management

You now handle increasingly complex organisational needs and are responsible for up to eight ICs working on areas that may not be related; you may also manage other managers. You lead and influence beyond ResearchOps and set a strategy for the team that delivers impact beyond your size and resourcing—your entire team is a force multiplier. You manage the team's budget and advocate for financial resources, maintaining and securing funding for headcount, tooling, and other team needs. You utilise a wide variety of management approaches beyond individual coaching and troubleshooting, including strategy, thought leadership, and evangelism, to unlock the full potential of ResearchOps within the organisation. Your team is a benchmark for ResearchOps in the industry.

DIRECTOR OF RESEARCHOPS

Innovation | Influence | Business Management | Leadership | Strategy | People Management

You design your team to deliver highly effective research systems that unlock new ways of working and measurably impact the organisation's highest priorities. Your team solves high-risk, complex organisational challenges. You develop strategies for systematic, scalable solutions that improve organisational effectiveness and iteratively execute them. You utilise a wide range of management approaches beyond individual coaching and troubleshooting, including strategy, thought leadership, and evangelism, to unlock the full potential of ResearchOps within the organisation. Your team is a benchmark for ResearchOps in the industry.