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PIVOTAL TOPIC: Leadership: Future Directions for Neuropsychology

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INTRODUCTION

This is our final issue as the editors of the National Academy of Neuropsychology (NAN) Pivotal Topics Bulletin. During the last three years, the Bulletin has evolved into a format that presents topics of interest or value to our membership (e.g., neurodegenerative disorders, diversity, sports concussion, emerging roles in neuropsychology). With each issue, it was our hope that the essays might stimulate discussion, teaching, study, and practice. For our final issue, we have chosen an unconventional theme: Leadership and Future Directions.

Effective leadership is often characterized by a fluid and careful balance of competing principles. Indeed, several leadership skills seem to fall within the theme of discretion—judging when to gather information from versus act on behalf of the body one represents; when to wait versus act; when to follow versus lead. Leaders must be able to delegate responsibility and to mobilize/inspire assistance from colleagues. Successful leaders prioritize the work product, and do not require credit or acknowledgement of their sacrifices. Personal agendas are often tabled in favor of more pressing or institutional priorities. A leader strives to be informed on all perspectives, giving special attention to hearing minority opinions. Possibly most importantly, leadership is characterized by vision and the ability to put into place policy and practices that will shape a movement. This vision ideally integrates historical lessons, current practice and issues, and an understanding of the short-term and long-term impacts of proposed change. A leader mentors future leadership, and values the creativity and energy that rotation promises.

We both have been fortunate to have studied and served with strong leaders in clinical neuropsychology. We recognize that during their service to our academies, officers and volunteers shape our field both through broad, organizational impact and direct personal interactions with colleagues and trainees. It is because of this influence that we believe that the topic of leadership warrants consideration. For some of us, the opinions of the leaders in our field are of the highest interest, as they reflect on the current issues confronting neuropsychology and recommend paths for the future. Others may seek greater understanding of the principle of leadership itself, as a quality that can be taught, mentored, and developed in a manner that may benefit both our immediate and broader professional settings.

In this issue, we surveyed leaders in neuropsychology practice groups to ask them about their perspectives about the future priorities of our field, their experience as leaders, and their thoughts about the critical skills required for successful leadership. We constructed a brief survey and asked the current and past presidents (2006-2011) of our practice groups (National Academy of Neuropsychology; International Neuropsychological Society; Division 40 of the American Psychological Association; American Academy of Clinical Neuropsychology; American College of Professional Neuropsychology) to complete it anonymously online. We contacted each person by email and requested that they complete an online survey of 10 questions, and

sent two follow-up reminder messages. Over the course of two weeks, we received a 59% response rate (13 responses, 8 no answer, 1 decline). Answers were provided anonymously and results were collected in an aggregated spreadsheet. Given time constraints and our acceptance of this project as a more descriptive rather than scientific endeavor, the following quantitative and thematic summaries were created based on participant responses. We acknowledge the limitations of a survey of this nature, including having a prespecified set of choice responses. We thus provide these results for individual interpretation, and caution readers from generalizing these responses broadly. Despite these limitations, we hope that as with other pivotal topics bulletins, this issue finds a place in discussions with colleagues and trainees, and perhaps challenges each of us to consider our aspirations and current roles as leaders in the field of neuropsychology.

DESCRIPTION OF RESPONSES

Broadly, responses reflected a need for attention to neuropsychology's position in public policy and awareness, a continued desire for standards of excellence in our science and practice, and general satisfaction with our communication/teaching vehicles of journals and meetings. There appears to be a growing interest in shifting our focus away from topics that have received much attention over the last decade (e.g., symptom validity testing) and back toward basic issues of measurement, assessment in specific populations (pediatric, geriatric), and the role of neuropsychology in an evolving healthcare environment (e.g., reimbursement issues, public policy, public awareness). What follows below is a detailed description of the response areas.

Critical Topics for Future Leaders

Respondents were asked to rank five specific topics in order of priority for the next generation of leaders to address. Public policy and public awareness was ranked as the highest priority, followed closely by reimbursement, while board certification, test and norm development, and diversity were not endorsed as highly. In a free text box, respondents offered additional topics warranting attention, which included research funding, building the science of our field, matching training to public need, and establishing a mechanism with greater support for postdoctoral education; we interpreted the final topic to mean strengthening funding for post-doctoral positions and increasing training opportunities.

Table 1. Rank order of issues critical to the next generation of leaders (rank 1-5 possible):

Category	Average Ranking	N
Public policy and public awareness	1.85	13
Reimbursement	1.92	13
Board certification	3.17	12
Test and norm development	3.82	11
Diversity	4.00	12

When asked what science and practice issues do we need to better understand, respondents rated disorders of aging, test and norm development, and pediatric disorders higher than sports concussion,

diversity, and symptom validity testing. Interestingly, ecological validity and the "value added" by neuropsychological evaluations were additional areas offered as free text responses.

Table 2. Rank order of science and practice issues warranting attention (rank 1-6 possible):

Category	Average Ranking	N
Disorders of aging	2.08	13
Test and norm development	2.67	12
Pediatric disorders	2.83	12
Sports concussion	3.92	12
Diversity	4.55	11
Symptom validity testing	4.55	11

When asked what topics receive too much attention, responses where ranked in the following order: Symptom Validity Testing, Sports Concussion, Diversity, Test and norm development, disorders of aging, and pediatric disorders. In addition, forensic issues were raised as a topic that may receive too much attention in a free text response.

Meetings and Journals

Overall, there was a fair degree of satisfaction with journals and national conferences in our field; comments encouraged continued improvement rather than fundamental problems. There were, however, some repeated themes in both contexts about greater attention to redundancy, cost management, and quality control.

Comments about our journals included concern about the proliferation of neuropsychology journals for a small profession and the impact of such growth on quality. Continued improvement of scientific standards for content was suggested, as was both fair reviews and more inclusiveness in the review and editorial process. The need for emphasis on evidence-based practice and publications with a direct application to professional practice were also mentioned.

Comments about our meetings included concerns about the cost of too many meetings, with mention of possible consolidation or collaboration across organizations. The need to continue or improve standards for scientific presentations was also noted multiple times. Topical areas that were freely mentioned as needing attention included evidence-based practice, how to increase public awareness of neuropsychology, clinical utility, international studies or educational programs, and thematic colloquia.

Rewards and Challenges: The Impact of Serving as a Leader

Notably, when asked about how the leadership position impacted one's career, the cost of serving on other professional responsibilities and home-life was reflected in several responses. Despite this, the vast majority of responses were favorable. Many of the benefits articulated by the group could be realized from service amongst colleagues at several levels within an organization. For instance, gains included better awareness of challenging issues, organizational operations, critical skills, colleagues' perspectives, and alternative viewpoints. Networking and working cooperatively with others was also highlighted. Some also noted that the position provided a platform for one's ideas, encouraged confidence in decision-making, augmented national recognition, and provided avenues for additional leadership opportunities.

Respondents offered insightful comments about the most rewarding aspects of serving as a leader in neuropsychology. Specifically, they often reported feeling rewarded by learning from, motivating, and collaborating with colleagues; serving and impacting the field; mentoring; and accomplishing objectives specifically related to problem solving in the field. Learning about broader organizational structure and inter-organizational collaboration were also noted as rewarding. Examining ways to advance the profession, and specific issues like enhancing training guidelines and attempting to expand public awareness of neuropsychology were highlighted. Respondents also commented on the intrinsic reward and meaning of serving their field.

According to responses, the most challenging aspects of serving as leaders involved managing the motivational issues and personalities of colleagues, accomplishing goals despite setbacks and conflicts, and the inherent time demands. Both intra and inter- organizational biases, myths, and strain were raised as barriers. Some mentioned that learning how larger organizations work and representing a broad constituency were challenging, as well as being limited by resources and the weak political power of our groups. They also reported challenges surrounding their efforts to keep neuropsychology in a relevant position in light of health care reform by increasing public awareness of neuropsychology specifically and collaborating with other allied medical professions.

Principles of Effective Leadership

We asked our respondents to rank qualities that they consider when voting, making nominations, and selecting people to mentor. Of those choices provided, the current and past leaders of our field strongly endorsed interpersonal skills as the highest priority when selecting potential future leaders. Leadership experience was also ranked somewhat highly, while clinical, research and academic experience/expertise ranked as less important. Other qualities that were spontaneously offered by the respondents in free text responses included: follow through, willingness to serve, willingness to lead, willingness to mentor, and a grasp of the issues.

Table 3. Rank order of leadership qualities considered (rank 1-5 possible)

Category	Average Ranking	N
Interpersonal skills	1.46	13
Leadership experience	2.38	13
Clinical expertise	3.42	12
Research experience	3.73	11
Academic experience (teaching/pubs)	3.73	11

Weaknesses in leadership were more often attributed to personality factors than skills sets. Ego and self-centeredness, arrogance, and impulsivity were commonly listed, as was lack of dedication, time, and follow through. While few concerns focused on skills or perspectives, there were several comments that addressed concerns about leaders not working within the broader framework of psychology as a whole, not working within the shared concepts of neurology and other neuroscience disciplines, and maintaining a narrow view of healthcare.

We include the list of leadership strengths and skills offered by our respondents in free text, as any summary would dilute the rich and broad ideas presented. We grouped these by content with a thematic subtitle to facilitate organization. It is a useful exercise to measure one's own approach against these standards.

Vision: Ability to formulate and communicate a vision, dedication to the mission, vision, ability to keep focused on the mission while addressing bumps in the road to achievement.

Commitment: Determination, perseverance, follow through and persistence

Collaboration: Patience and flexibility, appreciation for diversity of opinion and style, when the presenting problem is conflict, ability to listen, ability to see consensus, ability to seek compromise, cooperation, ability to work together, capacity to bring a coalition together, collaborative approach, ability to share ideas and work toward consensus, fairness, patience for all viewpoints to surface, personal respect, acceptance of others, consensus building

Sophistication: Broad perspective and outlook, wide knowledge of the field, need to see the big picture, grasp of issues, enough experience in the field to recognize trends, understanding of the range of activities in neuropsychology, experience

Communication: Diplomacy, interpersonal skills, negotiation skills, good people skills

Service: Selflessness, altruism, volunteerism, willingness to invest and become engaged, making tough decisions that benefit the field but not necessarily one's self

Judgment: Reflective decision-making, rationality, empathetic critical thinking, being informed, integrative critical thinking

Principles and Skills: Transparency, desire to foster young talent, scientific background, excellent writing skills, focus on strengthening psychology not just neuropsychology, opposition to politics and being political, organizational skills

Inspiration: Ability to mobilize others, ability to motivate others to participate, getting in touch with the grassroots networks

SUMMARY

The development of future leaders in neuropsychology is critical to maintaining a field that adapts to rapidly evolving healthcare and research funding environments. In training, we emphasize establishing strong foundations in neuroscience, neuroanatomy, statistics and measurement, psychological disorders, and neurological diseases, and integrating this education with experiential learning in research and clinical settings. It is not so clear, however, how one teaches the concept of leadership to a new generation of students and young professionals, as excellence in science and practice do not necessarily translate into strong and successful leadership. It is also equally challenging to foster organizational conditions that encourage maximal participation and accountability in such pivotal roles. We hope this issue encourages the development of a dialogue about just such matters.

Our final installment as editors of the *Pivotal Topics* themed NAN Bulletin summarizes findings from an informal leadership survey conducted with a small group of current and former presidents in neuropsychological organizations. Capturing and summarizing the viewpoints of leaders in neuropsychology presents several methodological challenges, not the least of which include the potential biases that we harbor while attempting to draft questions, seek respondents, and organize and present results. At the outset, we understood that this project would be limited to a descriptive presentation of opinions from respected figures in our field, and in no way is it intended to illustrate definitive future directions and characteristics of successful leadership.

As reflected above, the paths to successful leadership are likely multifaceted, but may generally involve nurturing the interaction between innate personality characteristics, personal valuation of service, and opportunities that offer leadership experience. We leave it to you, our respected colleagues, to draw your own conclusions, and perhaps use some of these comments from your peers and mentors as a catalyst for examining your own capacity for leadership.

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