

A New Era for Psychologist-Leaders: Introduction to the Society of Psychologists in Leadership and the *Psychology of Leaders and Leadership*

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This article introduces the name change of the Society of Psychologists in Leadership (SPL), from the Society of Psychologists in Management (SPIM). SPL seeks to become the premier home for psychologists who are also executives, managers, leaders, and consultants, and for psychologists who aspire to leadership positions in their organization, locally, nationally, or globally. In this article, we first discuss the founding and early years of SPIM as critical development in the recognition of psychologists as managers and leaders. Then we discuss societal and cultural changes that led to consideration of SPL rebranding and name change, including discussions of cultural and academic changes in the connotation of management versus leadership, an increasing emphasis on psychologists as leaders, and a cultural increase in focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. We discuss the board's mixed-methods approach to assessing the needs of its members, expanding the membership and value of the organization, recognizing and honoring the

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founders and early members, ensuring a unique identity and value of SPL, and revitalizing and refocusing the academic journal. We conclude with considerations of the future of SPL to serve psychologists in leadership in the 21st century.

Keywords: management, leadership, organization, psychologist, rebranding

The Society of Psychologists in Leadership (SPL), founded in the early 1980s as the Society of Psychologists in Management, is a 501(c)3 nonprofit professional society of psychologists who work as executives, managers, leaders, and consultants in a variety of sectors, including business, government, healthcare, community services, consulting firms, and academia. SPL provides a professional home for psychologists who work to advance management, leadership, and organizational excellence. SPL also supports a peer-reviewed journal, *Psychology of Leaders and Leadership*, formerly *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, published by the American Psychological Association (APA). On the occasion of the organization's 2021–2022 transformation in focus from management to leadership, organizational name change, and journal name change, this article describes (a) the founding and early goals of the organization, (b) the reasons for and process the SPL board followed to engage stakeholders and implement a name change, and (c) planned new directions for the future of SPL in its aim to support psychologist-leaders.

Founding and Early Aims of SPIM

Psychologists typically conduct activities such as clinical therapy and counseling, behavioral research and publications, and educational activities (Thorn & Yancey, 2021). Many psychologists, however, also lead others, such as conducting clinical supervision, leading organizations, or advising leaders. Thorn and Yancey (2021) cite James Cattell as an example of this nontraditional path: Cattell founded The Psychological Corporation for the purpose of making applied psychology, including tests and measurements, available to industry and business (Sokal, 1980). Other psychologists have engaged in activities that are more entrepreneurial and leadership related than health services oriented, including J. B. Watson, a psychological pioneer who became a leader in advertising, and multiple psychologists who lead organizations or have been elected to public office. APA surveys indicate that approximately 40% of APA-member psychologists report management and administration are

significant activities in their current job, regardless of employment setting or health services provider status (American Psychological Association Research Office, 2015).¹ Further, psychologists have contributed to research to understand and elucidate leadership approaches (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2004), complexity theory in leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007), emotions in leadership (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2014), the role of followers (Kellerman, 2008), personality and leadership (e.g., Judge et al., 2002), psychologists in management (Kelly & Finkelman, 2011), and diversity in leadership (Chin & Trimble, 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Although many psychologists serve as managers and leaders, engage in management and leadership activities, and contribute to research on management and leadership, APA and the discipline of psychology have paid limited attention to leadership development in a strategic, comprehensive, or coordinated way (Miles-Cohen et al., 2020).

SPIM was formed as a result of Richard Kilburg, in 1982 the APA Administrative Officer for Professional Affairs, identifying that there was no professional recognition for psychologists in managerial roles (Thorn & Yancey, 2021). Kilburg organized a special issue of *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* devoted solely to psychologists in management (Kilburg, 1984). In collaboration with colleagues who conducted similar management activities that were not recognized as clinical activities by the American Board of Professional Psychology, he founded the Society of Psychologists in Management (SPIM) in 1985. Early founders also included Mark Ginsburg, who at that time ran the APA State Association Office; Anthony Browskowski, then director of the Northside Community Mental Health Center and a friend and mentor of Kilburg's who had introduced him to organization development; Doug Bray, founder of assessment centers and author of one of the first longitudinal studies of manager development; and Joe Grosslight, the chair of the Psychology Department at the University of Florida. In 1985, the first Society of Psychologists in Management meeting had 66 attendees; Kilburg was selected as its first president. Anthony Browskowski was the second president and was central to the organization and implementation of annual meetings. Dwight Harshbarger, then vice president of human resources at the Sealy Corporation, was the first elected President in 1987. In 2021, the organization rebranded as Society of Psychologists in Leadership (SPL).

In 1997, SPIM and Rodney L. Lowman, then Professor at Alliant International University, established *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, a scholarly publication that was conceptualized as a hybrid between a scholarly journal and a professional guide to good managerial practice. The journal was

¹ Note these numbers may be an inaccurate representation of all psychologists because they only address psychologists who are members of APA, which is around half of all U.S. psychologists.

targeted for the practicing psychologist-manager. The APA began publishing the journal in 2012.

Context of SPIM Rebranding to SPL

Societal and cultural changes facilitated the initiation of the rebranding charge that culminated in the organization's name change. Specifically, a cultural and academic change in the connotation of management versus leadership, an increasing emphasis on psychologists as leaders, and a cultural increase in focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have been key in this change.

Management Versus Leadership

The terms manager and leader are often used interchangeably, and there has been significant discussion about the functional and connotative difference between these terms. Turk (2007) argued that managers are viewed as policy followers and are reactive in their actions, compared to leaders, who create policy and are proactive. More recently, Nayar (2013) articulated three ways in which managers and leaders are different. First, managers oversee others, thereby "counting value," while leaders "create value" by designating tasks and planning for the future. Second, managers exhibit power over a finite group of subordinates, while leader power may have a broader impact and affects people outside a single work unit or organization. Last, managers focus on task outcomes or meeting set goals, while leaders focus on influencing people; Nayar indicates that it is not power and control but influence and inspiration that separates leaders from managers. Turk (2007) stated managers can become leaders if they exhibit a leader perspective; demonstrate leader qualities such as passion, creativity, and enthusiasm; and engage in leader behaviors that build loyalty by making people feel listened to, appreciated and important.

Conceptualization of managers and leaders has changed from the 20th to the 21st centuries. In 1938, Bernard published an influential book in which he viewed managerial authority as the ability to persuade with the foundations of authority resting in the skills of the manager. Management in the 20th century was influenced by the work of Max Weber and focusing on authority and dominance (Hopen, 2010; Weber, 1947). Managers were viewed as those who gave orders and controlled the workplace. However, as technology and globalization progressed during the 20th century, the view of management

changed. For example, [Drucker \(1993\)](#) argued that the focus of a manager was not possible in a technologically sophisticated workplace because no individual can have sole control over all the information and resources needed for organizational success. Therefore, the manager role transformed to one of leadership where the focus is on managing complex teams, while fostering employee participation and empowerment. Similarly, [Heames and Harvey \(2007\)](#) described a progression from the 20th-century idea of manager as leader to the 21st-century model of global leadership.

The terms management and manager are typically associated with the 20th century and qualities needed in a different time. The current century requires individuals with global skills and knowledge; who are technically competent; who are flexible, honest, and open-minded; and who can deal with complexity ([Heames & Harvey, 2007](#)). The term applied to the person who is in this role has now switched from “manager” to “global leader.” In sum, the 21st century brought technological advancements and globalization that now requires global leadership rather than 20th-century management.

Increasing Recognition of Psychologist-Leaders

As the number of psychologists in the U.S. has steadily risen to around 100,000, the number of psychologists who report management or leadership as primary activities has remained at around 40% for at least the past 20 years ([American Psychological Association Research Office, 2015](#)). A sense of increasing urgency to solve global problems and a critical mass of individuals with specialized skills have contributed to renewed interest in psychologists in leadership ([Bennis, 2007](#)). Skills that make strong psychologists, such as analytic ability, skill to navigate emotionally challenging situations, collaboration skills, ability to integrate feedback, and systems thinking, are also critical skills for successful leaders ([Bennis, 2007](#); [Kelly & Finkelman, 2011](#); [Thorn et al., 2015](#)).

Recognizing the potential of psychologists, identifying the absence of formal leadership training for psychologists, and building on SPIM’s commitment to education, senior leaders at SPIM created an institute in 2011 to focus on the transition from psychologist to psychologist-manager ([Thorn et al., 2015](#)). The Institute focuses on four facets of leadership and management: (a) understanding yourself and your fit with leadership and management, (b) working with subordinates and managing work through others, (c) managing resources and achieving outcomes, and (d) strategic planning and implementation ([Thorn et al., 2015](#)). Similarly, APA’s Committee for Women in Psychology created the Leadership Institute for Women in Psychology to address the complex and interacting factors affecting women psychologists’

promotion to and success in leadership positions in professional settings (Miles-Cohen et al., 2020).

As these efforts continue, APA and state and territorial psychological associations have increased their programming to provide leadership training to early- and midcareer psychologists. For example, APA's Emerging Leadership Academy provides training in "the characteristics, qualities, and processes associated with novel challenges that demand change and invite innovation in response to the uncertainties we confront as leaders during critical times" (APA Emerging Leadership Academy, n.d.). Several states, including California, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, also offer leadership programs through their state psychological associations. Despite—or perhaps because of—their increasing proportion among psychologists, women, and people of color remain underrepresented in leadership roles (Hallett et al., 2017; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Cultural Increase in Focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Finally, there has been a recognition generally in the U.S. culture and in psychology specifically about the need to increase DEI among leaders. The proportion of women psychologists has substantially increased in the past 75 years to currently 60% of psychologists (American Psychological Association and Committee on Women in Psychology, 2017). The field—or at least APA members—is becoming more diverse, with 26% of APA-member psychologists under age 36 identifying as racial/ethnic minority, compared to only 8% over age 50 (American Psychological Association Center for Workforce Studies, 2020). With increasing attention to cultural movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, psychologists are being called to demonstrate their values of multiculturalism, social justice, and advocacy to increase DEI and confront injustice (Crowell et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2019).

Transformation From SPIM to SPL

In the contexts of cultural and academic change in the connotation of management versus leadership, an increasing emphasis on psychologists as leaders, and a cultural increase in focus on DEI, SPIM board members at the 2016 conference in Atlanta began discussions about potentially rebranding SPIM. Over the next several years, the board established a committee to address the potential rebranding. For consideration of SPL's name change, board members had several goals: (a) to explore the possibility of a new name

to attract more early and midcareer psychologists in management and leadership to boost organization membership; (b) to ensure the name and direction of the organization accurately conveyed the original mission and vision of the organization while adjusting to the changed context of today; (c) to balance support and engagement from organization founders and early members while also appealing to a new generation of psychologist-leaders; (d) to use the opportunity of a possible name change to gather feedback from SPIM members, prospective members, and individuals who attended the annual conference (the organization's signature event) but did not join to identify how to increase the value of the organization to members; (e) to ensure a unique identity and value compared to other similar organizations; and (f) to revitalize and refocus SPIM's journal, *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*.

The leadership team determined it was important to apply psychological principles and theory to the process of the rebranding effort. SPIM's name was a core intangible asset and was central to both the founding and the identity of SPIM. Psychology principles that apply to rebranding include: (a) social proof, in which people's affiliation with a brand or organization can signify who they are as people (e.g., as leaders or managers); (b) authority, in which people want to affiliate with groups that represent authority (e.g., as "leaders" are perceived to have more authority than "managers"); (c) reciprocation, a principle that we seek to give back to others when we receive from them (for organizations like SPL, this can include camaraderie, new ideas, and information; [Cialdini, 2021](#)). These principles can be incorporated into the name change process. For example, [Vallaster and von Wallpach \(2018\)](#) found that nonprofit organizations changing their name benefit from incorporating stakeholder perspectives to strategically ensure the rebranding maximizes the stakeholders' needs, values, and commitment to the organization. Consequently, the SPIM Rebranding Committee, led by SPIM Board Member Robin Hindsman Stacia, was charged with determining how SPIM was perceived by members and former members, how the terms management versus leadership were viewed, and member perspectives on rebranding.

The Rebranding Committee engaged in a mixed-methods approach ([Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017](#)) to ensure stakeholders provided feedback about SPIM and any potential rebranding. A qualitative data subcommittee conducted interviews with seven founders and early members and with several psychologists who attended SPIM in the past but did not join; the committee also incorporated anecdotal comments from members of APA Division 13 (Society for Consulting Psychology) who were not members of SPIM and SPIM members who did not renew membership. This committee reported the following findings: SPIM is viewed as a special place for psychologists who work in organizations as managers, leaders, and consultants. Its camaraderie and support as a small organization (around 80 members) and its annual conference are great assets and often the

best source for experiential evidence and discussion of real-world experiences as psychologists who work as executives, managers, leaders, and consultants. Nevertheless, as a small organization of mostly senior psychologists, there were significant concerns regarding SPIM's ongoing financial stability. Lapsed members tended to not return to SPIM because they retired, were no longer in management positions, or no longer had funding to attend the conference. There was interest in SPIM rebranding to be a home for broader leadership development of psychologists who serve as leaders not only in professional organizations (e.g., APA) but also in politics, academia, and business. There was a slight preference among interviewees for leadership over management as a part of the organization's name.

These qualitative findings were used to create a survey sent to all SPIM members. Survey findings indicated that SPIM members were satisfied with their membership and overall ranked their membership with SPIM very favorably when compared with other psychologist organizations. Members joined SPIM because of the annual conference, the opportunity to network, and collegiality and friendliness of members. Although SPIM members identified positively with the organization's name and with both management and leadership, leadership was ranked higher as accurately reflecting the respondents' professional identity compared to management (45.3% vs. 34.2%). Based on the committee's recommendations, the Board voted in 2020 to change the name of the organization and its tagline from SPIM to Society of Psychologists in Leadership: Advancing the Science and Practice of Leadership and Management.

The Future of SPL

Organizations that change their name typically demonstrate a sustained increase in performance because the name change serves as a signal that the organization is committed to improve its image, brand, and performance (Horsky & Swyngedouw, 1987). The rebranding of SPIM to SPL and its journal transitioning from focusing on management to focusing on leadership reflects the norms of global leadership as well as the need to support psychologists who are serving as global leaders. SPL members are innovative and creative, leading diverse and dispersed teams, and immersed in technologically sophisticated global environments.

SPL members are midcareer and senior psychologists who have one of the following work activities: (a) They work as managers or leaders in organizations. A psychologist-manager or psychologist-leader's duties include responsibilities in such areas as budget, personnel and program decisions, organizational planning. (b) They teach and/or conduct research in management and/or leadership often but not always on faculty at a university

or college. (c) SPL members consult with managers and leaders in organizations. Management consultants are involved in such activities as executive coaching, organizational consultation, assistance with executive selection and succession planning, and/or research in such areas. (d) SPL members have academic training in management and or significant management experience. Many SPL members also have American Board of Professional Psychology certification in Organizational and Business Psychology.

Requirements to be a full member of SPL include a doctoral degree in psychology from an accredited program and serving as a manager or leader, academician whose focus is management, or as a consultant to management. Early career members have had a leadership role for fewer than 5 years. SPL also offers membership to Associate Members (master's level), Affiliate Members (bachelor's level), and Student Members (enrolled in a graduate program). Membership categories are designed to allow inclusive participation in SPL while also maintaining the purpose of the organization. As such, Full, Early Career, and Associate members are allowed to vote and serve as elected officers while Affiliate and Student members do not have those privileges. All members must commit to following the APA Code of Ethics. See more information about membership at the SPL website: <https://www.psychleaders.org>.

SPL's renewed goals are to: (a) provide a professional home and networking for psychologists who are in leadership roles across diverse work environments; (b) provide mentorship and education to psychologist-leaders across the career spectrum; (c) enhance the science and practice of leadership for all psychologists through the journal, *Psychology of Leaders and Leadership*; and (d) enhance the application and science of leadership for our members through our annual conference. SPL seeks to provide support for psychologists working as leaders within common psychology settings (e.g., at health service organizations, in academic settings) as well as in leading and contributing to leadership in business/industry, government, and policy settings globally. Primary SPL activities include monthly membership social hours, Continuing Education sessions throughout the year, and the annual conference, which includes the institute for psychologists transitioning to leaders.

Psychology of Leaders and Leadership will continue *The Psychologist-Manager Journal's* hybrid focus on both research findings and a professional guide to leadership practice. Although the rich literature on theories of leadership and the empirical findings on the outcomes of leadership provide a strong basis for effective leadership practice, other forms of scholarship can be uniquely effective in translating that science to leaders. *Psychology of Leaders and Leadership* offers a venue for publishing manuscripts on theory development and applications, systematic reviews and meta-analyses, case studies on the practice of leadership, original empirical research, and book reviews. Case studies in particular provide a unique opportunity to ground experiences in the

science of leadership while sharing the lessons learned in the field. Using these various submission types, *Psychology of Leaders and Leadership* serves as an engaging and useful resource for researchers and professionals using psychology to understand and enhance leadership. See the journal's general call for papers for more information on submitting manuscripts to the journal (<https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/mgr/call-for-papers-general>).

SPL has transformed into a home for psychologists who are also executives, managers, leaders, and consultants. The organization recognized societal and cultural changes including a cultural and academic change in the connotation of management versus leadership, an increasing emphasis on psychologists as leaders, and a cultural increase in focus on DEI. SPL engaged in a mixed-methods approach to assess the needs of its members, expand the membership and value of the organization, recognize and honor the founders and early members, ensure a unique identity and value of SPL, and revitalize and refocus the journal as *Psychology of Leaders and Leadership*. SPL has transformed to serve as the premier organization for psychologists in leadership in the 21st century.

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