

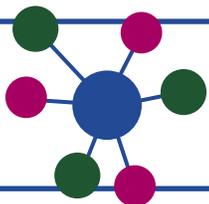
Navigating Future Practice: VUCA

The concept of **VUCA** describes environments characterized by **volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity**. This increasingly relevant term was coined by the United States military, and the concept is widely used within business, education and other sectors to promote resilient, adaptable leadership in a changing world. The realities of a VUCA world have many implications for future dietetics practice, and understanding them will prepare registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) and nutrition and dietetic technicians, registered (NDTRs) to thrive in practice.

Forecasts & Trends

What does a VUCA world look like?

- In a rapidly changing world, experience rooted in the past needs to be complemented by the knowledge that **the future may deviate from prior patterns**. Novel opportunities and threats may be missed because they do not fit expectations or former patterns. Quick responses are critical, increasing the importance of decision-making based on the best available evidence, which may come from a variety of sources and may not always be complete.
- The world is becoming increasingly unpredictable, not only due to changes in technology, information, and social systems, but also due to **unpredictability in the physical world**. Heightened resource stresses, climate change, trade conflicts, and other disruptions have far-reaching effects on food systems and human health, affecting factors ranging from the basic availability of certain foods to the affordability and nutritional quality of the food supply.
- People increasingly **struggle to trust** health professionals, technologies, digital infrastructure, media reporting, government, and even audio and visual information. This may be driven by the larger volume of information available, as well as increased politicization and polarization in all aspects of life.
- **The way we collect, access, and use data** is changing:
 - > The world is more connected — news can be spread globally within minutes.
 - > Information is easier to access, but it may be harder to identify which information is meaningful. This makes it even more challenging for the public to identify evidence-based nutrition information.
 - > The amount of data available is growing rapidly, driven in part by the proliferation of internet-based technology. This requires new ways of organizing and interpreting diverse data sets.
- Labor intensive processes are increasingly automated. **Automated processes** may be more efficient, but they can also be less transparent and less well understood.



*This is the first in a series of briefs from the **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Council on Future Practice** describing change drivers that will affect the future of the profession. This brief is intended to familiarize readers with this specific change driver and its implications for the profession, so that readers can share this knowledge with their organizations. Learn more about the **CFP's Visioning Process**.*

Charting a Course

How can RDNs and NDTRs thrive in a VUCA world?

Navigating volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity is challenging, for both individuals and organizations. Thriving in a VUCA world requires RDNs and NDTRs to think in new ways; to be effective leaders and contributors within interprofessional teams; and to continually seek opportunities to lead, learn, and grow.

RDNs and NDTRs of the future are agile

They:

- ... Engage their **collaborative networks** to make decisions that have scientific foundations, even when research is still emerging.
- ... Develop capacity for ad-hoc teams and decentralized decision making so they are prepared to **respond to a rapidly evolving environment**. Dietitian leaders empower their teams to stay abreast of current research and hone their decision-making skills.
- ... Are prepared to take advantage of software, taskification, and automation in order to **devote more time to higher-order tasks** that require critical thinking and responsive communication.

RDNs and NDTRs of the future are systems thinkers

They:

- ... Hone specific skill sets, and also **see broader connections** between actions at the individual level and actions at the level of policy, systems, and environments.
- ... Shift emphasis from providing facts to driving change, thinking critically, and **understanding complex systems**.
- ... Develop **collaborative relationships** with other professions, disciplines, and sectors. Diverse teams are better equipped to work at the systems level, be responsive to changing conditions, and think in new ways that don't rely on past patterns.

RDNs and NDTRs of the future are courageous

They:

- ... Share their expertise with **confidence**. They also recognize that the evidence base is rapidly evolving, and they continually pursue **lifelong learning**.
- ... Are willing to engage with and tolerate **risk**. They create learning environments where it is safe to share and learn from **critical feedback**.
- ... Seek out **innovative partnerships**, identifying opportunities to collaborate with both traditional allies and competitors.
- ... Are willing to serve in **non-traditional leadership roles**.

RDNs and NDTRs of the future are trusted

They:

- ... Sharpen their ability to uphold standards of **evidence-based practice** in an environment where the timeliness of decisions grows in importance.
- ... Expand their reputation as a **trusted source** in the ambiguous and psychologically fraught world of diet and health.
- ... Value and build **diversity**, inclusion, and representation in order to support diverse perspectives and communication mediums.