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**Introduction**

Assertive communication is one of the three common communication styles. These styles include passive, aggressive and assertive communication, [Eslami et al., 2016](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4752719/). In passive communication one believes that other people’s perspectives, feelings and rights matter most than his or hers. In aggressive communication one regards his opinions, feelings and rights more superior than for others. There’s no respect for the other person’s thoughts or feelings. Assertive communication takes the soft spot between those two extremes. It is about expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs in a clear, direct, and respectful way. It is all about striking a balance. This essay is aimed at exploring assertive communication, its characteristics, its benefits and how it can be used to improve personal relationships and work relations.

To beef up my assessments of the concepts of assertive communication I carried out a mini research at my work place. The research targeted 12 middle managers; 7 females and 5 males,(Table1.0). Three of them were of age 50-60 years old age ranges while 9 were of 40-50 years old age range. They were chosen randomly and amongst them were the Principal bursar, Computer programmer, Administration officer, senior teacher grade ones and 2 Heads of department-pastoral. They were given a questionnaire to complete and it was later analysed.

Table 1.0 the table of middle managers who completed the questionnaire.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Gender for interviewee** | **Age of interviewee**  **(years)** | |
| **40-50** | **50-60** |
| **Males** | 4 | 1 |
| **Females** | 5 | 2 |
| **Totals** | **9** | **3** |

The questionnaire had questions about some characteristics of assertive communication like self-expression, respect for others, handling criticism, conflict resolution and confidence in communication. The questions had responses for which the interviewees were to indicate how they handle themselves in situations that may require the application of the characteristics of assertive communication. (A copy of the question is attached to this assignment.)

The results from the responses were then compiled and analysed. It was rather interesting to realise that the middle managers indicated lack of confidence in communication and public speaking and do not place value and worth to their opinions.

Most of them showed that their opinion and feelings do not matter and some saying they would rather be behind the scene than be at the forefront. Although these observations are true they are however contrary to the expectation of an assertive manager in particular. There was one who indicated that she would interrupt a supervisee back instead of calming down and seeking a compromise or trying to understand their perspective.

**Literature review**.

The difference between assertive communication and aggressive communication.

Assertive communication is about expressing one’s thoughts, feelings, and needs in a clear, direct, and respectful way. It is about standing up for one’s rights and opinions while respecting others. People often confuse assertive communication with aggressive communication. However the two are different in that while assertive communication involves speaking one’s mind, that is done respectfully, without intimidation or belittling others. Aggressive communication on the other hand involves forcing ones opinion on others often through intimidation or belittling others. There is no respect for the other person’s thoughts, feelings or rights. Aggressive communication often leaves the subjects frustrated, defensive and seeking revenge while assertive communication promotes peace and tranquillity.

For example if friends are in the habit of borrowing each other valuables like a car, an aggressive person may respond “no way am not giving you my expensive car” while the assertive one may say “well am using it on that day so may have to drop you.” The assertive person’s response may leave friendship intact while the aggressive person may dent it.

Benefit of assertive communication.

Most writers allocate many benefits to assertive communication. They believe that it creates a harmonious and amicable resolution to conflicts, improves self-esteem and promotes peace in all types of relationships including personal and professional relationships. Some authors attribute it to reduced stress levels. They believe when students are trained to communicate assertively, that will lower stress, anxiety and depression especially among high school students [Eslami et al., 2016](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4752719/). Assertive behaviour demonstrates respect for self and others, promotes self-disclosure, self-control and positive appreciation of self-worth. This style of communication is a learned reflex that is people are not born with it, Brehm Sharon S. Kassin Saul M., 2008.

Characteristics of assertive communication.

1. They include cognitive components involving a certain way of thinking and
2. a series of Non-verbal elements such as: Tone of voice; a low and well-toned voice always deliver the message correctly, contrary to a hashed and high toned voice. Stance; One should be stand still and reduce body movement. Facial expressions; facial expression should reflect the inner feelings. For example when someone is smiling and yet communicating something that bothers him may send a conflicting message, Coman Alina, 2008. Eye contact; an assertive person looks at people directly into theirs. They maintain eye contact during discussions. Clear and direct messages; when communicating assertively one expresses his thoughts and feeling clearly and directly. Active listening; It is vital exercise active listening skills like nodding, asking clarifying questions and affirming to indicate active listening.
3. Giving feedback; when giving or receiving feedback there must be reduced or no interruptions. When practicing assertive communication one should be calm during giving or receiving feedback.
4. Respect to other people’s opinions; one should respect other people while seeking to have his or her opinions and thoughts known.
5. Open and frank self-expressions: one should be able to express his opinions openly without fear.
6. Conflict resolution skills an assertive person should be able to handle any kind of conflict and win all the time.
7. Confidence in communication; an assertive person is always confident. He or she hold his or opinions high and always find them worth sharing.
8. It advocates for the use of “I” not “You” messages when talking to others.

Assertive communication in personal and professional relationships.

Assertive communication is a crucial skill in both personal and professional relationships, Coman A., 2004. When it comes to professional success, assertive communication is key. It allows people to express their ideas effectively and give feedback constructively and navigate interpersonal dynamics with confidence. It is often required that managers should revolutionise their companies especial in the light of the ever changing and developing technology and market changes. To get the company to an adaptive mode the manager should be able to win the full potential of the supervisees or employees. Assertive communication is then a complete necessity to achieve that. He should be able to negotiate change, make employees compromise for goal achievement and for overcoming any barriers to succeed. Assertive communication may also build personal relationships. It is alleged that it improves self-esteem, confidence, self-image and effective communication. These are necessary skills even for a personal relationship.

The impact of culture in assertive communication.

Culture and its stereotypes usually play a role in impacting communication styles. In some cultures assertiveness may be viewed as rude while in some cultures it is expected. In African culture men are expected to be silent and not talk too much especially when going through difficult times. They should not even cry. It is perceived as weakness, one is seen as a weak man, while it is normal for a woman to cry. She is seen as a weaker vessel and need man’s protection. In the work place this may not be helpful especially when women hold high positions of management. People should develop self-reflection and awareness and learn to seek feedback from others in order to practice the assertive communication style.

**Results analysis of the questionnaire on assertive communication at my work place.**

The results on the attached table indicate the responses people gave towards some main features of assertive communication. The available 12 middle managers were asked to complete a questionnaire; 7 were females and 5 were males. The questionnaire focussed on self-expression, respect to others, how one should handle criticism be it constructive or destructive. It also focussed on conflict resolution skills, one’s confidence when communicating and whether people think their ability to communicate effectively or assertively was influenced by their culture or the environment they work in. The results will be analysed based on these features follows and will later be shared with the school management;

1. Self- expression:

The research wanted the people to state whether they are able to express their opinions and feeling openly and how they respond when in disagreement with someone.

All the 7 females said that they often express their opinions freely and 2 males said they always express their opinions openly and calmly during heated discussions. On responding to disagreements 11 of the managers said they express disagreements calmly.

For middle managers this is a good sign in leadership and management. Supervisees need leaders who are calm and often express their views openly. It is also useful for them to be able to discuss issues amongst themselves without withdrawing anything.

2. Respect for others.

The questionnaire asked them to state how they react when interrupted and whether they listen actively when others speak.

According to these results these managers are mature and respectful to their audience as on average 8 out 12 of them will politely ask people to let them finish talking instead of interrupt them back. On listening actively 11 of the managers said they always listen actively when other people speak. This is great as the work environment will be conducive when people respect each other.

3. Handling criticism.

The managers were asked to indicate how they handle constructive criticism and how they feel when receiving negative feedback.

Generally these middle managers are doing well in handling criticism as 10 out of 12 of them said they use constructive feedback to improve and 11 are motivated by negative feedback to improve instead of ignoring it or getting angry.

4. Conflict resolution.

The intention here was to find out how people approach conflict and whether they are comfortable discussing difficult topics with others.

In total 4 out 12 people would seek a compromise while 5 will try to understand other people’s views and 6 out of 12 said they often feel comfortable discussing difficult topics and 4 said they always feel comfortable. This looks impressive because these managers won’t avoid or be aggressive but they would attend to conflicts and resolve it assertively.

5. Confidence in communication

We also wanted to find out if the middle managers are confident to speak to their audience and whether they believe their opinions are valuable and worth sharing.

In total 4 out 12 people said they are very confident while 5 said they are moderately confident and 3 women declared they not confident at all, no male said so. In terms of believing in the value and worth of their opinions only 2 people said they always believe their opinions are valuable and worth sharing. The 10 of them said that their opinion are often valuable and worth sharing.

These managers seemed to be lacking in confidence to speak in front of their supervisees as none of them said they are extremely confident and only 4 said they are very confident and also only 2 out of 12 said their opinions are valuable and worthy.

The staff development department should mount a workshop about the value of public speaking and why managers should always believe on the value and worth of their contributions.

6. Problem solving

The research also seeked to unearth the knowledge of problem solving by the middle managers. They were to say whether it is true or false that problems can be solved without first establishing the root cause, whether being friendly can lead them to them being exploited and they would rather be behind the scenes than be at the forefront.

All the 12 of them said it is that problems cannot be addressed without seeking the root cause. In terms of being in the forefront or behind the scenes, 5 of these middle managers said it is false they would rather be on the forefront than being behind the scenes. Then 7 said it is true they rather be behind the scenes. (On the results table attached the 5 who said are males and the 7 who said true are females). In general males would prefer to be in the fore-front while females would rather be behind the scenes. From these results one may safely conclude that amongst these managers the males don’t fear leadership while females would rather be led.

7. The impact of culture and the work environment in shaping ones assertiveness.

The middle managers were to state the cause of their assertiveness be it aggressive, passive or normal assertiveness. That is whether it is their culture or the environment they work in that influenced them.

Then 3 out of 5 males said the environment shaped their assertiveness while 1 said its culture and one said both of them contributed to his level of assertiveness. The females however 5 out of 7 of them said its culture and only 2 said it’s the environment. (please find this in the result table)

The results are in agreement with the African and Botswana cultural arrangements. According to our culture men are to be strong in handling hard situation, that’s being a man. They are not even supposed to cry, it is considered a disgrace and unacceptable. It is however acceptable that a woman is a weaker vessel and can easily express her pain and cry. These cultural bottlenecks create a situation where men don’t get to learn how to be assertive and somehow gain the skills in the work environment while women on the other hand enjoy the support, can learn the skills from their parents at home and at work, Perlow Leslie, 2003. One of the females wrote “it is the way I was groomed always...” meaning culture made her to be assertive.

8. Receiving feedback from disgruntled members.

The managers were also asked how they would prefer to receive feedback from their disgruntled supervisees. Either through a letter, or someone sent to them or confrontations.

All the 12 managers said they prefer to receive feedback from disgruntled supervisees through direct contact than confrontations, letters, or someone sent to then. This when paired with whether they can be free to speak freely in public presents a positive discrepancy in that although the managers may not speak freely in public at-least in their private space they become confident and don’t fear their supervisees.

All the managers also said they believe manipulation is not the correct method of getting what they want from their supervisees.

**Conclusion**

Aggressive communication is a style in which individuals express their feelings and opinions and advocate for their needs in a way that violates the rights of others. Thus, aggressive communicators are verbally and/or physically abusive. Aaggressive communicators will often: try to dominate others ,use humiliation to control others, criticize, blame, or attack others, be very impulsive have low frustration tolerance, speak in a loud, demanding, and overbearing voice, act threateningly and rudely, not listen well, interrupt frequently and use “you” statements.

Assertive communication on the other hand is a style in which individuals clearly state their opinions and feelings, and firmly advocate for their rights and needs without violating the rights of others. These individuals value themselves, their time, and their emotional, spiritual, and physical needs and are strong advocates for themselves while being very respectful of the rights of others.

Assertive communicators will: state needs and wants clearly, appropriately, and respectfully, express feelings clearly, appropriately, and respectfully, use “I” statements, communicate respect for others, listen well without interrupting, feel in control of self, have good eye contact and speak in a calm and clear tone of voice, have a relaxed body posture, feel connected to others, feel competent and in control not allow others to abuse or manipulate them and stand up for their right.

Assertive communication is a very good tool that benefits personal and professional relationship. It improves self-images, self-esteem and promotes effective communication. Although people are not born with it, learning it seems easy and will help reduce stress, anxiety and depression among people even high school learners.

Form this study one may recommend for deliberate efforts to inculcate the skill in the work place. Managers should be trained to be assertive, give constructive feedback and learn how to receive negative feedback as this will improve work relations and produce good results and achieve organisational goals.

**References;**

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3. Coman Alina, 2008. Tehnici de comunicare. Proceduri şi mecanisme psihosociale. Bucureşti, Editura C.H.Beck. 4. Nelson-Jones, Richard, 1996. R

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**ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION QUESTIONARE.**

Communication is an important commodity in all aspects of life particularly in the work place. It must be clear and effective to achieve its intended goals. However, quiet often people especially supervisees are challenged in the reception of instructions from their supervisors. This questionnaire is aimed at helping managers to evaluate their communication style and determine how assertive they are in various situations. It is my hope that after going through this questionnaire one will have gained some insights and have achieved some level of self-introspection with the intention to modify their communication style where necessary.

**Personal information:**

**(Please complete this section)**

Full name (optional): ……………………………….. …………………………………….

Profession: ……………………………………………..

Designation: ……………………………….……………..

Nationality: …………………………………

Contact number (optional) ……………………………

Date: ……. /.….. / 2024.

**(Please place a tick in the box to indicate your choice.)**

Age: 25-30 30-40 40-50 50-60

Gender: Male Female:

Religion: Aligned Non-Aligned

**Self-expression:**

1. How often do you express your opinions and feelings openly

Never Rarely Often Always

1. How do you respond when in disagreement with someone?

Avoid the topic Agree to avoid conflict Express my disagreement calmly Argue aggressively

**Respect for others:**

1. How do you react when someone interrupts you?

Stay silent Get upset Politely ask them to let me finish Interrupt them back

1. Do you listen actively when others speak?

Never Rarely Often Always

**Handling criticism:**

1. How do you handle constructive criticism?

Ignore it Get defensive Make changes Use it for improvement

1. When you receive negative feedback how do you feel?

Angry Sad Indifferent Motivated to improve

**Conflict resolution:**

1. How do you approach conflict?

Avoid them Confront aggressively Seek a compromise Try to understand the other person’s perspective

1. Do you feel comfortable discussing difficult topics with others?







Never Rarely Often Always

**Confidence in communication:**

1. How confident are you when speaking in front of a group of employees?

Not confident at all Moderately confident Very confident extremely confident

1. Do you believe your opinions are valuable and worth sharing?

Never Rarely Often Always

1. I think that problems cannot be effectively addressed without seeking the roots of what caused these problems

Rather true Rather false

1. I am friendly and easy-going, but sometimes I get a little exploited

Rather true Rather false

1. I prefer to be behind the scene than to be at the forefront

Rather true Rather false

**(Please provide brief explanation to answer the questions below)**

1. Do you think your assertive character is a function of the culture or environment you working at? Please explain.

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

1. How do you prefer to receive feedback from your disgruntled supervisees?

……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….

1. Is manipulation a correct way to get what you want from your interactions? Please explain.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

**(**Date administered around 10-11 December 2024)

**RESULTS ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONARE ON ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION AT MY WORK. (Results table by gender)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Never | Rarely | Often | Always |
| M | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| 2 | Avoid topic | Agree to avoid topic | Express disagreement calmly | Argue aggressively |
| M | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| 3 | Stay silent | Get upset | Politely ask them to let me finish | Interrupt them back |
| M | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| F | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| 4 | Never | Rarely | Often | Always |
| M | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| 5 | Ignore it | Get defensive | Make changes | Use it to improve |
| M | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| 6 | Angry | Sad | Indifferent | Motivated to improve |
| M | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| 7 | Avoid them | Confront aggressively | Seek a compromise | Try to understand other persons view |
| M | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| F | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 8 | Never | Rarely | Often | Always |
| M | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| F | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 |
| 9 | Not confident at all | Moderately confident | Very confident | Extremely confident |
| M | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| F | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 10 | Never | Rarely | Often | Always |
| M | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 |
| F | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| 11 | Rather true | Rather false | Not sure | I don’t know |
| M | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| F | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 12 | Rather true | Rather false | Not sure | I don’t know |
| M | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| F | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 13 | Rather true | Rather false | Not sure | I don’t know |
| M | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| F | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 14 | Culture | Environment | Either of the two | None of the two |
| M | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| F | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 15 | Direct contact | Send someone | letter | Confrontation |
| M | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| F | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 16 | Yes | No | I don’t know | Not sure |
| M | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| F | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 |