

## Assertiveness: It's Influence on Job Performance

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### Abstract

Service sectors including insurance sector are dominating the economic environment of the nation. The contribution of service sector in country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is ever-increasing. The share has risen from 50.4 per cent in 2000-01 to 59.0% in 2011-12. People are conscious about post-retirement leisure and hassle-free life. As such, insurance sector is receiving the attention of economists, industrialists and national planning commission and is a booming industry. Insurance restores a prevailing sense of security and confidence in the mind of the people in case of eventualities. This has been evinced in a number of interdisciplinary academic discourses by researchers, actuaries, academicians, and economists in our country. The role of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) is exemplary. The role of marketing, particularly by personal selling, as is done by the insurance agents of the LIC of India is unique. The review of literature has revealed that most of the studies, encompassing sales performance, have given stress on different job behaviours of which assertiveness is inimitable. A fundamental research was pursued to identify possible causal relationship between job performance (dependent variable) and assertiveness (as one independent variable).

**KEYWORDS:** Assertiveness, Tenets of assertiveness, Assertive communication, Assertive behavior

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### 1. Introduction

Service characteristics distinctively differ from that of products. Service characteristics include intangibility, perishability, inseparability, heterogeneity, and ownership. Services produced can never be stored. They need to be offered as soon as they are produced. For example, a teacher can't transfer knowledge in absence of students; an advocate can't suggest legal advices in absence of clients; so forth. An insurance agent can convince prospective customer to convert to actual insurant in face to face communication. Accomplishing the task an agent needs some special skills of which assertiveness is unique and inimitable. The agents need to understand the sentiment and inherent need, be courageous enough, and communicate forcefully such that both the customer and the agent are benefited.

### 2. Objectives

The prime objective of the study is: To examine whether differ group of performers (low, moderate, and high performers) differ with respect to their assertiveness; to measure the extent of correlations between assertiveness scores (independent variable) and performance scores (dependent variable); their degree of association; and their dependency.

### 3. Assertive behaviour: A conceptual framework

Assertiveness is social boldness. Assertiveness was initially described as a personality trait by Salter (1949) when it was stated that some people had it, and some people didn't. Later Wolpe (1958) and Lazarus (1966) redefined assertiveness as the ability of expressing 'personal rights and feelings who also found that every body could be assertive in some situations, and totally ineffective in some other situation. A person is assertive when he stands up for his rights in such a way that the rights of others are not violated. Alberti and Emmons (1970) and Jakubowski (1978) deliberated that people who show relatively less assertive behaviour do not believe that they have the right to express their feelings, beliefs and opinions. In the deepest sense, they reject the idea that they are born equal and are to be treated as equals. They grew up doubting themselves and are looking to others for validation and guidance. Assertiveness is expressing personal rights and feelings without fear and to stand for the rights without encroaching and trampling others rights. Being assertive is about respecting oneself enough to state and what one wants from other people. Assertiveness also means respecting other people and their right to express their needs (Ferguson, 1996). Assertiveness behaviour helps to feel positive to hold the self-esteem forceful, express the needs, wants, and feelings honestly, allows others to uphold their views without dismissing or insulting them (Paterson, 2001).

Assertiveness has been defined by Bowles (2001) as a positive and constructive way of relating to other people respecting their needs, wants, and rights, as well as, one's own needs, wants, and rights. Assertive behaviour enables persons to act in their own best interests, to stand up for themselves without undue anxiety, to express honest feelings comfortably, or to exercise personal rights without denying the rights of others [Web site: <http://www2.arkansas.net>]. Assertiveness directly helps an individual to get what one wants.

Alberti and Emmons (1991) distinctly differentiated Assertive, Non-assertive, Aggressive and Passive-Aggressive Communication:

- (a) Assertive: - standing up for oneself without denying the rights of others; expressing oneself honestly, with both parties on equal footings, acting in one's own best interest without hurting, manipulating or putting others down.
- (b) Non-assertive: - not speaking up in own interest; allowing others to choose, denying oneself from the opportunity to express feelings and desires; usually results in feeling just and anxious, without achieving desired goal.
- (c) Aggressive: - expressing oneself at the expense of others; hurting, humiliating, putting down, or denying the rights of others, making choices for others and minimizing their worth, usually generates bitterness and desire for revenge.
- (d) Passive-aggressive: - non-confronting, tricky behavior designed to control others through indirect methods (e.g. backstabbing, sarcasm, ignoring, sniping, procrastinating, and sabotage).

Assertiveness is an antidote to fear, shyness, passivity, and even anger, and so there is an astonishingly wide range of situations in which assertiveness was appropriate (Schimmel, 1976) who also suggested several kinds of assertive behaviours: (<http://mhnet.org/psychhelp/chap13>).

- To speak up, make requests, ask for favours and generally insist for ones rights are respected as a significant, equal human being. To overcome the fears and self-depreciation that keep one from doing these things.
- To express negative emotions (complaints, resentment, criticism, disagreement, intimidation, the desire to be left alone) and to refuse requests.
- To show positive emotions (joy, pride, liking someone, attraction) and to give compliments, and accept compliments with a smile "Thank you."
- To ask why and question authority or tradition, not to rebel but to assume responsibility for asserting your share of control of the situation - and to make things better.
- To initiate, carry on, change and terminate conversations comfortably. Share ones feelings, opinions and experiences with others.
- To deal with minor irritations before your anger builds into intense resentment and explosive aggression.

Jakubouski (1978) reminded some basic rights, any human being must have in possession, which are: the right to act in ways that promotes dignity and self-respect without violating others' rights; to be treated with respect; to say 'No' and not feel guilty; to experience and express ones feelings; to take time to slow down and think; to change one's mind; to ask for what one wants; to do less than one is exceptionally capable of doing; and to ask for information; to make mistakes; feel good about oneself.

#### **4. Tenets of assertiveness**

The "Tenets" of assertiveness philosophy propounded by Jakubouski (1978) elucidated the various outcomes of assertiveness in the various apt of work life as:

- By standing for oneself and letting self known to others, we gain self-respect and respect for other people.
- By trying to live our lives in such a way that we never cause anyone to feel hurt under any circumstances, as in that case, we end up hurting ourselves also.
- When we stand up for ourselves and express our honest feelings and thoughts in a direct and appropriate way, everyone usually benefits in the long run. Likewise, when we demean other people, we also demean ourselves and everyone involved usually loses in the process.
- By sacrificing our integrity and denying our personal feelings, relationships are usually damaged or prevented from developing. Likewise, personal relationships are damaged when we try to control others through hostility, intimidation and or guilt.
- Personal relationships become more authentic and satisfying when share our true reactions with other people and do not block others' sharing their experiences.
- Not letting others know what we think and feel is just as inconsiderate as not listening to others people's thoughts and feelings.
- When we frequently sacrifice our rights, we teach other people to take advantage of us.
- By acting assertively and telling other people how their behaviour affects us, we are giving them an opportunity to change their behaviour, and we are showing respect for their rights to know where they stand with us.

Assertiveness is nothing more than compelling self-assurance, an ability to speak up for oneself, making one's viewpoint heard and known without trampling on the rights of others, while Gillen (1995) stated the assertive interaction as the beginning of a rational, non-accusational conversation and assertiveness helps achieving results, respect people, build confidence and self-esteem, reduce stress, gain peoples' liking.

Assertiveness means expressing oneself with confidence without fear and without resorting to passive, aggressive or manipulative behaviour. Assertiveness emphasizes expressing one's needs, opinions, feelings being confident that he or she will not be dominated, exploited or coerced against his/her wishes. Tone of voice, intonation, volume, facial expression, gesture and body language, all play a part in assertive communication (Bishop, 2000).

Investigating the relationships amongst assertiveness, aggressiveness and verbal intentions using scenarios depicting incidents from three service industries, Swanson and McIntyre (1998) concluded that the nature of intended verbal communications was positive for assertive consumers in comparison with nonassertive consumers.

Dalhousie University (1998) cautioned that while practising assertiveness skill any one must be aware of the application in the areas e.g. eye contact, facial expression, body posture, distance/contact, gesture, voice, fluency, timing, listening, and thoughts. The University also mentioned Active listening, Clear statement of expectations, Saying "No", Giving positive recognition, Use of 'Given that' statement, Selective ignoring, Assertive withdrawal, Use of 'I' message, as essential features of assertiveness communication.

So, assertiveness not only enables behavioural modification, it also greatly improves the mental health of the person practicing assertiveness.

## 5. Assertive Communication

Assertive communication leads to a win-win situation. Few examples of assertive communication will further illuminate the strength of this type of messages.

### 5.1 Use factual descriptions desist from offering verdict

Compare the following

#### 3.1.1 Express the facts - Compare the following

- "This is a sloppy work, carelessly done." (Manager is aggressive)
- "The pages (say, 7, 10, 24, 26... of this Draft HR Manual are not in order. Please review and submit." (Manager is Assertive)

#### 3.1.2 Avoid exaggerations - Compare the following

- "You are never coming on time in the HR planning meeting!" (Manager is aggressive)
- "(Looking at the record of attendance) the HR manager said, in the last meeting also you were late by more than one hour. You are 45 minutes late today. Please ensure timely arrival." (Manager is assertive)

#### 3.1.3 Use 'I' not 'You' - Compare the following:

- "You always interrupt my success stories!" (Manager is aggressive)
- "I would like to express my viewpoints without being interrupted." (Manager is assertive)

3.1.4 Express thoughts, feelings, and opinions reflecting ownership - Compare the following:

- "He makes me angry." (Manager is aggressive as denies ownership of feelings)
- "I get angry when he breaks his promises." (Manager is assertive as he is expressing his own feelings)

## 6. Assertive behaviour: Its measurement

Psychometric instruments help to measure the extent of assertiveness. For example, Rathus (1973), Jerabek (1996), Holtz and Cadogan (1990) had developed psychometric instruments to measure various psychological variables including assertiveness. Of all the instruments the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule are widely used till date. The instrument designed Jerabek (1996) 'Cyberia Shrink - Body Mind Queendom' facilitates online measurement and at the end of the test presents suggestions.

### Rathus Assertiveness Schedule

Rathus Assertiveness schedule is a thirty-item schedule having six options per item extensively used to assess and determine the level of assertiveness of a person engaged in any profession. There are 13 positive items and 17 negative items. The schedule have high test-retest reliability [ $r = 0.78, p < 0.01$ ].

Sedat and Eker (1998), Department of Applied Psychology, Turkish University, used Rathus Assertiveness Schedule while working on examining stress, social support and assertiveness among university students in a prospective design.

## 7. Methodology

### 5.1 Stratification of sample

The sample of size 219 was stratified based on the Job performance scores and Assertiveness scores in three classes. The stratification was necessary to pursue Chi-square and ANOVA tests.

Class 1: From lowest score to  $(M - SD/2)$

Class 2: From  $(M - SD/2)$  to  $(M + SD/2)$

Class 3: From  $(M + SD/2)$  to highest score

M: Indicates mean

SD: Indicates standard deviation.

Table 1	Assertiveness Grade	Low	Mod	High	Total
		37	139	43	219

Table 2:	Performance Grade	Low	Mod	High	Total
		30	141	48	219

### 8. Results of Statistical Tests

Statistical tools: Correlation, Chi-square test (Analysis of Frequency, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used.

Correlation of Job performance with Assertiveness

6.1 Pearson Correlation of Job performance with Assertiveness was calculated

Table 3:	Correlation: Between Job performance and Assertiveness	
Correlation	219 Agents: Job_Perf_Scr by Ass_Scr	
	r statistic	0.72
	99% CI	0.62 to 0.79
	2-tailed p	<0.0001 (t approximation)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job_Perf_Scr indicates job performance scores</li> <li>• Ass_Scr indicates assertiveness scores</li> </ul>	

The value of r (= 0.72) indicates that the extent of correlation job performance and assertiveness is high.

6.2 Chi-square test (Analysis of Frequency)

Chi-square test helps to ascertain the ‘Goodness of Fit’ and extent of association. In order to carry out the Chi-square test the distribution of sample were tabled as shown below.

Table 4	Job Performance by Assertiveness			
Chi-square test - Job Performance Grade by Assertiveness Grade				
Performance Grade	Assertiveness Grade			
	Low	Mod	High	Total
Low	18	11	1	30
Moderate	18	113	10	141
High	1	15	32	48
	37	139	43	219

X <sup>2</sup> =127.50	p <0.0001	No of cell with frequency less than 5: -	2
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The frequencies of 2 cells are less than 5. Chi-square test can be carried out if frequency is minimum 5. As such, the cross partition table of assertiveness and job performance had to be restructured as.

- (i) Assertiveness: Low and Not Low and Performance: Low and Not Low (Table 4a)
- (ii) Assertiveness: Not High and High, Performance: Not High and High, Table 4b)

Table 4a	(a) Job Performance by Assertiveness		
Job Performance Grade	Assertiveness Grade		
	Ass_Low	Ass_Not_Low	Total
JP_Low	18	12	30

	(5.1)	(24.9)	
JP_Not_Low	19 (31.9)	170 (157.1)	189
Total	37	182	219
$X^2 = 42.51$	$p < 0.0001$	Contingency coefficient, $C = 0.40$	

Table 4b	(b) Job Performance by Assertiveness		
Job Performance Grade	Assertiveness Grade		
	Ass_Not_High	Ass_High	Total
JP_Not_High	160 (137.4)	11 (33.6)	171
JP_High	16 (38.6)	32 (9.4)	48
Total	176	43	219
$X^2 = 82.40$	$p < 0.0001$	Contingency Coefficient, $C = 0.52$	
JP_Not_High: Low and moderate job performance grades Ass_Not_High: Low and moderate assertiveness grades			

The values of  $X^2$  (= 42.51) and  $p$  (<0.0001) in Table 4a and  $X^2$  (=82.40) and  $p$  (<0.0001) in Table 4b indicate that association between the level of assertiveness and job performance is extremely significant. The strength of the relation is 0.40 and 0.52 respectively.

To further investigate the three categories of operational agents, viz. low, moderate and high performer, and confirm the interrelationship between job performance and assertiveness, ANOVA was applied.

### 6.3 ANOVA on Job performance scores

Respondents were classified in three groups: Low, Moderate, and High performer on the basis of the means and standard deviation of the job performance scores.

Table 5(a)	Source of variation	SSq	DF	MSq	F	p
	Between groups	10662.4	2	5331.2	395.37	<0.0001
	Within groups	2912.6	216	13.5		
	Total	13575.0	218			

Table 5(b)	Contrast	Difference	LSD - 99% CI	Remarks
	JP_Low vs JP_Mod	-11.5	-13.37 to -9.5	(significant)
	JP_Low vs JP_High	-23.5	-25.73 to -21.3	(significant)
	JP_Mod vs JP_High	-12.1	-13.65 to -10.5	(significant)

The value of  $F (= 395.3)$  and  $p (<0.0001)$  assures that the three groups viz. high performing (HP), moderate performing (MP) and Low performing (LP) agents of LIC differ significantly. The difference between the mean scores of the HP, MP and LP, when considered in pairs, are also significant. That is why performance could be taken as the classificatory variables.

### 9. Job Performance by Assertiveness

Three distinct groups: Assertiveness scores of Low job performers, Moderate job performers, and High job performers. The sources of variances of between groups and within groups are tabled.

Table 6(a)	Source of variation	SSq	DF	MSq	F	p
	Between groups	26651.738	2	13325.869	73.67	<0.0001
	Within groups	39072.243	216	180.890		
	Total	65723.982	218			

Table 6(b) Job Performance by Assertiveness			
Contrast	Difference	LSD 99% CI	Significance
Ass_JP_Low vs Ass_JP_Mod	-15.534	-22.562 to -8.506	(significant)
Ass_JP_Low vs Ass_JP_High	-36.300	-44.435 to -28.165	(significant)
Ass_JP_Mod vs Ass_JP_High	-20.766	-26.607 to -14.925	(significant)
Ass_JP_Low, Ass_JP_Mod and Ass_JP_High denote assertiveness scores of low, moderate and high performing agents.			

Referring to the above tables, the value of  $F (=73.67)$ , the null hypothesis, ‘There is no difference amongst HP, MP and LP agents with respect to their assertiveness scores’ is rejected. Thus the three groups of assertiveness scores of HP, MP and LP LIC agents are significantly different.

### 10. Conclusion and Recommendation

Assertiveness is social boldness, compelling self assurance, and it means an ability and willingness to easily speak up for oneself, make one’s viewpoint heard and known and without trampling on the rights of others. The sample was been categorized in three groups, low, moderate and high performing agents by percentile cut off. The performances of the agents are associated with the level of assertiveness. The low, moderate and high performing agents differ significantly with respect to their assertiveness. Job performance has many influencers like job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational commitment, organizational culture, etc. However, assertiveness play a distinct and dominant role without trampling on others responsibilities; and in shaping behavioural modification. Positive assertion intertwined

with motivational urge and feeling of accomplishment generates a synergistic outcome to end up with a win-win situation in favour of both the customers and organization. Is it recommended that organizations may install a system of measuring assertiveness periodically and conduct management development programmes. Obviously this effort will significantly contribute to enhancement of employee productivity and in turn organizational productivity.

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