

An Overview of the Literature of Assertiveness and Assertiveness Inventory

Thahira Bibi bt TKM Thanga and Halimah Mohd Yusof
Faculty of Management, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, Johor, Malaysia

Abstract: This study presents the main findings of a literature review carried out on the assertiveness and assertiveness inventory. This study focuses on various definitions of assertiveness by many researchers and the inventories used to measure assertiveness. It is hoped that this literature review will help other researchers on the subject matter.

Key words: Assertiveness, assertiveness inventory, literature review, definitions of assertiveness, inventories

INTRODUCTION

It is not easy to assert yourself without being labelled in Asian culture. Asian culture defines being “Avocal” as exceptional case. Assertiveness had always been described as a spontaneous, outgoing, direct and energetic individual who has a sincere liking for people, decisive, responsible and anxiety free. This is because assertiveness lies along a continuum between aggressiveness and passive behavior. Individual with assertive behavior is recognized for their capability in adjusting with the environment health and also gratifying interpersonal relationships. Thus, this study will an indicator to draw attention on the assertiveness concept and the inventories used.

ASSERTIVENESS

Assertiveness is a concept which emerged in the late 1940 s, beginning with the pioneering work of Salter. He used the terms excitatory personality and assertive interchangeably to describe a person who has emotional freedom and honest responses. Lange and Jakubowski (1976) perceived assertiveness as Astanding up for personal rights and expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways which do not violate another person’s rights. It implies that assertiveness is not the domination of the other person or deference and does not involve aggression or manipulation. It involves respect for oneself and others through communication and compromise. It is not A simply a way to get what one wants. The emphasis is not on achieving goals but on the means of expressing them.

Stubbs (1985) affirms that assertive behavior is a behavior that expresses or specifies the rights of the individual while respecting the feelings and rights of other

individuals. Literally when discussed about assertiveness culture, organization members which practices this behavior will have ways of dealing with others such as calm when dealt with unexpected situations. Adler defined assertiveness as the ability to communicate range of thoughts and emotions with confidence and skill is yet a third variation. The fourth exemplifies further clinical approach: “assertive training is a behavior therapy procedure aimed in reducing maladaptive anxiety which prevents a person from expressing himself directly honestly and spontaneously”.

It is important to note that assertiveness describes behaviors, not personalities. Assertion can be described to be made up of three primary components: behaviors such as making or refusing a request or expressing affection; to people such as friends, spouse, parents and the authorities within a situational cultural context. These three dimensions (behaviors, persons and situational) need to be considered in defining and assessing assertiveness.

Wolpe (1958) pointed out assertiveness as “the effective communication of personal thoughts and feelings in interpersonal encountered in a fashion that respects and regards the thoughts and feelings for others. Wolpe believed that assertive behavior Arefers not only to more or less aggressive behavior but also to the outward expression of friendly, affectionate and other non-anxious feelings”. He used relaxation training and assertion training to help clients overcome anxiety in interpersonal relations. He believed that the expression of feelings such as affection or anger would inhibit anxiety. Alberti defined assertiveness as “behaviour which enables a person to act in his own best interest stand up for himself without undue anxiety and to express his rights without destroying the rights of others”. Assertive behaviour is a set of situation-relevant skills in an interpersonal context.

Jakubowski and Spector divided the type of behavior into aggressive and passive. The purpose of aggressive behavior is to humiliate, dominate or put the other person down rather than to simply express one's honest emotions or thoughts. It is an attack on a person rather than on the person's behavior. This aggressive behavior is used to manipulate, dominate, humiliate and infringe on the rights of others. Aggressive behavior is defined as behavior which enhances the self at the expense of others and achieves desired goals by choosing for others or violating other's rights (Passmore, 1977).

Non-assertive or passive behavior is a type of interpersonal behavior that results in a person's rights being violated by another. Non-assertive or passive behavior invites others to infringe upon and take advantage of the non-assertive individual. Non-assertive person typically denies self and inhibit from expressing actual feelings. Continued non assertion and frequently accompanied by acts of chronic self-apology decreases the sense of self-esteem and leads to feelings of worthlessness and depression.

Tomaka suggested that assertiveness as a learned social skill, has a way of lowering psychological stress. They emphasized the studies they reviewed mainly involve the use of self-report measures which may lead to limitation with their research. Elliot and Gramling commented that individuals who assert themselves utilize a variety of social supports and derive more benefit from these supports than do nonassertive individuals.

Paterson defined assertiveness as "a multidimensional attribute or skill which includes negative assertions such as disagreeing with others". The categories of assertions as outlined by the researchers include requests for others to change behavior, confirmation of one's basic personal rights, refusal of requests that are not reasonable and responses to constructive feedback. Assertiveness, according to Ryan is a behavior that can learn. Its purpose is to extinguish self-defeating thinking in favor of healthy modes of communication.

Assertiveness is believed to be an interpersonal behavior resulting from an intrapersonal cognitive state. In other words, assertiveness is an ability of oneself to assert and saying no to requests that one does not want to fulfill. In recent decades, however the concept of assertiveness has broadened and includes interpersonal competence in conflicts, capacity to well maintain relationships and the capability of saying no to requests that one does not want to fulfil. Furthermore, it also includes interpersonal competence in conflicts and capacity to maintain relationships.

According to Eneva and Mavrodiev, they explained in the late 70's, a number of psychologists had paid

attention to assertiveness as a means of protecting individual rights. Smith emphasized that the ability to protect own human rights in a humane and democratic way, without prejudice to the fundamental rights of others was among the important characteristics of assertive conduct. Tennant defined assertiveness as a self-expression through which a person stands up for his or her own rights without violating the rights of others. However, Burley defined assertive as a form of behavior that shows respect for self and others. Assertive behavior is mainly on being transparent and honest with ourselves and others, listen to the views of others and able to stand up for yourself and at the same time understand other people's situation.

Assertiveness is closely related to self-imagination self-respect that helps to create self-belief on inner relation of people. Defending of self-rights, saying "no", beginning, continue, ending and how to solve problem, pressure endurance, freedom sensation, recognizing in selection, getting acceptance are of common characteristics of self-esteem and assertive persons. Assertiveness is a skill that can be thought but not a skill inherited from birth. Nobody is constantly assertive. For example, a person can easily be assertive with strangers yet he finds it difficult to be assertive with his parents. A person who chooses to be assertive with his friends in a situation can be passive in another.

Assertive behavior also captures the communication of strong opinions and feelings. Assertive communication of personal opinions, needs and boundaries has been defined as communication that diminishes none of the individuals involved in the interaction with emphasis placed on communication accuracy and respect for all persons engaged in the exchange. Assertiveness involves a degree of mutuality between ourselves and other people. To learn to be assertive is related to be able to decide when and where to express himself (Pfeiffer, 2010). Assertiveness enables an individual to act in their own best interests to stand up for themselves without undue anxiety, to express honest feelings comfortably and to express personal rights without denying the rights of others.

To summarize the literature on the definition of assertiveness, researchers have approached this subject from different analytical perspectives but common themes relate to defined assertiveness in standing up for personal rights-expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways. It is important to note also that by being assertive individual should always respect the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of other people. Assertiveness concerns being able to express feelings wishes, wants and desires appropriately and is an

important personal and interpersonal skill. In all interactions with other people, whether at home or at work with employers, customers or colleagues assertiveness can help individual to express themselves in a clear, open and reasonable way, without undermining the rights of his/her self or others.

ASSERTIVENESS INVENTORY

Rathus assertiveness schedule: Rathus (1973) is the most widely used measure of assertiveness and conceptualizes assertiveness as social boldness and frankness. Studies assessing minority groups in the US with a variety of measures of assertiveness have yielded group differences, for example: Less assertiveness for Japanese American compared to US white-collar workers and greater assertiveness for black undergraduates compared to white undergraduates. Results of studies as mentioned have been criticized for using measures such as RAS which is largely based upon whites as dominant culture that conceptions of assertiveness and thus cannot accurately too be compared of such groups.

According to Law *et al.* (1979) they performed a principal components analysis of the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) to investigate the adequacy of this inventory as a global measure of assertiveness. The analysis (using 956 undergraduate students) indicated that the RAS does not provide a one dimensional index of assertiveness but rather measures a number of factors including situation-specific assertive behavior, aggressiveness and more general assertiveness. The results discusses in relation to the small number of items comprising the schedule and rather limited repertoire of different behavioral situations sampled in the items.

A recent qualitative study found that Latinos exhibit strategic assertion as a mode of dealing with conflict over assertiveness and passiveness. A passive person is someone who gives into conflict or demands without consideration for their own needs while an assertive person is defined as someone who fulfilled their needs but does not avoid conflict (consider the rights of others). Meanwhile, a strategic person is defined as someone that fulfilled their needs but works to avoid areas of potential conflict. The current study seeks to create a reliable and unbiased scale of assertiveness, strategic assertiveness and passivity. Williams emphasized the development and psychometric inquiry of the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) resulting with a concise, reliable and valid screening instrument. The RAS constitutes the major components of responsible assertive behavior, (i.e., assertion and respect) and is easy to administer and

score. While additional data needed to determine test re-test reliability, this measure of stability is expected to be similar to the factor analysis alpha values.

Assertion Inventory (AI): Assertion Inventory is one of the instruments investigated with the expectation that one of them might provide a systematic way of detecting individual needs at the onset of assertion training. The result showed the discovery and subsequent use of the Gambrill-Richey Assertion Inventory (AI) as an excellent instrument developed in 1975.

According to Gambrill and Richey (1975) assertion inventory consisted of 40 items self-report inventory which permits respondents to note each item according to their degree of discomfort, probability of engaging in the behavior and situations they would like to handle more assertively. Normative data from a college population as well as data from women taking part in assertion training groups are included. Comparative distributions of these populations over four combinations of response probability and discomfort scores are presented as well as reliability and validity data. The value of the inventory both in clinical settings has been discussed in this research.

Assertion Inventory (AI) that developed by Gambrill and Richey (1975), measured an individual's discomfort with and probability of engaging in assertive behavior. The Assertion Inventory measures equally important variables of assertive behavior (i.e., discomfort and engagement of behavior) as the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) and as such is an appropriate measure of concurrent validity (Cronbach, 1970).

Assertiveness Inventory (AI): Assertiveness is the ability to formulate and communicate one's own thoughts, opinions and wishes in a clear, direct and non-aggressive way. This test determines whether a lack of assertiveness skills may be keeping you from fulfilling your potentials and reaching your goals (Lazarus, 1966).

According to Wolpe (1958) the Assertiveness Inventory is a list of questions that will be helpful in assessing your assertiveness. Completing this inventory may be a useful exercise in increasing your awareness of your behavior in situations that call for assertive responding. The inventory is not a standardized psychological test, therefore there are no right or wrong answers and there is no formal scoring procedure.

College self-expression scale: According to Galassi College self-expression scale is a 50 item self-report inventory designed to measure assertiveness in college students. The scale taps three dimensions of assertiveness (positive assertiveness, negative assertiveness and self-affirmation) in a variety of

interpersonal contexts: family, strangers, business relations, authority figures and opposite peer genders. Normative, reliability and validity data were presented. The value of the scale to both clinicians and researchers were discussed.

There are four educational institutions administered the college self-expression scale that measures assertiveness. The obtained responses were factor analyzed using the principal axis solution and the various maximal rotation methods. The results showed four main factors that included 43 of the 50 items of the original scale. These factors were identified as the willingness to take risks in interpersonal interactions, the ability to communicate feelings, setting rules and rectifying injustices and the presence or absence of a tendency to invoke a self-punitive attitude. The findings interpreted are as adding support to the validity of the scale as a measure of assertiveness.

Adult self-expression scale: The adult self expression scale was intended to address aggression, dominance and abasement throughout the adult population. It is designed to measure an individual's assertion. This test is a self-report measuring over 48 items and done in a test retest manner. The adult self expression scale is used to compare different aspects (one example is self-esteem and indirect aggression) in order to help come up with ways of improving individual issues. The adult self expression Scale was compared and combined with other tests to create a further reliable test. The individuals are to answer the questions based on experiences and their reactions to different situations. All of this information will help in understanding different individual's reactions.

The adult self expression scale is a combination of several different high validity points of several different tests. The test now includes 48 items based on assertion. This test was originally developed by corrections made to the adjective check list scales with discriminate analysis procedure. Then behavior questionnaire was added and revised using the college self-expression scale to create a further reliable test that could be conducted amongst all adults. They also used the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) and the Buss-Durkee Inventory as a measure of reporting assertion and aggression.

The adult self expression scale uses a 5-point likert format which has 25 positively worded questions and 23 negatively worded questions. All these tests were combined to develop the adult self expression scale. Individuals were tested on behaviors such as expressing personal opinions, refusing unreasonable requests, taking the initiative, expressing positive/negative feelings, standing up for rights and asking favors of others. The

test had 14 different factors that created variances. Overall, the 14 factors were defined as interpersonal situations (authority figures, parents, intimate relations) whereas the other 10 were defined as assertive behaviors.

However, Gay stressed on the outcome of their present studies designed to provide further validation of the adult self expression scale as a measure of assertive behavior for adults in general. Validation approached by the Campbell and Fiske multi-trait and multi-method procedure was concerned with the convergent relationship of assertion measured by the scale. It measures dominance and abasement as well as the discriminate capability of the instrument in terms of its relationship to various types of aggression, both verbal and physical. The reliability and validity of adult self expression scale and other scales used to create the adult self expression scale have high test-retest reliability and a minimum of moderate construct validity and concurrent validity. Throughout, the outcome proved that there may be a link between assertion and aggression. The attempt to validate assertiveness scales has correlated from low to moderate linkage of aggression.

The scale is developed from a combination of different tests with high reliability and a moderate validity. There are more tests being done to improve the cost of such testing (considering group testing vs individualized). The test is still being monitored and improved on so that it can be implemented across the general public adults.

CONCLUSION

This study reviews various definitions on assertiveness and the inventories that can be used to measure assertiveness. The need to use each inventory varies based on the objective of the research. It is also determined by the reliability and validity of each measurement. This study will further provide better understanding on the assertiveness behavior.

REFERENCES

- Cronbach, L.J., 1970. Essentials of Psychological Testing. 3rd Edn., Harper and Row, New York, Pages: 752.
- Gambrill, E.D. and C.A. Richey, 1975. An assertion inventory for use in assessment and research. *Behav. Ther.*, 6: 550-561.
- Lange, A.J. and P. Jakubowski, 1976. Responsible Assertive Behavior. Research Press Publishers, Champaign, Illinois.

- Law, H.G., E. Wilson and B. Crassini, 1979. A principal components analysis of the Rathus assertiveness schedule. *J. Consulting Clin. Psychol.*, 47: 631-633.
- Lazarus, R.S., 1966. *Psychological Stress and the Coping Process*. McGraw-Hill, New York, USA., Pages: 466.
- Passmore, B.A., 1977. *Assertiveness of women intercollegiate athletes*. Ph.D Thesis, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. <http://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=7215020>.
- Pfeiffer, R.H., 2010. *Relationships: Assertiveness Skills*. Growth Publishing, New York, USA. isBN:1893505340, Pages: 42.
- Rathus, S.A., 1973. A 30-item schedule for assessing assertive behavior. *Behav. Ther.*, 4: 398-406.
- Stubbs, D., 1985. *How to Use Assertiveness at Work*. Gower Publishing Company, Farnham, England.
- Wolpe, J., 1958. *Psychotherapy by Reciprocal Inhibition*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California.