

ASSERTIVENESS: THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND BENEFITS OF ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Ecaterina POSTOLATI^{a*}

^a Moldova State University, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova

Abstract

In this informational-analytical paper there are analyzed and summarized the results of the most relevant international studies on assertiveness and assertive behaviour, related to the identification of its strengths and the perception of this phenomenon in society. This work aims to summarize different approaches to investigating assertiveness from various perspectives, analyze qualities and psychological characteristics of an assertive person and benefits of assertive behaviour, as well as components of assertiveness. In this article assertiveness is revealed as an anti-manipulative trait, the golden mean between aggressiveness and passivity, as well as a strategy to protect against manipulation.

Key words: assertiveness, assertive behaviour, benefits, manipulation, personal rights

Approaches to investigating assertiveness

The phenomenon of assertiveness is a relatively new concept in psychology and is used to characterise adaptive personality traits. Today, the content of this concept in psychological science remains unclear. In this regard, the analysis of the phenomenon on the basis of philosophical and psychological approaches and concepts of personality is highly relevant.

The concept of assertiveness was formed in the late 50's - early 60's of the 20th century through the contributions of Salter (2002). It is based on key provisions of humanistic psychology and transactional analysis. The term "assertiveness" comes from the English "to assert" - to insist. In a simple interpretation, it denotes the person's ability to "stand one's ground" and defend one's point of view. Assertive behaviour is a constructive way of interpersonal interaction, acting as an

* PhD Student
E-mail address: epostolati@gmail.com

alternative to destructive types of behaviour - manipulation and aggression. This alternative is especially relevant in view of the fact that manipulative relations are very common in modern society and, unfortunately, tend to spread more and more. The growth of manipulative relations was caused by social upheavals of the last decades which led to unfortunate consequences, both in the public and individual consciousness of a large part of society in the post-Soviet space countries. This is evidenced, in particular, by a significant increase in corruption, which is one of the manifestations of manipulative relations.

The study of the issue of assertiveness in psychology originates in behavioural therapy. Later, Wolpe (1958), Alberti and Emmons (2008) and other behavioural psychologists laid the general bases for understanding the assertiveness phenomenon as self-confidence. At the same time, assertiveness was defined by Shiltsova (2012) as a consequence of learning, the acquired reaction of success to a social stimulus.

We can note that there are three approaches to investigating assertiveness from various perspectives.

1. Assertiveness manifests itself as spontaneous behaviour. An assertive person freely expresses their feelings and thoughts, does not limit themselves to rituals and conventions. In general, the individualism of such a person is recognized, but, with the unfavourable development of such qualities, the person may become focused only on one's own needs and interests, without taking others into consideration (Lebedeva, 2014).

2. From another point of view, assertiveness may be defined as adequacy. In contrast to the previous approach, in this case, assertive behaviour is visible when, while interacting with other people, a person flexibly changes behaviour, according to accepted standards, norms and rules, reacting to specific circumstances. Assertive skills suggest the possibility of constructive behaviour that does not harm other people, but at the same time, the ability to tactfully and politely defend one's own opinion, accept and provide feedback, as well as the ability to act decisively when goals are achieved (Stepanov, 2006). K. Rudestam, emphasizing the aspect of social interactions in assertiveness, also notes that assertive behaviour is the most constructive way of interpersonal interaction that allows a person to resist aggression and manipulation (Shiltsova, 2012). Russian scientists Nikitin and Kharlamenkova (2000) also define assertiveness as "self-affirmation through constructive activity".

3. According to the third approach, assertiveness is seen as perseverance which manifests itself in the form of the person's persistence. This concept offers an alternative to passive and

aggressive behaviour typical of people with low and overrated self-esteem. May and Ulrich (apud Paramonova, 2009) see assertiveness as the ability of an individual to make demands and requests when interacting with the social environment and to achieve their implementation.

These points of view reveal the connection between the notions of "assertiveness" and "spontaneity", "adequacy", "perseverance". Lange and Jakubowski (1976) consider these concepts to be identical, and A.M. Prichojan focuses on confidence, separating this feeling from self-affirmation, in his attempt to determine the content of assertiveness.

In our opinion, a complex approach to the definition of assertiveness is that of Romek (2003). In determining the content of assertiveness, first of all, there is analyzed the quality of confidence as attitude, a person's position in relation to himself, to the surrounding people, to a situation that may be changed. In the author's opinion, assertiveness is a particularly important personality trait, since it is viewed "on the one hand, as a constant social and psychological characteristic of a person whose basic trait is self-confidence and, on the other hand, as a process of self-affirmation, including the use of a strategy of confident (assertive) behaviour". This view allows us to assume that assertiveness is indeed a personal quality, but its manifestation implies the possibility of correction, improvement and training.

Grigorievskaya (1994) understands assertiveness as "a multi-component quality of the individual, including openness to learning about oneself and others; ability to understand one's own emotions, motivation to solve real problems that correspond to the real level of claims, and confident behaviour", and Petrovsky and Yaroshevsky (1996) as "a person's ability to defend one's rights and achieve one's goals confidently and with dignity, without hurting oneself and the surrounding people, without violating the rights of other people."

Kapponi and Novak (1995) and Salter (2002) regard assertiveness as a personal trait which can be defined as autonomy, independence from external influences and assessments, the ability to independently regulate one's own behaviour. Assertive personality is characterized by: orientation to the events of real life, where the past and the future make sense; independence of values and behaviour from the external influences; the ability to independently form one's own opinion about life; freedom of expression of personal potentials, openness; faith in oneself and trust in others (Kapponi and Novak, 1995). According to Bandura (1986), being assertive means being self-initiating and self-regulating. The manifestation of assertiveness is reflected in the confidence of one's own effectiveness, based on self-esteem and self-worth.

If we consider behavioural styles in terms of transaction analysis (Berne, 1964), when in the role of "Parent" the person argues, following the example of his parents, educators, leaders, and this may be described by the formula "So, it is necessary" or "I know it is right". "The Child" reflects the behaviour of a person according to the way they acted in childhood, and this may be expressed by the formula "I want it like this." The "Adult" role is peculiar to a person who independently, objectively, non-judgmentally formulates the course of their thoughts, their decisions and conclusions, and reflected in the formula "I choose." Assertive behaviour implies a relationship at the level of "Adult" - "Adult", thus, an assertive person perceives and behaves like an "Adult" and the same applies to the communication partner.

As opposed to the notion of assertiveness, Alberti and Emmons (2008) introduced in their works the notion of non-assertiveness, which, in their opinion, may take the form of aggression or submission. In our opinion, there is also a form of non-assertiveness, such as manipulation, where the manipulator violates the rights of others. In light of this approach, we consider assertiveness as one of the main anti-manipulative qualities and, therefore, a way to withstand manipulation.

Characteristics of assertiveness

In our research, assertiveness will be understood as a subjective personal quality, integrating initiative and readiness to risk in difficult life situations, self-confidence and positive attitude towards others, ability to make decisions freely and to be responsible for their consequences, perseverance in protecting one's own rights and the achievement of life goals, aimed at self-disclosure. Thus, assertiveness reflects a confident type of behaviour of a person who (Pfeiffer, 1998):

- is free in their self-disclosure;
- easily communicates at all levels, at the same time communication being open and clear;
- has an active orientation and an active life attitude;
- manifests high self-esteem.

Reviewing the results of modern applied researches, Sheinov (2014) came to the conclusion that individuals with high assertiveness are better protected against emotional problems, less often complain about situationally-caused anxiety, suffer more rarely from fears compared to individuals with low assertiveness. In addition, there is a close mutual correlation between an individual's assertiveness and self-esteem: individuals with assertive behaviour have a more

adequate level of self-esteem, can cope with stress more successfully, are more successful in life in general. A significant positive correlation has been revealed between the level of assertiveness and self-esteem. People can develop self-esteem and inner strength, mastering the methods of assertive behaviour.

In the works of such scientists as Wolpe (1958), Lange and Jakubowski (1976), Salter (2002), Alberti and Emmons (2008), Bishop (2010), and others, assertiveness is viewed as the subjective side of the individual who takes the initiative, showing and fixing confident behaviour and positive attitude towards himself and the environment, at the same time showing responsibility for his activities aimed at individual self-discovery (Shiltsova, 2012). Wolpe (1958) argues that a high level of anxiety is indicative of the lack of formation of assertiveness, whereas a low level of anxiety is indicative of success in the communicative sphere. Consequently, a low level of anxiety is also one of the components of assertiveness.

The theoretical analysis allowed us to distinguish the component structure of assertiveness, which includes cognitive, affective and behavioural components. According to Stein and Book (2011), assertiveness includes three main components: the ability to express feelings, the ability to openly express beliefs and thoughts, the ability to protect one's personal rights.

Confident people are relaxed and confident in their behaviour, are able to express feelings sincerely and without aggression. These components are reflected in the structure of assertiveness, consisting of a cognitive-semantic, affective and behavioural component. In addition, relying on this structure, there is a way of building assertiveness through optimal effects on each of the three components. The cognitive sphere forms one's beliefs and attitudes. On the one hand, it is an open expression of one's feelings, and on the other hand - emotional stability - the zone of competence of the emotional sphere. At the level of behaviour, assertiveness is expressed in skills and abilities that facilitate flexible and rapid adaptation to new conditions of the situation (Burley-Allen, 1986). The cognitive component of assertiveness includes an adequate assessment of the situation, the manifestation of flexible thinking in solving problematic situations. Thus, self-esteem is a building segment of the cognitive component that makes it whole. The affective component of assertiveness includes empathetic acceptance of oneself and others, confident behaviour and the manifestation of relations based on trust. The wholeness of the affective component is an indicator of self-confidence and a low level of anxiety. The behavioural component of assertiveness includes responsibility, perseverance, readiness for the manifestation of risky behaviour; it is characterized by a low level of aggressiveness, a

manifestation of active and persistent behaviour, aimed to achieve personal goals (Shamiyeva, 2009).

Advantages of assertiveness

Assertiveness promotes equality in human relationships; it allows a person to act in the light of his interests; it develops the ability to stand up for oneself without embarrassment, boldly express one's true feelings and enjoy one's rights without violating the rights of others (Alberti and Emmons, 2009). Assertive behaviour is the golden mean between aggressiveness and passivity, although it carries certain features of both of them (Swimmer and Ramanaiah, 1985). Assertive people tend to openly express their thoughts and feelings, but they don't want to offend anyone (Bowen, 1982). Assertive behaviour serves to prevent personal helplessness and helps expand human capabilities. Therefore, increasing the level of assertiveness of behaviour has become a measure to combat feelings of personal helplessness (Alberti and Emmons, 2008). In the work of Becker et al. (2008) it is shown that the assertiveness of the individual is a serious predictor of his ability to have and express his own point of view, to succeed in interpersonal relations.

Studies conducted on the subject of dominance factors (the desire to assert one's own point of view) and autonomy (independence in decision-making), inherent to assertiveness, have proved that assertive people are less prone to herd instinct in evaluating life situations. So, for example, assertive people evaluate sports events based on what they saw, and not what someone else saw (Scheer et al., 1983). Consequently, assertive individuals are not inclined to blindly trust negative information, a trait from which bad reputation develops.

Jinsi (2006) discovered a significant correlation between assertiveness and emotional intelligence at high school students. Since the growing period is a significant leap in development, it is very important to cultivate assertive behaviour at this stage. Children and adults, whose behaviour is assertive, are happier, more honest, healthier, and more rarely become manipulated. Feeling confident, they achieve their goals with greater success, when they become adults. Also, in Bruch's study, highly assertive participants demonstrated better performance in executing tasks of greater complexity than participants with low assertiveness, and this fact suggests that assertive people are more inclined to view situations from different points of view and use their own approaches in decision-making (Bruch, 1981).

In his study, Ryan and colleagues (2008) showed that both young and elderly women with assertive behaviour are more competent, and are more likely to achieve their goals. The

advantages of assertive behaviour turned out to be more significant in public places than, for example, in a hospital, as well as for situations characterized by greater danger (Ryan et al., 2008). A study by J. Sullivan et al. (1990) showed that the assertiveness of a competitor for a leading position, including the ability to withstand pressure, contributes to his success in career advancement.

According to a study by Tanck and Robbins (2008), a person with high scores on the assertiveness scale is quite sociable, analyses his problems, shares them, and takes active measures. Unlike people with a low level of assertiveness, the assertive person is less inclined to irritability, solitude or passive patience of inconvenience. Assertiveness is in a statistically significant positive correlation with such a mechanism of psychological adaptation to stress as problem solving.

Solving the problem involves the ability to criticize. S. Piccinin et al. found that highly assertive individuals have a stronger motivation for criticism than low-assertive ones. Their subjects expressed both confidence in their ability to criticize, and the success of such critics. However, such criticism is not aggressive (Piccinin et al., 1998). Assertive communication which is direct, honest and open, where mutual respect is displayed and rights are mutually respected inspires confidence in people.

From the cognitive perspective, assertiveness is most often defined as the absence of anxious thoughts. Kraft et al. (1986) found that increased fear of death depends significantly on a low level of assertiveness. People with a high level of assertiveness are more likely to cope with such tragedies as the death of a significant other. Assertiveness is an important predictor (a precursor) of success in any area of business, especially in management and leading positions.

Assertiveness as a way of protecting personal rights

Alberti and Emmons, who created the first assertive training meant to support people in activating their human potential, highlighted the equal rights of all people, irrespective of social status. They argued that nobody should place oneself above others in interpersonal relationships and communication, no matter the social advantages one might enjoy. Everyone has the right to act according to personal interests and beliefs, to freely express personal views and feelings and live as one desires, however, without harming others. The training's main purpose was to support people in making the most out of their personal and human rights (Alberti and Emmons, 2008).

According to Patricia Jakubowski, assertiveness is an “act of protecting human rights without violating the fundamental rights of others” (Jakubowski-Spector, 1973). It implied taking into account the boundaries between one individual's rights and the rights of others, and maintaining stability regarding them. Jakubowski and Lange (1978) elaborated the first published list of basic assertive rights. The authors distinguished between the ability to accept and assert one's rights and the ability to restrain oneself from building an individual selfish attitude. Assertiveness is meant to help people achieve what they deserve. Individual rights should be protected and used without violating the rights of others, an attitude which implies greater responsibility in relation to others. According to the authors, every human being, regardless of gender, race or religious affiliation, has the right (Jakubowski and Lange, 1978):

- to act in favour of one's own dignity and self-respect, without violating the rights of others; in Jakubowski's and Lange's words, one should be oneself without feeling guilty / ashamed, since everybody is unique in his/her views, intentions and actions;

- to be treated with respect by family and friends, as well as by all the people with whom we socially interact; respect is here defined not only as approval of actions and views of others, but also as acceptance of others as equal and worthy human beings.

- to say “No” without feeling guilty: all people have limited time, energy and resources, and these should be spent by taking into consideration personal needs and desires; otherwise, there would be reduced quality of life and sense of personal satisfaction; refusing should not be seen as selfish, but as preservation of one's rights.

- to feel and express personal feelings, especially negative emotions, since suppression of anger, frustration and resentment would only generate feelings of guilt and even more frustration; maintaining good relationships with other people should not imply hiding or smothering negative feelings but, on the contrary, these feelings should be shared and discussed, to avoid hostility that could gradually break an otherwise functional relation.

- to take a break: hasty decision-making and automatism of response are productive neither in professional nor in personal life; effectiveness and flexibility require time to calm down, rest and make decisions with a clear head, based on accurate planning and identification of reasons and action steps.

- to change one's mind, based on newly received information regarding what may have already been decided; in this case, according to Jakubowski and Lange, changing one's mind

should not be viewed as inconsistency and irresponsibility, but as flexibility of thinking and adaptability.

- to ask for whatever one wishes: one ought to express one's needs, without embarrassment or fear of being convicted or accused, or being regarded as bold.

- to do less than what one could do if he/she was using all his/her reserves: one should decide on the more or less important activities and, based on this, make efforts accordingly, to avoid physical and mental exhaustion; however, this right should not be used to escape from everyday professional and personal responsibilities.

- to ask for information: important decisions should rely on all information needed; one should ask for the information without fear of being referred to with condescension, contempt and disrespect; questions should be regarded not as personal limitation, but as lack of specific professional knowledge.

- to make mistakes: there is no person who has never made a mistake; fear of mistakes has often prevented people from taking action, which further diminished their chances of accumulating social and professional experience.

- to feel good about oneself: acting in light of the rights described above should not be regarded as an act of selfishness.

Smith (1985) also regards assertiveness from the point of view of individual rights. The subject of activity is aware of his own rights, uses them and can defend them. In his work, *When I Say No I Feel Guilty*, Smith (1985) formulated the Bill of Assertive Rights, including the following principles:

- You have the right to judge your own behaviour, thoughts, and emotions, and to take the responsibility for their initiation and consequences upon yourself.

- You have the right to offer no reasons or excuses for justifying your behaviour.

- You have the right to judge if you are responsible for finding solutions to other people's problems.

- You have the right to change your mind.

- You have the right to make mistakes -- and be responsible for them.

- You have the right to say, "I don't know."

- You have the right to be independent of the goodwill of others before coping with them.

- You have the right to be illogical in making decisions.

- You have the right to say, "I don't understand."

- You have the right to say, "I don't care."

It is worth noting that such a person respects the rights of others and builds relationships without violating anyone's boundaries. The author introduces the notion of "principles of assertiveness", which denote the rules of behaviour in the society and the construction of relationships with other people, the denial of manipulation, cruelty and aggression towards another person. According to Smith (1985), an assertive person knows his/her rights well and recognizes and respects the rights of others. Whenever there is imbalance between one's own rights and the rights of others, people usually become passive, aggressive or manipulative (manipulation is, according to Smith, a form of aggressive behaviour). Expressing assertive rights implies mutual respect, benevolent perseverance and politeness. Moreover, assertive rights are applicable in all aspects of life, including sexual.

Misinterpretation of assertive rights could lead to negative consequences (Shostrom, 1968; Stepanov, 2006): focusing on one's own rights may generate a high level of self-evaluation and individualism; it should be mentioned that besides rights, people also have responsibilities (Jakubowski & Lange, 1976; Smith, 1985; Bishop, 2010), the most relevant of which are as follows: to treat others with respect and oppose discrimination; to listen to the views, suggestions and opinions of others, and respond adequately; not to ignore views and opinions of that are different from our own; to accept the fact that some requests may not be fulfilled; to accept that others have the right to criticize our actions in a constructive manner; to show understanding when others make mistakes; to respect the rights of others and their desire to speak about themselves.

Conclusions

Assertiveness contributes to the achievement of goals, the development of communication skills, increasing self-esteem and competence; it helps to make more weighted decisions, to keep the situation under control, to build close relationships, to achieve greater success in education. Assertive people prefer to draw conclusions based on their own observations, they have more chances to achieve positive results in dealing with others, they are more satisfied with relationships and life in general.

Thus, in our opinion, assertive behaviour contributes to active, independent and responsible exploration of the world, bold and open communication with others, the ability to achieve goals and constructively defend personal ideas, needs and interests. Assertive behaviour is the golden mean between aggressiveness and passivity, serves as a preventive measure of personal helplessness, provides an advantage in critical situations and is positively interconnected with such a mechanism of psychological adaptation to stress as problem solving. Assertiveness excludes submissive (passive) behaviour. Thus, the assertiveness of the individual contributes to protection against manipulation. The formation of assertiveness and the training of assertive behaviour strengthens the skills of combating manipulation and enhances self-confidence.

In our opinion, the results of the authors of different years create a vast field of activity for further research on the phenomenon of assertiveness. Existing studies indicate promising areas of assertiveness research, facilitate the formation of working hypotheses, allow us to compare the obtained results, carry out intercultural adaptation, etc.

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