

The Role of Assertive Skills on Employees Work Performance: as key to Organisational Sustainability

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Abstract

Maintaining an excellent and sustainable work performance track record is a general aim of every organization, this study examined the role of assertive skills on employees' work performance as a key to Organisational sustainability. with the use of convenient sampling techniques, data were collected from 110 participants whose age ranges between 18-65 years. Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS) and Role-Based Performance Scale (RBPS) were used for data collection. The hypothesis was tested using a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 20). Assertive skills were found to have a significant positive relationship with employee work performance, there was a significant statistical difference between the highly assertive and less assertive employees on work performance. Therefore, we recommend that employees in every work setting should develop assertive skills. Secondly, assertive employees should be commended and rewarded rather than being intimidated and victimized.

Keywords: Assertive Skills, Work Performance, Sustainable Development, Unionism.

Introduction

Globally, the lifeline of every organization is a sustainable increase in performance of staff and that of the overall organization, this explain why some multinational organizations have spent millions of dollars annually on training and retraining of staff as a way to equip them for better performance (Farh, 2012). Work performance is not only of great concern to employer, but also to the employee. Some employers go as far as fixing how much an employee earned on how much he performed in a given work scheduled (Kacmar, Harris, Collins & Judge 2009; Tang,

2010). This therefore necessitated the keen interest and attention towards how to achieve high work performance of staff for sustainable development.

Work performance is the consistent outcome of an individual task, which tells if a person does his work well or not; Cambell (1993). Invariably, it is an important criterion for organizational success and sustainability; Performance management is of priority to human resources managers, thus factors that will enhance employee work performance such as the right knowledge, skills, abilities and motivation for the work are closely look into and maximized by employers. Communication skills for instance play an important role in understanding ones work requirement, this is why the ability to express oneself in communication process cannot be underestimated. Assertiveness is therefore pivotal in communication because it involves many factors like ability to express one's sincere feelings and idea about ones job, boldness to stand for what is right and the boldness to ask for ones legitimate right without aggression Rathus (1978).

Assertiveness is a method of communication that shows the ability to express one's feelings, beliefs, ideas and needs directly, openly and sincerely without infringing on others rights Ibrahim (2011). It's the act of being self-assured and respecting other people, Assertive people do not allow others to abuse them; they feel disturbed when others violate their right or deprived them of their privileges (huurre et al 2006). Therefore, this communication skill is very important for a worker not only because of better work performance, but aid learning processes as well. Assertive people are always confident, conscious and vigilant. Venkoba (2016) therefore identify four ways in which one can become more assertive, which are; self-monitoring, challenging irrational beliefs, modeling and behaviour rehearsal. Though, in most work environment, especially in Africa, the opportunity to be more assertive can be enhance with the activities of labour unionism. The presence of labor unions or trade associations that can agitate for better employee packages which gives members a sense of security from being victimize by their employer. Labour Unionism as a legal medium for collective bargaining therefore creates an opportunity for workers to challenge any irrational beliefs, work procedures or decision made by management.

Due to the necessity in increase in employee work performance for sustainable development, several studies have examine numerous factors that can enhance employee work performance, such as pay satisfaction, motivation, work environment, supervisory role, leadership, workload, communication. But only few of these studies have examined the impact of assertiveness on work performance. Among these few studies, most attention were on academic performance among adolescent and students (Hojjat, et'al, 2015: Khadabakhashi, 2015 & Venkoba, 2016) leaving adult population which makes up the working class in Nigeria with less literature. This study therefore investigates the role of assertiveness on employee work performance as key to a sustainable development in Nigeria.

Literature underpinning

Assertiveness as a concept is seen as social boldness necessary for social interaction within a group. It means respect of yourself and seeing others ideals, opinions, thought, feelings and beliefs as important as yours. Chaharmarkoohi (2013). According to Adejumo (2010) it is defined as the ability to express ones ideas and opinion without any fear of being victimize or oppress. This means, assertiveness skills enable employee to express their view even though it

contravene the organization position on a matter. It sees interpersonal behaviour as a room to direct expression of one's feelings, without cognitive distortions and anxiety, acknowledging both verbal and nonverbal aspect as well as the defense of one's right. While respecting those of others (Ames & Fynn, 2007; Caso & Hernandez, 2007; Goldberg-lillehoj; Hansen, Cachran, & Lindsey, 2005). Assertive behaviour explain the expression of a person's right, thought, feeling without denying the right and feelings of other people (Alberti & Emmons 1986; Bastani 2008). According Venkoba (2016), assertiveness is more or less as submissiveness; he identify four ways of becoming more assertive which are self-monitoring, challenging irrational decision, modeling assertive people and behaviour rehearsal. Moon (2009) added that assertive behaviour may reflect in different personalities such as aggressive behaviour; aggression involves standing up for you in a way that is pushy push and inappropriate. This may totally not be correct because one can be assertive; standing up for ones right or fighting for what rightly belong to ones without exhibiting any form of aggression. Galassi et al. (1994) suggested that assertive people are communicative, free-spirited, secure, self-assured, and able to influence and guide others. This confirm the claim that assertive people are more likely to be occupying leadership positions and standing tall at their workplaces and possibly performing better compared to less assertive people.

Work performance on the other hand, is an important concept within the field of industrial and organizational psychology, performance remain the only measurement criterion to determine organizational outcome or success. Campbell (1990) see work performance as individual level of productivity, that is, performance as an individual activities. Chris and Ukaidi (2016) differentiate performance from outcome by describing it as a behaviour that can lead to the realization of organizational objectives. Idowu (2012) added that, performance does not necessary have directly observable actions of individual, may also consist of mental productions such as answers and decisions. Performance must be goal oriented and be directed towards institutional goals that are relevant to employee role of the job Obiwuru et al. (2011). McGrath and MacMilliam (2006) identify job knowledge and job skills as major predictors of employee work performance. (Clifton, Narasimhan & Yue 2007) in a similar vein, agree that cognitive ability variables have an effect on task knowledge, task skills, and task habits in turn are seen as predictors of contextual performance.

The social exchange theory is propounded by Hamans (1961). It's a theory that viewed social behaviour in terms of the pursuit of profit or interest and the avoidance of punishment and other form of cost. It is a sociological theory that study social behaviour in interaction between two or more parties that consider cost-benefit factor in determining risks and rewards Roেকেlein (2018). The theory state that human interactions are guided by "social economics" that is, we exchange not only material goods and money, but also social goods like love, friendship, services and information. In doing so, we are said to use a "mini-max" strategy which means; minimizing cost and maximizing rewards. Therefore, this theory explains while some employers of labour minimize cost even in the aspect of conflict of interest to maximize rewards at the extent of their employees interest or welfare. It also explains while many organizations do not take chances with the activities of labour unionism that may lead employees becoming more

assertive and agitate their right even at frightening circumstances in the workplace. Also, on the basis of the assumption of this theory, the positive organizational support is one of the social exchange variables, which the employees are met to enjoy. This describe the employee and employer exchange relationship in an organization (wahab, Cheong, Shamsudding & Adbullah, 2014). Thus, this study is theoretically rooted on social exchange theory.

The study is also supported by Social learning theory of Albert Bandura (1971) which state that, people can learn through observation, imitation and modeling. This therefore implies that desires behaviour can be consciously learn through constant imitation and paying undivided attention to the sample behaviour. Assertiveness as a behaviour can be learned through observation and modeling or better still mentorship which is more visible in our contemporary workplace and career. On this basis, this theoretical stand of the current study is thereby grounded.

Assertiveness and work performance

Ghadrati et al (2016) investigated the relationship between self-esteem, assertiveness and academic achievement in female high school students in Iran. Using 701 female high school students between the ages of 14-17 years, they find a significant correlation between assertiveness and academic achievement, and concluded that, since assertiveness are learnable skills, they therefore recommend the inclusion in academic curriculum for elementary education in Iran. According to Eskin (2003), the level of assertiveness increased with an increase in the students' age, but this relationship was significant only in males but not in females. In a similar vein, Ahmed et al (2016) examine the effectiveness of assertiveness training on the levels of stress, anxiety and depression of High School Students in Iran, the study were quasi-experimental in nature, using a systematic random sampling, data were collected from 126 second grade high school students and divided into experimental and control group. Data collected were analyzed using ANOVA. The result therefore shows there was no significant difference in the interval of assertiveness between groups. They concluded that conducting assertiveness training in high schools decreases their level of anxiety, stress, and depression in students.

Chibuke, Chimezie and Ogbuinya (2013) conducted a study, on the role of locus of control on assertive behaviour of adolescence. Using purposive random sampling, 80 adolescents were sampled for the study. Locus of control scale and Assertiveness Inventory were used for data collection. Based on the scores of locus of control, the sample was divided into internal locus control group comprising 40 participants and external locus control group comprising 40 participants. Similarly, based on assertiveness scores, the sample was divided into low assertiveness group and high assertive group comprising of 40 participants each. The study employed a 2x2 factorial design; and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for data analyses. The findings revealed that locus of control play a significant role in adolescent behaviour. Individuals who are internal controls tend to be highly assertive than external controls.

Aqsa and Mahmood (2015) in their study, effect of assertiveness skills on job Burnout, conducted in Iran, the result of their findings revealed that, assertiveness skills have a negative effect on job burnout. In similar vein, Montserrat et'al (2012) conducted a study titled; Assertive skills and academic performance in primary and secondary education, Giftedness, and conflictive Students, A sample of primary and secondary education students from Spanish public centers

whose academic performance was normally distributed. The result of the findings revealed that, there is a statistical significance negative correlation between assertiveness variable and academic performance in the diverse sample analyzed, they therefore conclude that “an assertive deficit can act like a variable that predisposes towards academic failure. (Oladipo, Arigbobu & Rufai , 2012) in their study “gender need-achievement and assertiveness as factor of conceptions about math among secondary school students in Ogun state” concluded that there is no significant relationship between need achievement and assertiveness among male students.

- Hypotheses:**
- i. there will be a significance positive relationship between Assertiveness skills and work performance.
 - ii. there will be significance statistical differences between highly assertive and less assertive employees on work performance.

Methods

Design

The study employed a cross-sectional design method. The study has one independent variable and one dependent variable, the independent variable appear in two levels while the dependent variable is consider as one, which is employee work performance. The study is analytical in nature as it examine the role of assertive skills on employee work performance.

Participants

Participants were drawn from selected public and private manufacturing companies in Delta State, Nigeria. The study population is 2,386, among which a sample size of 110 participants were drawn for the study. Socio-demographic data of the participant is presented below.

Table 1:

Characteristics	Description
Age	Range; 18-65 M = 30.78 ± SD= 8.9
Sector:	
Public	59.1%
Private	40.9%
Education:	
2 nd degree	39.1%
1 ST degree	36.4%
High school	24.5%
Organisational Position:	
Entry level	48.2%
Middle management	22.7%
Top management	29.1%
Gender:	
Male	52.7%
	47.3%

Instruments

The Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS) was developed by Rathus S.A. (1973). The 30 item inventory is designed to assess assertive behavior or social boldness or the extent to which an individual claims rights, voice out true feelings in social settings. The response range from “very unlike me=-3”, “rather unlike me=-2”, “slightly unlike me=-1”. “slightly like me=+1”. “rather like me= +2”, and “very much like me”. The scale has direct and reverse scoring pattern. In reverse scoring, the value assigned to each response rate is reverse. For the direct score, the items are:3,6,7,8,10,18,20,21,22,25,27,28,29. Reverse:1,2,4,5,9,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,19,23,24,26,and 30. To get the overall score you add up the score for direct and reverse together, score ranges from +90 to -90 where positive refers to highly assertive and negative as less assertive. the norms reported for this scale is M&F(n=68) is .294 for American sample while Nigerian Sample reported M(n=100) is 48.25, F(n=100) is 48.61. Thus, any score above the norm is consider as highly assertive and score less than the norm is less assertive. The reliability coefficient reported by Rathus (1973) are .77 split-half and test-retest of eight weeks interval is .78. anumba (1995) obtained a concurrent validity coefficient of .25 by correlating RS with index of Peer relation by Hudson et’al (1986).

Role-based performance scale (RBPS) was develop by welbourne et’al (1997), this scale measure various aspect of employee performance in an organization. the scale consist of 20 items that measure factors like job holder, innovation, career person, team member and organizational members. 4 items each on the scale measure each of these factors. Questions were structured in a way respondents could respond by ticking as appropriate ranging from ‘need much improvement’ to ‘excellent’. The alpha value for this scale is .86 and .94 test retest. And this was standardized for Nigerian population Okpamen (2017). The scoring pattern is in likert type with a total score of 100 in which the responses are scaled from 1 to 5. With 1 = Need much improvement, 2= need some improvement, 3= satisfactory, 4= good and 5= excellent. Some of the sample questions from this scale are – quality of work output? Obtaining personal career goals? Coming up with new idea? working as part of a team or workgroup.

Procedure for Data Collection

Permission was sought from the management of each of the organizations. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants. They were also given assurance of confidentiality and anonymity of their identities and responses. They were also informed that participation was purely voluntary and that they were free to stop whenever they felt uncomfortable to continue with the research. 30 questionnaires were distributed per company. For two public liability companies and two private companies, a total of 120 questionnaires were distributed, 4 got missing, 116 were retrieved, and out of which 110 were analyzed.

Data analysis

Data collected were analyzed with the use of SPSS version 20, descriptive statistics was used to analyzed socio-demographic data of the respondent and Pearson moments correlation and independent sample t-test was used to test the stated hypotheses. This is appropriate because the study tend to test for significance relationship and significance differences.

Result

Table 2: Showing the Mean, Standard Deviation and inter-variable correlation.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	30.78	8.91	1						
2. Gender	-	-	-.284**	1					
3. Sector	-	-	.049	.101	1				
4. Education	-	-	.635**	-.549**	.246**	1			
5. Position	-	-	.835**	-.299**	.142	.730**	1		
6. Assertiveness Skills	70.51	6.12	.171	-.256**	.761**	.303**	.168	1	
7. Work Performance	48.26	4.26	.079	.501*	-.221	-.164	-.075	.286**	1

Note: ** correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (1-tailed). N = 110

Result in table 2 showed that assertiveness skills has positive significant relationship with employee work performance [$r(108)=.286, p < .01$]. This implies that, assertiveness skills have direct and positively correlate work performance. This means that hypotheses one is hereby accepted.

Table 3: Summary of Independent t-test analysis showing the Mean and SD difference between highly assertive and less Assertive employee on Work Performance.

Variable	Mean	SD	T	Df	F	P-value
Assertiveness: highly assertive	79.45	6.239	2.672	108	3.459	.009
less assertive	76.23	4.717				

Note: ** $p < .01$, * $P < .05$, N=110

Result in table 3 above revealed statistical differences between employee who are highly assertive and those less assertive on work performance $F(108)=3.459, P < .01$ with highly assertive employee performing better than those with less assertive skills ($M=79.45$ & 76.23). This imply that hypotheses two that state there will be significance statistical differences between highly assertive and less assertive employees on work performance is hereby confirmed.

Discussion

Assertiveness is the ability to express ones view, opinions, idea, or ones right without infringing on someone else's right. It's fundamental in communication between employee and employer, supervisor and supervisee as the case may be. Deficiency in this skill may impair employee work performance (Bastani, 2008).

The current research tried to add to our understanding of the relationships between assertiveness and work performance by examining the role of assertive skills on employee work performance.

The result of the current study indicates that there is significant positive relationship between assertive skills and employee work performance, as well as differences in the performance of employee who are highly assertive and those that are less assertive, with those highly assertive performing better than their colleague who are less assertive. This implies that, social boldness (assertiveness) enable employee to ask questions when necessary, express displeasures and contribute their ideas when needed, which invariable gives an employee a sense of belonging. This position is supported by the findings of Ames and Flynn (2007) as well as Venkoba (2016).

This finding reveals that assertive skills can predict employee performance; therefore, employee with less assertive skills can develop this through imitation and modeling. This idea is rooted in Albert Bandura (1971) social learning theory which suggests that “desired behavior can be learned through effective modeling i.e. paying undivided attention to the behavior of interest”. This is where Unionism plays a key role in creating a social cultural atmosphere that enhances the spirit of assertiveness as a culture within the organization.

Furthermore, the findings is also empirically supported by the findings of Ghadrati et 'al (2016) who reported a significant positive relationship between assertiveness and academic performance and suggested that since assertiveness is a learnable skills, they therefore recommend the inclusion in academic curriculum for elementary education in Iran. This implies that performance at any level in life can be greatly enhance by individual level of assertiveness which enable a person or a worker to speak up at any stage of his work were he/she needed clarification and training, or speak out when he perceived dangers such as sexual harassment, victimization and many more which lead to counterproductive work behavior.

Limitation and future research

Although the current study has some important contributions to the existing literature of assertiveness and work performance in Nigeria, it has, like any other study, some limitation that is worth noting. First, the sample size is a typical concern of many research. Different results may be found from a larger or more diverse sample.

Second, although the sample used in the current research was fairly large and reasonably heterogeneous, one limitation is the generalization of the result to the whole population of Nigeria. And finally, the study did not take to account the various organizational factors that may exist in the culture of the organizations that may allow or prevent any form of assertive behavior.

Conclusion

It is therefore concluded that, assertiveness as a skill possess by an employee can enhance such an employee work performance as an individual and the organizational performance at large, which invariably will lead to organizational sustainability. Therefore, we suggest the activities of unionism as a way to create the culture of being assertive as workers. Moreover, assertive employees perform better than less assertive employees in work performance as reveal by this finding.

Recommendations

Based on the finding, it's recommended that employees in every work setting should in bid the culture of being assertive as a person. By probably getting involved in unionism activities in their organizations which give voice to members and create a culture of being assertive as a worker. Secondly, Assertiveness as a skill should be considered as one of the criteria for personnel selections since it has proven to predict high performance and productivity. Finally, assertive employees should be commended and rewarded rather than being intimidated and victimized, in order to sustained increase in work performance.

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