

## **A STUDY OF CULTIVATING ASSERTIVENESS THROUGH TRAINING FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION AMONG EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC SECTOR (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BHARAT HEAVY ELECTRICALS LTD., BHOPAL)**

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### **Abstract**

*When targets are set and decisions are taken in any organizational setting, it often falls to different levels of managers, supervisors and team leaders to mobilize, motivate, direct, and work with other employees to achieve the set targets. But the communication style used by managers could make a critical difference between failure and success. An aggressive style could destroy social cohesion and team spirit in the work place, while a passive relational style could force the wheel of organizational efficiency grinding to a halt.*

*Assertive communication is motivational, goal directed and effective because it begins with a respectful recognition of the essential worth of every member of the working group. This helps them build team cohesion and drive staff effectiveness. Every year, companies spend lakhs of money upgrading their employees' technical, sales and customer service skills. What many of these companies don't realize is that assertiveness training also can affect things like customer satisfaction, productivity and profitability. By giving this kind of training, companies can teach their employees to solve problems through cooperation and negotiation. It pays to be assertive at workplace where change and uncertainty are the only constants in today's business world. It helps them to be successful and in building core competence.*

*This research paper aims to find the assertiveness level of executives at BHEL, which is one of the Maharatna Companies. The study is descriptive and exploratory in nature. Various research papers, journals, newspapers, magazines and questionnaire are used to gather data. The study will tell how assertive communication benefits an individual personally and professionally thereby benefitting the organization. It will also recommend suitable measures to build up assertiveness among executives.*

**Keywords:** Assertiveness, Communication, Training, organizational efficiency

### **INTRODUCTION**

Once the targets are set by organization, the success of it depends on how well managers motivate and direct their staffs. Assertive style is considered to be the best communication style that helps managers make staffs work the way they want.

Assertive communication is one's ability to express oneself openly and truthfully without denying the rights of others. They are truthful about their own feelings and responsible towards others. Assertive people care about other's feelings and therefore phrase their requests or complaints in a polite but firm manner. These people have a sense of 'give and take' and are co-operative at times of conflict. Assertive people assess each situation and decide most suitable action. They can bend and give in if required or they can stand up for their rights and be strong at other times.

Some of the benefits of being assertive at workplace are:

- ✓ Assertive communicators first ask what the other person wants and then quickly negotiate a solution that everyone can live with.
- ✓ Because problems are solved more quickly, resentment, frustration and other tensions that block peak performance are reduced.
- ✓ Assertiveness training helps employees become problem-solvers rather than victims of a situation they believe they can't control. While victims feel paralyzed, assertive people feel empowered to find the best solutions.
- ✓ Employees stop procrastinating and start acting. They form an action plan for success Communication becomes clearer and more concise, which reduces misunderstandings and clarifies expectations. In an assertive work environment, people speak up and say what's on their minds. They aren't afraid their ideas will be thrown away, ridiculed or ignored.
- ✓ Employees concentrate on what's within their control, rather than what's beyond their control. For instance, you can always control how you react to a situation, but you can't control how others react.
- ✓ Instead of wasting time by gossiping and complaining — which accomplish nothing — employees focus on the positive, productive steps they can take to resolve problems.

Thus being assertive is very essential to stay competitive in a dynamic business environment. To find the assertiveness level of executives at BHEL, Bhopal, I conducted a survey of 50 employees from different departments asking them to fill-up a questionnaire on assertiveness. When the compiled data was analyzed it was found that the executives there were either passive or aggressive towards their work. 50% of the employees said that they find it difficult to say 'no'. This can act as a barrier in getting the right work done as becoming more passive will make people walk over them and they will not do what is expected from them but do what they think is apt. 44% employees said that they can be sarcastic which shows their short temperedness. This can adversely affect their work and the people working under them as it would create a kind of grudge against their supervisors and would ultimately hamper their performance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Williams D. A. and Carey M (2003) in the paper titled "Getting the most out of your interactions with others: Use effective communication" said that most of our stress arises when there are interpersonal difficulties. It may also be because of failure to communicate effectively. The aggressive style, passive style, and the passive-aggressive style when used can lead to problems. Assertiveness is the only style that allows both parties to compromise so as to get something each wants. It involves regarding your own rights as well as the rights of others and clearly putting across your feelings and desires. The steps in the GO DO IT formula can help in communicating assertively.

Michel Fiona and Fursland Anthea in the paper titled "Assert Yourself" said that there are a many assertiveness techniques such as basic assertion, empathic assertion, consequence assertion, discrepancy assertion, the broken record technique, and negative feeling assertion. It is essential to remember your non-verbal communication when using these techniques.

## OBJECTIVES

- 1) To study how assertive communication benefits an individual personally and professionally thereby benefitting the organization.
- 2) To study the significance of training and development and how is it carried out at BHEL, Bhopal.
- 3) To recommend suitable measures to build up assertiveness among executives.

## METHODOLOGY

The research I did is descriptive and exploratory in nature i.e. both primary and secondary sources were used. The study was conducted with major focus on BHEL's Bhopal unit. I took sample of 50 Executives of BHEL, Bhopal unit through questionnaire method. Data analysis is done using percentage analysis method. The purpose of this research was to find out the communication style of executives used at the workplace.

## SIGNIFICANCE

- 1) By being assertive an employee not only develops himself but also the organization as a whole.
- 2) An assertive person has more control over his life and takes the right decision after assessing each situation carefully.
- 3) An assertive person helps to bring in cooperation and coordination which is very essential for the success of the organization.

## LIMITATIONS

- 1) The sample size was small as compared to the strength of employees at BHEL, Bhopal.
- 2) Communication style was evaluated only of executives and not of other levels of employees at BHEL, Bhopal.

## THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

### Overview of Indian Public Sector

The Indian Public Sector has always played a major role in shaping the path of the country's economic development. Prior to Independence, there were only a few Public Sector Enterprises in the country with its presence primarily confined to Railways, Post & Telegraph and the Ordinance Factories. However, visionary leaders of independent India drew up a roadmap for the development of Public Sector as an instrument for self-reliant economic growth. The Public Sector provided the much-required thrust and has been instrumental in setting up a strong and diversified industrial base in the country. Over the years, PSU operations have extended

to a wide range of activities including manufacturing, engineering, steel, heavy machinery, machine tools, fertilizers, drugs, textiles, pharmaceuticals, petro-chemicals, extraction and refining of crude oil; services such as telecommunication, trading, tourism and warehousing; and a range of consultancy services.

With the economy embarking on the process of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization since the early-1990s, the role of the Indian Public Sector has subsequently undergone a rapid change. Integration of the domestic economy with global markets has thrown up a plethora of opportunities and challenges. Some of the public sector enterprises with strategic vision are actively exploring new avenues and have increased their activities to go in for mergers, acquisitions, amalgamations, takeovers and for creating new joint ventures. Acquisitions, JVs and green field projects in Petroleum Sector have already taken place and are under active consideration in Power, Coal and Mining Sectors.

Today, both the Public and Private Sectors have become an integral part of the economy, with both the sectors complimenting each other in strengthening the nation's industrial landscape. However, the recent economic meltdown has initiated a debate about the way business and operations are being handled by the PSUs, especially against the backdrop where globally several corporates have either gone bankrupt or have marginally survived owing to state-sponsored bail-outs. In this context, it is worth noting that the Indian PSUs have emerged relatively unscathed to register reasonable growth rates.

### Training and Development

Forces affecting the workplace make training an essential ingredient for company's success. Customer service, enhancing productivity, employee retention and growth, coping with the retirement of skilled employees—these are some of the issues affecting companies in all industries and sizes and influencing training practices. Training can contribute to companies' competitiveness. Competitiveness refers to a company's capacity to maintain and gain market share in an industry.

Companies are experiencing great change due to changing technologies, rapid development of knowledge, globalization of business, and development of e-commerce. Also, companies have to take measures to attract, retain, and motivate their work forces. Training is a necessity if companies are to participate in the global marketplaces by offering high-quality products and services! Training helps employees to use latest technologies, function in new work systems and communicate and cooperate with peers or customers who may be from different cultural backgrounds.

Training helps in imparting skills, knowledge and brings attitudinal change in the employees.

Training methods are categorized into two groups-

- (i) On-the job methods
- (ii) Off-the job methods

On-the job methods refer to the ones that are applied in the workplace, while the employee is actually working. Off-the job methods are used away from workplaces.

### TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT AT BHEL, BHOPAL

#### TRAINING PROCESS:

This process involves the following:

- 1) **Training Need Identification (TNI)**
- 2) **Conducting of Training**
- 3) **Evaluation of Training**

In BHEL Bhopal, the above process is carried out in the manner mentioned below:

Training needs are identified in the following ways:

- a) **TNI Questionnaire method**- where standard TNI formats are send to all Departments for identifying their departmental technical and behavioral needs. These identified needs are then send to HRDC along with nomination of employees for different programmes.
- b) **Focus Group Discussions with departmental heads/training coordinators:** for improving methodology of training process, better and effective On-The-Job related skills and abilities.
- c) **Development needs of executives:** Technical and Behavioral competency needs of executives are obtained from online performance appraisal system (eMAP) where individuals identify their own development needs.

Based on the identified training needs, Annual HRD Training Calendar is prepared which mentions the details of programmes to be conducted in that year.

The programmes are conducted from April to March each year. As per the calendar, training programmes are conducted where the following things are involved:

1. Programme Design
2. Faculty for carrying out the programme (Internal/External)
3. Target Audience (participants)

4. Classroom facility with desired infrastructure/outbound programme  
 After the training is completed, feedback about the programme and faculty is obtained from the participants through:

- Programme Feedback form (for all programmes)
- Faculty Feedback form (for all programmes)
- Post Training Effectiveness Evaluation form (obtained after 3 months of the programme for programmes of 5 days/more duration)

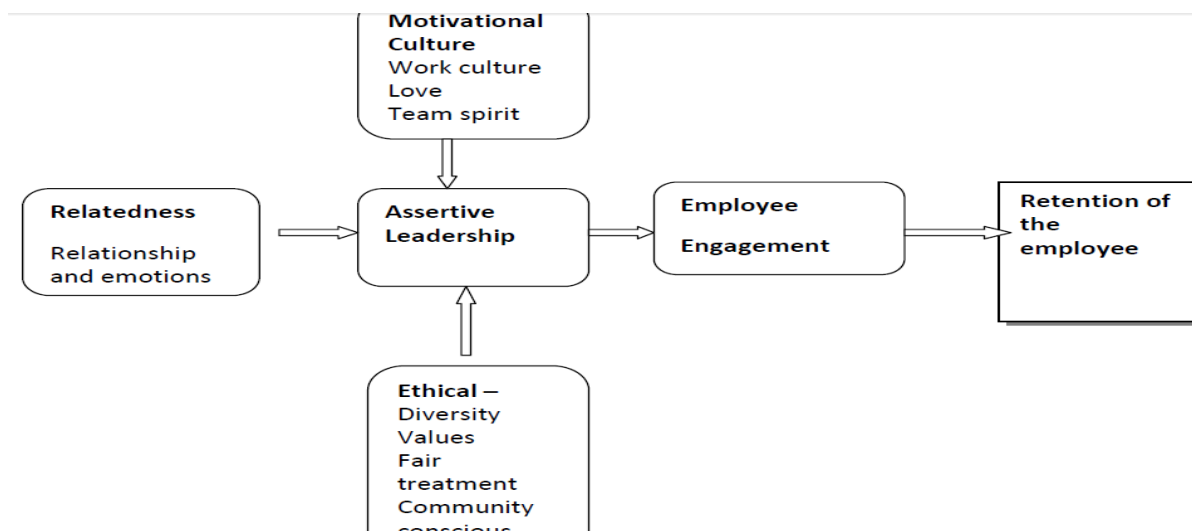
### ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

Managers have to be able to achieve their company's business plan. This involves dealing with staff who may be dominant, awkward, uncooperative or are unable to prioritize their work, manage their time etc. The staff member may have gotten used to just doing things "their way". Or, they may have genuine concerns / worries about doing what their manager asks, but don't express them. Dealing with such scenarios requires being assertive.

Assertiveness involves standing up for ones rights in a manner that does not offend others or deny the rights of others. People who are assertive have more control over their life. Chances of other people taking advantage of them are also reduced.

It is an attitude that honors your choices as well as of those with whom you are communicating. It's not about being aggressive and steamrolling your coworker into submission. Rather, it's about seeking and exchanging opinions, developing a complete understanding of the situation, and negotiating a win-win situation. It can help you to influence others in order to gain acceptance, agreement or behaviour change.

Researches have shown that an Assertive leader helps in creating the following in the workplace:



### STRATEGIES FOR SAYING NO

There's nothing wrong with saying 'yes', doing favours, or taking on responsibilities. Problems arise, though if you do these things because you can't say no or don't know how to do so. things to keep in mind for those times when you wish to say 'no'.

- **Use assertive body posture.** Use direct eye contact, keep your head up, shoulders back, hands relaxed or gesturing normally, and voice calm and loud enough to be heard.
- **Decide on your wording.**
- **Don't apologise when it isn't necessary.**
- **Don't defend yourself or make excuses when it isn't necessary.**
- **Strengthen your position.** Don't expect that the other person will accept your refusal the first time that you turn them down – especially if you've been saying yes for years. Be ready for them to push again, and respond with a refusal that is just as strong or stronger.
- **The broken record technique.** Don't feel you have to rephrase your response every time. If you keep repeating the same message, eventually the other person will hear it. This may start sounding odd, but it will be the other person provoking it.
- **Don't wait for acceptance.**
- **Accept the consequences.**

The behavioral component of assertiveness includes a series of non-verbal elements such as maintaining proper eye contact, tone of voice, timing of message, proper facial expression and content etc.

**CASE STUDY**

**Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL)** owned by Government of India, is one of the largest engineering and power plant equipment manufacturing enterprise in the World. BHEL the proud “MAHARATNA” company of the Government of India has made the country self-sufficient in the area of power plant manufacture and is now well poised to meet the challenges of the future.

The Industry Sector Business segment of BHEL covers Transmission, Transportation, Renewable Energy, Defense and various industries like Cement, Sugar, Fertilizer, Refineries, Petrochemical, Paper, Oil & Gas, Metallurgical and other process industries.

They place great emphasis on innovation and creative development of new technologies. Their research and development (R&D) efforts are aimed not only at improving the performance and efficiency of their existing products, but also at using state-of-the-art technologies and processes to develop new products. This enables them to have a strong customer orientation, to be sensitive to their needs and respond quickly to the changes in the market.

Their greatest strength is their highly skilled and committed workforce of 49,390 employees. Every employee is given an equal opportunity to develop himself/herself and grow in his/her career. Continuous training and retraining, career planning, a positive work culture and participative style of management - all these have engendered development of a committed and motivated workforce setting new benchmarks in terms of productivity, quality and responsiveness.

BHEL's Bhopal plant is the mother plant; one of the oldest plants installed in 1956. Bhopal plant focusses on manufacturing of heavy electrical equipments. BHEL, Bhopal is spread over an area of 543 acres and covers 11 manufacturing blocks with attached Annexe Buildings occupied by commercial, Engineering, Manufacturing and Allied services departments. Each block focusses on manufacture of specific type of equipment.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Statements	Disagree strongly (%)	Disagree somewhat (%)	Agree somewhat (%)	Agree strongly (%)
1. I express my opinions honestly, openly and appropriately all of the time.	2	6	38	54
2. I can get angry and am comfortable letting that show.	12	36	40	12
3. I find it difficult to say 'no'.	20	28	50	2
4. If I do not agree with a task I've been given, I find my way on dragging my feet on it.	26	30	40	4
5. If someone knows more than me I feel comfortable in asking for help from them.	2	4	26	68
6. I feel guilty if I leave on time for a valid reason and other people are still working.	32	22	30	16
7. I can be sarcastic	30	18	44	8
8. I think my way of doing things is better than other people's.	4	28	56	12
9. If someone takes advantage of me, I find a way of getting my own back.	6	16	58	20
10. I feel I have a right to say no to other people's requests and to negotiate a compromise.	8	12	52	28
11. If I am in a large meeting, I find I do not speak up.	32	26	30	12
12. I like to be in control of a situation.	4	8	52	36
13. If the situation dictates, I can stare people down.	6	38	36	20
14. I make good eye contact with other people.	4	4	40	52
15. If I am unsure about a given task, I find it uncomfortable to ask for help.	26	30	24	20
16. I have been known to talk about other people behind their backs	68	16	16	0
17. When I have to deal with someone in authority, I find it difficult to look them directly in the eye.	62	20	18	0
18. I am a good listener and equally other people listen to what I have to say.	0	8	40	52
19. Rather than confronting someone about an issue, I would rather give them the cold shoulder or drop hints to other people that I am not happy.	18	22	44	16

20. I am not afraid to be direct with someone, even if they think I am being rude.	8	20	46	26
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## FINDINGS

- 1) It was observed that 40% executives rated agree somewhat to the statement “I can get angry and am comfortable letting this show”. While 36% executives rated disagree somewhat to the same statement. This is not a good sign as this shows that they do not have self-control while confronting a difficult situation.
- 2) The research results showed that 50% employees agree somewhat to the statement ‘I find it difficult to say ‘no’. While just 20% disagree strongly with the same. To say no to what is not right is very important as then people will not try to take advantage or overrule us. It thus shows that training need to be provided to executives on ‘learning to say no’.
- 3) The research showed that 32% people disagree strongly to the statement ‘feeling guilty for leaving the office for a valid reason while other people are still working’. While 30 % of the people agree somewhat with the same statement. This shows that people are not confident or have less faith in the decisions they take because even after taking the right decision they question themselves that whether they took the right decision or not. It also shows that they think more of what others will think about them.
- 4) The survey conducted showed that 44% people agree somewhat to the statement ‘they can be sarcastic’. This is again a bad sign which shows their short temperedness.
- 5) It was observed that 56% people rated agree somewhat to the statement ‘I think my way of doing things is better than other people’s. While 4% disagreed strongly with the same. This shows that they consider themselves superior and others inferior and it also shows lack of team work as others are not being encouraged for their good idea.
- 6) After the research it was found that 32% people disagree strongly to the statement ‘If I am in a large meeting, I find I do not speak up’, while 30% people agree somewhat with the same. This shows that they are not much social.
- 7) It was observed that 30% people disagree somewhat with the statement ‘if I am unsure about a given task, I find it uncomfortable to ask for help’ while 20% people agree strongly with the same. This also needs corrective actions.
- 8) 62% people rated disagree strongly to the statement ‘When I have to deal with someone in authority, I find it difficult to look them directly in the eye.’ While 18% agreed somewhat with the same. This shows that appropriate training need to be provided to increase their confidence level.
- 9) It was observed that 46% people agree somewhat with the statement ‘I am not afraid to be direct with someone, even if they think I am being rude.’ While 8% disagreed strongly with the same.

## SUGGESTIONS

The research on level of assertiveness among executives in handling various situations has brought to light both positive aspects and dark spots. To cultivate assertiveness in them the following suggestions should be taken into consideration:

1. From the findings, it is recommended that a training programme on “Assertive Communication” may be organized for the employees where they may be given inputs of “how to say No” and how to make decisions with much assertion.
2. In order to avoid conflicts and sarcasm, stress may be given on listening to others for better teamwork and support. Training programmes on Listening Skills, Inter Personal skills and Team work may be conducted.
3. Executives may be encouraged to give presentations periodically in order to build in self- confidence and face the public with courage. The best presenter should also be rewarded so as to future enhance their morale and encourage others to do the same.
4. They should be given challenging team tasks where each member of the team plays an important role or function in the completion of the task. This will not only help in building up confidence of each member to handle challenging task but will also highlight the relevance of teamwork giving the message that together everyone achieves more.

## CONCLUSION

The study helped to identify the communication style of executives at BHEL, Bhopal. It was found that they were either passive or aggressive while handling various situations. Thus a training program on the same as laid out in this report should be conducted in order to further enhance the productivity of the employees. Leader’s role becomes that of sharing strong vision and making his or her organization believe in his or her vision, and at the same time taking care of their employees personal and professional problems as their mentor and simultaneously providing enough space and power so that they could fly on their own and in the

subsequent process nurture leadership in them .If a leadership nurtures this relation with its employees then people will be retained by themselves as the proverb says people don't leave jobs they leave their boss. The research revealed that Assertiveness is the key contributor to the development of a psychologically healthy workplace. Leaders can directly influence morale, satisfaction and perceptions of stress which engages employees in happy manner and stops him or her in leaving the organization. By being assertive, leaders can help in bringing change in the organization and getting the wholehearted acceptance of that change from each member of the organization. From the study, it can be concluded that for fast growth and progress of any organization, communication plays a vital role. Communication among the employees will be more fruitful if everybody follows assertive style of communication.

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