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Original article

Assertive communication in managers of the Provincial School of Sport Initiation

Comunicación asertiva en directivos de la Escuela de Iniciación Deportiva Provincial

Comunicação assertiva nos gestores da Escola Provincial de Iniciação ao Esporte

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ABSTRACT

Assertiveness is a key social skill for the promotion of human development and the prevention of psychosocial problems in the various areas of human development. The aim of this paper is to determine the characteristics that assertive communication assumes in managers of the Sports Initiation School "Ormani Arenado Llonch" of Pinar del Río. An observational, descriptive, cross sectional study was conducted in the period between April and June 2018. For this purpose, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used, and the sample consisted of 12 managers. The empirical methods used to obtain information were: observation, the Rathus Assertiveness Scale and the semi-



structured interview. It was shown a prevalence of managers between 50 and 60 years of age (33%) and belonging to the male gender (67 %). The positions held were mainly Assistant Director in Integral Formation, Head of Grade and Head of Department (25%). The totality of the sample received postgraduate courses (100 %). Participants with between 21 and 30 years of work experience prevailed. The assertive confrontational communicative style prevailed (42%). Economic and social development in today's Cuba needs managers who act away from aggressive and selfish postures; but also who leave behind uncritical and passive postures; rather it is needed assertive men and women.

Keywords: Assertive communication; Manager; Sports Initiation School.

RESUMEN

La asertividad es una habilidad social clave para la promoción del desarrollo humano y la prevención de problemas psicosociales en los diversos ámbitos del desarrollo humano. El objetivo de este trabajo es determinar las características que asume la comunicación asertiva en directivos de la Escuela de Iniciación Deportiva Escolar "Ormani Arenado Llonch" de Pinar del Río. Se realizó un estudio observacional, descriptivo, transversal en el periodo comprendido entre abril y junio de 2018. Para ello, se utilizó un muestreo no probabilístico por conveniencia, quedando conformada la muestra por 12 directivos. Como métodos empíricos de obtención de información, se utilizaron: la observación, la Escala de Asertividad de Rathus y la entrevista semiestructurada. En la investigación, se mostró predominio de directivos que se encontraban entre los 50 y 60 años de edad (33 %) y que pertenecían al género masculino (67 %). Los cargos ocupados fueron fundamentalmente Subdirector en Formación Integral, Jefe de Grado y Jefe de Departamento (25 %). La totalidad de la muestra recibió cursos de superación de postgrado (100 %). Primaron los participantes que tenían entre 21 y 30 años de experiencia laboral. Prevaleció el estilo comunicativo asertivo confrontativo (42 %). El desarrollo económico y social en la Cuba de hoy necesita de directivos que actúen alejados de posturas agresivas y egoístas; pero también que dejen atrás posturas acrílicas y pasivas, necesita de hombres y mujeres asertivos.

Palabras clave: Comunicación asertiva; Directivo; Escuela de Iniciación Deportiva Escolar.

RESUMO

A assertividade é uma habilidade social chave para a promoção do desenvolvimento do homem e a prevenção de problemas psicosociais em diferentes áreas da evolução humana. O objetivo deste trabalho é determinar as características que a comunicação assertiva assume nos dirigentes da Escola de Iniciação ao Esporte "Ormani Arenado Llonch" de Pinar del Río. Um estudo observacional, descritivo e transversal foi realizado entre abril e junho de 2018. Para este fim, foi utilizada uma amostragem de conveniência não-probabilística, e a amostra consistiu de 12 diretores. Os métodos empíricos utilizados para obter informações foram: a observação, a Escala de Assertividade de Rathus e a entrevista semiestructurada. A pesquisa mostrou uma predominância de gerentes entre 50 e 60 anos de idade (33 %) e pertencentes ao sexo masculino (67 %). Os cargos ocupados foram principalmente o de Chefe Adjunto de Treinamento Integral, Chefe de Grau e Chefe de Departamento (25 %). A amostra inteira recebeu treinamento de pós-graduação (100%). Os participantes com entre 21 e 30 anos de experiência de trabalho foram predominantes. Prevaleceu o estilo de comunicação assertiva e confrontacional (42 %). O desenvolvimento econômico e social na Cuba de hoje precisa



de gestores que estejam longe de posturas agressivas e egoístas; mas também que deixem para trás posturas acríicas e passivas; precisa de homens e mulheres assertivos.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação assertiva; Administração; Iniciação Esportiva Escolar.

INTRODUCTION

The human condition is associated with communication as a form of relationship between people. It is through the communicative process, essentially, that they synthesize, organize and elaborate in an increasingly intense way all the experience and knowledge that comes to them as individuals, through language. Communication has a strong educational charge because the people involved in it receive the possibility of transmitting to each other all their psychological reality, social values, knowledge and skills for successful interaction with other people, which has an impact on the improvement of their personality (Caballero, Cruz & Otero, 2018).

Communication is inevitable in the interaction that takes place within the framework of the educational and management process. It plays a fundamental role in the formation and development of the teacher's personality through its affective cognitive expression and, to a large extent, conditions the quality of the results obtained in their professional work; therefore, it must be designed as any other didactic component of the pedagogical process (Caballero *et al.*, 2018).

In fact, in the last twenty years, communication has been studied with greater force, being an aspect of great interest for psychologists, speech therapists, philosophers, pedagogues, among other professionals. Focusing not only on its impact on teachers, but also on the students, that is, the teaching-educational process as a whole. In this sense, research developed in other contexts highlight the importance of communication in pedagogical work, Cañas & Hernández, (2019); Gómez, Ángulo & González, (2017); Villena, Justicia & Fernández, (2016).

Meanwhile, in Cuba, we find the studies of Caballero *et al.*, (2018); Codina, (2002); González, Rodríguez and González (2019).

All these proposals reveal the interrelation that exists between cognitive processes and communication, with a psycho-pedagogical approach through topics related to the development of social skills, assertiveness, school coexistence and interpersonal relationships from psychology and education.

Alberti (2008) defines assertiveness as the ability to express thoughts, feelings, perceptions, to choose how to react and to uphold one's rights when they are appropriate as obligations; being assertive means being able to express oneself with confidence without having to resort to passive, aggressive or manipulative behaviour, which implies self-knowledge, self-control to know how to listen and respond to the needs of others without neglecting one's own.

It is evident then that assertiveness is a communicational strategy that can be incorporated into the managerial plan of the organization, but it is also a value, which is part of the personality system of the individual and his daily actions, it is a bridge that extends between the individual and the environment where he has to communicate and develop (Gómez *et al.*, 2017). From this perspective, assertiveness and its link with the success of educational institutions involves observing the path that they travel to become



successful organizations, emphasizing the fluidity of their managerial relationships with communicational exchanges since in these processes of exchanges they assign, delegate functions, establish commitments, give communicational quality to the organization, which generates a sense of belonging. Through motivational, assertive and effective communication, behaviors are also predicted and interpreted; strategies are evaluated and planned, which mobilize change, individual and group goals are proposed in an effort (Gómez *et al.*, 2017).

In the case of educational institutions that have prefixed professional objectives, framed in the organizational mission that respond to a vision that, ultimately, becomes the compass that guides, channels and promotes all actions. Referring to assertive communication processes implies understanding communication as an opportunity to meet with the other; this raises a wide range of possibilities for interaction in the work and social environment because it is there where human exchange has reason to be since it is through this communicative skill that people achieve understanding, coordination, cooperation and enhance the growth and development of the institution (Gómez *et al.*, 2017).

Sport as a human activity does not escape the need for assertive communication. The good communication of a sports coach in his/her performance must be characterized by a set of verbal and extra verbal skills that allow him/her to behave properly in each act or communicational situation and that transmit the true axiological foundations of a personological construction. Possess a high level of observation that will provide the necessary feedback for the redesign of their pedagogical actions, in which empathy is an important element to achieve communication with efficiency and based on ethics and responsibility of the specialty. In addition, it will promote a positive attitude in athletes, favoring the development of the corresponding physical activity and the assimilation and internalization of values and ethics consistent with our social system and human policy, which is today a challenge and a necessity in the sports system (Téllez, González & Sánchez, 2019), because in practice, when linking with the athlete, a contradiction is perceived between the discourse and human behavior, manifesting shortcomings that affect their overall comprehensive general training, which so necessarily must be developed and consolidated if you want to promote behaviors aimed at achieving the expected results (Téllez, González, & Sánchez, 2019).

Cuban society in the last decade as part of the educational revolution, driven by numerous programs, is called to improve the pedagogical work in order to obtain educational excellence for which the development of communication skills is among the first lines of improvement, especially in the context of the Sports Initiation School (Eide in Spanish) "Ormani Arenado Llonch" of Pinar del Río that serves students motivated by study and sport. However, there is a lack of scientific publications on the subject.

For this reason, this article highlights the characteristics that communication assumes in the management process and reflects on its impact on interpersonal relationships that are established in the educational context, from the deepening and analysis of assertive communication as a way to develop the initial training of the pedagogical professional.

Considering the previous arguments, the present research had as objective to determine the characteristics that assertive communication assumes in managers of the Sports Initiation School (Eide) "Ormani Arenado Llonch" of Pinar del Río.

In order to carry out this research, instruments taken from the following authors were used (Rathius, 1973; León & Vargas, 2009; Díaz, Torruco, Martínez & Varela, 2013).



MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive, cross-sectional, observational study, conducted in the period between April and June 2018 in managers of the Sports Initiation School (Eide) "Ormani Arenado Llonch" of Pinar del Río.

Population and sample

The Eide "Ormani Arenado Llonch" has 3 Teaching Units: Primary Education, Secondary Education and Pre-University Education. As a population, it has 20 directors, of which three are Unit Directors, one Deputy Director General, three Cycle Heads, three Grade Heads, three Department Heads, four Teaching Secretaries and three Deputy Directors of Integral Formation, constituting its management structure.

The sample selected was non-probabilistic by convenience and consisted of 12 members of the management structure, which represents 60% of the total number of managers of the aforementioned educational institution. The participants came from the three Teaching Units existing in the center. The sample selection was justified by criteria of accessibility and disposition of the sample.

In order to answer the research objective, the following empirical and statistical methods were used:

Observation: a technique widely used in evaluation processes. The observation of a phenomenon or subject must be carried out continuously and repeatedly, as the result obtained from a cut may not be significant. When the observed results are repeated, then they demonstrate stability in what is observed and, therefore, have value for interpretation.

It was used with the objective of identifying in the activities of the work system of the center how the communication was between the members of the Board of Directors and in their interpersonal relations from their managerial position in the context. It served to extract regularities and other elements for the diagnosis, as well as to evaluate the results of the application of the proposal.

Rathus Assertiveness Scale: this instrument consists of 30 *items*, with multiple response type (Likert). It is designed to be self-administered in such a way that the subjects evaluate each statement according to a scale of six anchors, which goes from -3 (very uncharacteristic of me, extremely non-descriptive) to +3 (very characteristic of me, extremely descriptive). It has an application time of approximately 20 minutes.

Its reliability was obtained with two studies, the first by means of *test-retest* in 68 university students between 17 and 27 years old, which obtained a relationship coefficient of $r = 0.7782$ ($p < 0.01$), with a stability between moderate and high; in the second study, the reliability was determined by halves between even and odd items in 67 people outside the university environment of both sexes, between 15 and 70 years of age, achieving a relationship coefficient $r = 0.7723$, ($p < .01$), which confirms the high homogeneity of the RAS traits.

It was used to know how assertiveness behaves in managers of the School of School Sports Initiation (Eide) "Ormani Arenado Llonch".



Semi-structured interview: it starts from planned questions that can be adjusted to the interviewees. Its greatest advantage is the possibility of adapting to the subjects with enormous possibilities to motivate the interlocutor, clarify terms, identify ambiguities and reduce formalisms.

Used to know socio-demographic characteristics and aspects related to communicative styles implemented by managers.

The information was processed using Microsoft Office Excel 2010. Descriptive statistics were used as a statistical method, based on the analysis of the results in absolute frequency and relative frequency distribution tables.

Procedure

The following steps were carried out for the development of the study:

- *Step 1:* Review of current historical-tendential background on the object of study.
- *Step 2:* Search and development of assessment tools
- *Step 3:* Presentation of the research proposal to the General Director of Eide, the Scientific Committee and the Research Ethics Committee for approval.
- *Step 4:* Sample selection.
- *Step 5:* Data collection.
- *Step 6:* Analysis, processing and integration of the results.
- *Step 7:* Elaboration of the scientific article.
- *Step 8:* Presentation to the scientific community and stakeholders of the main results obtained.

Ethical Aspects

Participants were asked for their informed consent, then the characteristics and objective of the research were explained. The identity of those involved was reserved to guarantee originality and the right to anonymity when giving their answers.

RESULTS

As Table 1 shows, 33 % of the managers were in late middle adulthood, being between 50 and 60 years of age. There was a predominance of the male gender (67 %). The positions held were predominantly Deputy Director of Comprehensive Education, Head of Grade and Head of Department (33 %). The totality of the sample (100 %) received postgraduate courses. The majority of those evaluated had between 21 and 30 years of work experience (33 %) (Table 1).



Table 1. - Socio-demographic characteristics of the managers

Age	Quantity	%
30-40	3	25 %
41-50	3	25 %
51-60	4	33 %
61 and over	2	17 %
Genre		
Female	4	33 %
Male	8	67 %
Position		
Unit Director	2	17 %
Assistant Director of Integral Formation	3	25 %
Head of Grade	3	25 %
Head of Department	3	25 %
Teaching Secretary	1	8 %
Postgraduate studies		
Courses	12	100 %
Diplomas	9	75 %
Masters	6	50 %
Teaching Experience		
0-10	1	8 %
11-20	2	17 %
21-30	4	33 %
31-40	2	17 %
41 and over	3	25 %
Total	12	100 %

Table 2 shows the global values of assertive behavior in managers of the Eide "Ormani Arenado Llorch". Forty-two percent of the respondents showed confrontational assertive behavior; 25 %, assertive and 17% very assertive. To a lesser and equal extent, the categories inassertive and definitely assertive, 8 %, were evidenced. None of the managers manifested definitely inassertive or very inassertive behaviors (Table 2).



Table 2. - Assertiveness

Assertiveness	Quantity	%
Definitely unassertive	0	0 %
Very inassertive	0	0 %
Inassertive	1	8 %
Assertive Confrontational	5	42 %
Assertive	3	25 %
Very assertive	2	17 %
Definitely assertive	1	8 %
Total	12	100 %

Table 3 reflected assertive behavior as a function of gender and age. Thirty-three percent of the participants belonged to the male gender and showed a conforming assertive behavior, i.e., they supported their opinions; however, they showed contradiction between words and deeds. In terms of age, 25 % of the respondents were in the range of 41-50 years and 51-60 years, showed confrontational assertive and assertive behavior respectively. Assertive behavior was characterized by being frequently functional and adaptive in interpersonal relationships, the messages are congruent; those who projected it also presented fear, fear of criticism, mockery by others. It is important to highlight that with increasing age the degree of assertiveness also increased (Table 3).

Table 3. - Assertiveness in function of gender and age

Assertiveness	Gender		Age range			
	Feminine N (%)	Male N (%)	30-40 N (%)	41-50 N (%)	51-60 N (%)	61 y + N (%)
Definitely unassertive	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)
Very unassuming	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)
Inassertive	0(0 %)	1(8 %)	1(8 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)
Assertive confrontational	1(8 %)	4(33 %)	2(17 %)	3(25 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)
Assertive	1(8 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	3(25 %)	0(0 %)
Very assertive	1(8 %)	1(8 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	2(17%)
Definitely assertive	1(8%)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	1(8 %)	0(0 %)

Table 4 highlights the predominance of managers who had 21-30 years of work experience and who in turn showed assertive behavior (25 %). It is significant to note that in this section also, as the years of work experience increased, the degree of assertiveness increased (Table 4).



Table 4. - Assertiveness and years of work experience

Assertiveness	Years of work experience				
	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41 and over
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Definitely unassertive	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)
Very inassertive	0(0%)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)
Inassertive	1(8 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)
Assertive Confrontational	0(0%)	2(16 %)	2(16 %)	1(80 %)	0(0 %)
Assertive	0(0%)	0(0 %)	3(25 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)
Very assertive	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	2(16 %)	(%)
Definitely assertive	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	0(0 %)	1(8 %)

DISCUSSION

Regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample, the results are consistent with those found in other research (Cañas and Hernández, 2019; Tantalean and Livia, 2021).

Regarding assertive communication, 67 % of the participants scored above the average range, while the remaining 33% were in a lower range, which could be an indicator of low assertive communication and would suggest that participants are not clear about the importance of this type of communication from their role as adults. However, they do consider assertiveness as a determining factor in their role as managers (Güell, 2011).

A relationship was also found between assertiveness and sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender and years of work experience. Researchers found interaction between assertiveness and age (Cañón & Rodríguez, 2011), stating that as age increases, the assertiveness of an individual is greater, considering age fundamental to define someone as assertive. Meanwhile, others claim that there is no such relationship with factors such as age, gender and socioeconomic status (Cañas & Hernández, 2019).

In relation to gender, studies have been found that agree that there are differences between men and women in terms of the level of assertiveness. For example, Garaigordobil and Durá (2006) state that women have assertive communication styles in a higher percentage than men, while Ayvar (2016) found in his work with adolescents the opposite in terms of the level of assertiveness, against which he states that perhaps there is a social and cultural change in relation to gender stereotypes, which is also evident in the form of communication of both.

With regard to years of work experience, Zeldin (2000) states that the experience accumulated in certain activities in which an individual believes he or she is competent produces a higher level of competence. It is here where the relationship between teaching experience and the development and strengthening of the competencies inherent to the role, such as assertive communication, can probably be established.



However, in order to make any binding statement between sociodemographic variables and assertive communication, it would be necessary to make an inquiry in larger population samples, even though ours was representative (60 % of the population). Therefore, the findings of this research are specific to the study sample and it is not possible to make any generalizations.

From the results found, other research could be formulated, understanding that assertiveness is a way to achieve social transformations (Buitrago, 2019), which refer to specify the influence of this type of communication in the role played by managers in the academic environment, such as: (a) the influence that their assertiveness has on the academic performance of students, as reported by Monje, Camacho, Trujillo and Artunduaga, (2009), who identified a positive type correlation; (b) the obstacles that assertive communication between parents, teachers and students has, an aspect that was studied by Martínez and Castellanos (2016).

In the search for information through the literature review on the topic of assertive communication in teachers and / or managers, there was little scientific information according to the requirements of this journal, so it is necessary to expand the number of investigations that help strengthen this theme.

Once the main results of the study are exposed, it can be pointed out that in the Sports Initiation School (Eide) "Ormani Arenado Llonch" of Pinar del Río, the directors showed a confrontational assertive communication style characterized by the support of opinions, but in contradiction between words and deeds. They said they did not know in depth the educational reality of the context in which they direct, therefore, they were not sufficiently prepared in this sense, which constituted a barrier that hindered and made difficult the assertive communication. There were also nuances of authoritarianism, aggression and imposition in the communication that was established with subordinates, problems in the ability to listen. In addition, it was found that management activities were not conveniently planned or prepared, such as spaces for reflection, debate, dialogue that would allow for exchange and participatory decision-making; only two managers received training on communication issues, which represented 17 % of the total sample, and there was a lack of preparation offers on this issue.

For this reason, it is necessary to follow up on the subject to continuously reinforce assertive communication and the importance that this should assume in the educational field or in any of the fields of work. In addition to conducting studies with larger population samples that contribute to effective intervention programs. An assertive attitude means that the institution is pleasant and people seek to remain in it to support the achievement of the objectives as goals, strengthens the identification of teachers with the institution, providing them with relevant, sufficient, timely information, reinforcing their integration and generating in them a favorable image of the organization, its products and services.

Assertiveness as a style of communication implies the defense of the legitimate rights of the subject in his/her condition as a person and as a professional, in his/her own conditions, which allow him/her to fulfill his/her duties as a citizen.

Therefore, economic and social development in today's Cuba needs managers who act away from aggressive and selfish postures; but they must also leave behind uncritical and passive postures, rather it needs assertive men and women.



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Conflict of interests:

The authors declare not to have any interest conflicts.

Authors' contribution:

The authors have participated in the writing of the work and analysis of the documents.



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