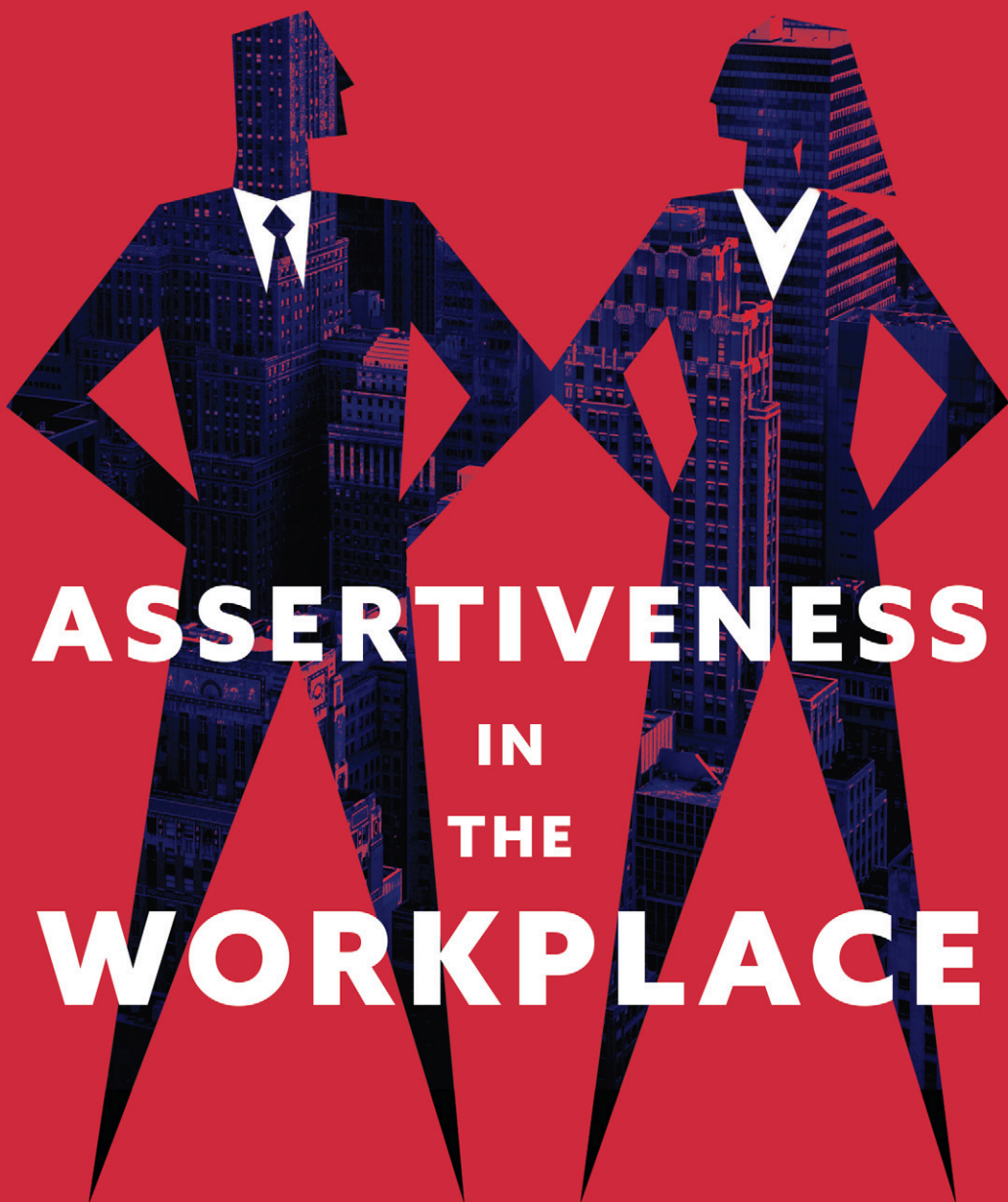


Edited by

**CONNIE ATRISTAIN-SUÁREZ  
SUSANA CASTAÑOS-CERVANTES**



**ASSERTIVENESS  
IN  
THE  
WORKPLACE**

**Personal and Business  
Competitiveness in Emerging  
and Developing Countries**

# **Assertiveness in the Workplace**

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# **Assertiveness in the Workplace: Personal and Business Competitiveness in Emerging and Developing Countries**

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL

First edition 2025

Editorial matter and selection © 2025 Connie Atristain-Suárez and Susana Castaños Cervantes.  
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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83662-215-4 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-83662-214-7 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-83662-216-1 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*To Fernando, Rodrigo, and Berenice,  
for being the centre of my life and the driving force behind my dreams.*

*To you, Fernando, tireless companion, for your love, support, and faith throughout  
our journey together.*

*To Rodrigo and Berenice, my beloved children, for inspiring me to be better every  
day and for your smiles and hugs that fill me with energy and joy.*

*This book is for you, with all my love and gratitude, because you are by my side,  
making every day an adventure worth living.*

*Connie Atristain-Suárez*

*To my loved ones, who gave me the gift of dreams and the ability to realize them.  
Dr. Susana Castaños-Cervantes*

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## Preface

In a world where emerging markets and developing nations are at the forefront of economic and social transformation, assertiveness has emerged as a decisive element of professional and organizational success. This book, *Assertiveness in the Workplace: Personal and Business Competitiveness in Emerging and Developing Countries*, reflects the culmination of a comprehensive exploration into assertiveness as a transformative tool that holds the power to shape individuals, influence organizations and foster resilience within dynamic, competitive landscapes.

A keen observation sparked the idea for this work: while assertiveness is frequently discussed within the context of personal development, its impact on organizational culture, business adaptability and sustainable growth has often been underrepresented, especially in regions facing unique economic and social challenges. In this book, we aim to address that gap, presenting assertiveness not merely as a personality trait but as a strategic approach that enables individuals and organizations alike to navigate, influence and excel in complex environments.

One of the most rewarding aspects of curating this volume has been the opportunity to draw upon diverse, rich perspectives from emerging and developing nations. The contributing authors have dedicated their efforts to understanding assertiveness within various contexts – economic, cultural and organizational – and their insights reveal a remarkable diversity in challenges and applications. Through rigorous analysis and case studies, the authors examine assertiveness as an enabler of effective communication, ethical decision-making, adaptability and resilience, offering a fresh, nuanced view of how assertiveness underpins competitive advantage.

As editors, we have been particularly struck by assertiveness's universal applicability. Across different contexts, assertiveness emerges as a skill that bridges divides, fosters mutual respect and facilitates honest, constructive dialogue. It is a competency that empowers individuals to navigate personal and professional challenges with integrity and purpose and supports organizations in becoming adaptive, inclusive and forward-looking. This universality is especially compelling in developing and emerging markets, where assertiveness can help bridge the gap between traditional cultural norms and the demands of a globalized economy.

The experience of editing this book has been enriching for us. It has been a journey marked by intellectual exchange, collaboration and shared vision among contributors passionate about advancing assertiveness as a subject of study and a

driver of real-world change. We are indebted to our authors, who bring their expertise and commitment to exploring assertiveness as a force for positive impact in regions where economic development and personal empowerment are deeply intertwined. Their contributions have enriched our understanding and appreciation of assertiveness and opened new perspectives on how this trait is applied and interpreted across cultures and professional domains.

We are delighted to present this book to a readership that will find the material as enlightening and valuable as we have. Whether a business leader, an academic, a policymaker or a student, readers will deepen their understanding of assertiveness and be inspired to consider how it can be applied to their professional and personal lives. Beyond the theoretical frameworks and case studies, this book is an invitation to view assertiveness as an asset. This asset is as relevant to individual career development as it is to the broader goals of organizational sustainability and societal progress.

In closing, we extend our gratitude to all those who have contributed to this work, from the authors whose insights have brought this vision to life to the readers who share our interest in fostering a more assertive, ethical and competitive world. We hope this book will serve as a valuable resource, offering knowledge and practical tools to those who wish to embrace assertiveness as a catalyst for positive transformation in their personal lives, workplaces and communities.

Connie Atristain-Suárez  
Susana Castaños-Cervantes

# **Acknowledgements**

‘We sincerely thank the Universidad Panamericana Campus Ciudad de México for believing in this project and providing us with the support that was fundamental for its realization. We are deeply grateful for the trust placed in us.’

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## Chapter 1

# Assertiveness in the Workplace: Personal and Business Competitiveness in Emerging and Developing Countries

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### Abstract

This chapter examines the role of assertiveness in the workplace, focusing on its significance for personal and business competitiveness in emerging and developing countries. Assertiveness is a critical communication style that promotes clear, direct and respectful expression of opinions, needs and desires. The text highlights the importance of assertiveness in building trust, fostering effective communication, resolving conflicts, enhancing the work environment and contributing to organisational success. Assertiveness is also linked to leadership effectiveness, decision-making, emotional well-being, employee development and self-esteem as it allows individuals to express themselves without fear of being subjugated or exploited. Additionally, the chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the book's objectives, detailing the critical research questions that guide the exploration of assertiveness in the workplace. It also outlines the book's structure organised into three distinct parts. This thoughtfully organised structure enables the book to provide readers with a thorough and practical understanding of assertiveness, encompassing its significance and broader impact on organisational success. By presenting assertiveness comprehensively, the book equips readers with the essential insights and strategies to harness assertiveness to enhance individual and business competitiveness effectively.

*Keywords:* Assertiveness; workplace communication; leadership; conflict resolution; organisational culture; emotional well-being; business competitiveness

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Assertiveness in the Workplace, 1–14

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doi:[10.1108/978-1-83662-214-720251003](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83662-214-720251003)

## **Introduction**

Assertiveness is a philosophy of life and a way of conducting business founded on respect and consideration towards others. Relationships based on trust, respect, openness and sincerity are forged through assertiveness. These relationships are characterised by a genuine interest in understanding each other, recognising differences, confronting challenges and providing support while maintaining openness and honesty in communication. To achieve competitiveness in both business and personal spheres, it is essential to cultivate assertiveness and build relationships rooted in it. It requires courage, a continual commitment to examining one's values and a readiness to embrace change and explore new ways of thinking, feeling and acting across diverse situations.

Being assertive in business implies communicating confidently without resorting to passive, aggressive or manipulative attitudes. It involves greater self-awareness, acceptance and empowerment of one's true identity. It necessitates listening and responding to the needs of others without neglecting one's own and compromising personal principles. Also, it implies enhancing communication skills and effectively managing stress in complicated situations. Being assertive also means expressing needs, opinions or emotions with the confidence that one will not be subjugated, exploited or forced to go against one's desires.

In organisations of the present day, many individuals are fearful of confronting conflicts and receiving criticism. They believe they would lose in any dispute and that negative comments could crush them. They feel they do not have the right to express their viewpoints and have been raised since childhood to believe that their role is merely to accept and comply with standards imposed by others in society. Making themselves visible with flaws, with their own opinions or with personal desires makes them feel exceedingly vulnerable and exposed to potential attacks. Therefore, in a work environment where collaboration and effective communication are fundamental, being assertive allows one to express ideas and opinions clearly and respectfully, fostering an environment where everyone feels heard and valued. Furthermore, assertiveness encourages the constructive resolution of conflicts as being able to express needs and concerns appropriately opens opportunities to find solutions that are beneficial to all parties involved.

When we act assertively, we are placing our own needs on an equal footing with the needs of others. It is essential for both our well-being and the success of the company. When we find a win-win solution that maintains the dignity, respect and needs of others, a lasting result is achieved that all parties can subscribe to. This option is not necessarily the simplest one as it involves taking on greater responsibility and being aware of the importance of the people around us and how we are interconnected. It inevitably leads to a change in how we perceive the world and see ourselves.

In the business environment, as in other contexts, assertiveness is related to effective communication beyond merely choosing the right words and saying them at the right time and place. It also encompasses tone of voice, intonation, volume, facial expressions, gestures and body language, which are crucial in conveying an unambiguous message to the other person. In most cases, an

assertive response is the most favourable option and leads to situations where both parties mutually benefit, feeling satisfied with the outcome and themselves.

A business culture that promotes assertiveness also encourages employees' growth and professional development. When individuals feel secure enough to express their desires for growth and development, they can work on their skill and knowledge development. This benefits the company by having more qualified and committed employees. Assertiveness plays a crucial role in the modern workplace as it improves interpersonal relationships and the work environment and boosts business and personal competitiveness.

Moreover, assertiveness contributes to improving decision-making and efficiency at work. Assertive work teams can openly discuss ideas and proposals, leading to a more thorough evaluation and selection of the best options to achieve the company's objectives. On a personal level, assertiveness is crucial to emotional well-being and self-esteem. By expressing needs and boundaries appropriately, employees feel more empowered and respected, which improves their job satisfaction and overall quality of life.

Companies face constant challenges to remain relevant and succeed in an increasingly competitive world. In this context, assertiveness has become an essential skill for individuals and organisations. The ability to communicate effectively, expressing opinions and needs clearly and respectfully, is crucial for the development of healthy work relationships and markets, as well as for the achievement of business objectives. Therefore, assertiveness is an essential skill in the workplace to foster a culture of respect, collaboration and growth. It improves business competitiveness by improving communication, decision-making and conflict resolution. Likewise, it encourages individuals' personal and professional development, resulting in more committed and satisfied employees.

**Table 1.1** provides a structured overview of the fundamental elements defining assertiveness within professional settings, highlighting critical dimensions such as communication, conflict resolution, self-awareness, leadership, emotional well-being, organisational culture and decision-making. These elements are essential for fostering a productive and respectful work environment. For instance, assertive communication allows for the clear, direct and respectful expression of needs and opinions, which is vital for effective collaboration and mutual understanding among team members. Additionally, self-awareness is emphasised as a foundation of assertiveness, enabling individuals to confidently express their identity and values without undermining others' perspectives. The overview further underscores assertiveness's role in leadership, where balancing authority with empathy and respect enhances team morale and cohesion. By synthesising these aspects, **Table 1.1** serves as a valuable reference for understanding the multifaceted nature of assertiveness and its impact on both personal and organisational competitiveness in the workplace.

Based on the foregoing, assertiveness becomes an invaluable resource for achieving success at the organisational and personal levels. The book presents recent findings from the business context in emerging and developing countries. It broadens the general research on assertiveness, enhancing our understanding of the term and giving direction to possible lines focused on organisations and people within this sphere.

Table 1.1. Critical Aspects of Assertiveness in the Workplace.

Aspect	Description
Communication	Clear, direct, respectful expression of needs and opinions
Conflict resolution	Constructive approaches that foster mutually beneficial solutions
Self-awareness	Understanding and acceptance of one's identity and principles
Leadership	Balancing authority with empathy and respect
Emotional well-being	Enhancing self-esteem and reducing workplace stress through clear communication
Organisational culture	Promoting a culture of respect, collaboration and growth
Decision-making	Making informed decisions that consider both personal and organisational needs

*Source:* Authors' elaboration.

*Note:* The table shows the critical aspects of assertiveness in the workplace and a brief description of what each of them should be like.

## Assertiveness Statement: Exploring Its Definition

Various researchers define assertiveness as a communication style that allows the expression of opinions, desires and needs in a clear, direct and respectful manner without violating the rights of others (Alberti & Emmons, 2001; 2008; Garner, 2012; Pfrombeck et al., 2023; Pourjali & Zarnaghash, 2010; Thangal et al., 2023). Being assertive implies defending one's rights and values while showing consideration for others and seeking a balance between one's own needs and those of others. Assertiveness skills help articulate one's unique sense of self while maintaining a connection with others.

An assertive person can establish appropriate boundaries, defend their rights and make decisions independently (Filipeanu & Cănanău, 2015; Pourjali & Zarnaghash, 2010). Some characteristics of assertiveness include the appropriate expression of feelings without resorting to aggressive or passive behaviours. This involves communicating with confidence, being firm in expressing one's ideas and knowing when to say 'no' when necessary, without feeling guilty or subjugated by the opinions of others, as well as having the ability to accept constructive criticism (Thangal et al., 2023, p. 5). For his part, Caputo (1984) asserted that assertiveness includes five fundamental individual rights, namely the right to be respected, the right to feel and express feelings, the right to be wrong, the right to say no and finally, the right to ask questions.

According to Ames (2009), assertiveness is a dimension of everyday perceptions that reflects an individual's interpersonal disposition to defend their interests and ideas and resist the impositions of others, that is how a person responds in a

situation where their positions and/or interests are or could be in conflict with the positions or interests of others. The person's response could be located along a dimension that goes from evasion and passivity at one end to aggression and hostility at the other. Gil'Adí (2004), in his work, identifies and explains three fundamental interpersonal styles. The first is characterised by fighting, accusing and threatening, pushing people away. The second style is passive, where the person allows others to take advantage of them, accumulating resentment and rage. In contrast, the assertive style stands out for defending oneself and expressing true feelings without allowing others to take advantage while also considering the feelings of others. Similarly, Gil'Adí (2001) classifies assertiveness into three categories: essential assertiveness (expressing rights, feelings and personal opinions appropriately), empathetic assertiveness (expressing the needs of oneself with sensitivity towards the other person) and confrontational assertiveness (addressing directly and respectfully the contradictions in the words or actions of the other person without imposing the desire of oneself on others).

Therefore, assertiveness promotes positive interpersonal interaction (Lwehabura & Matovelo, 2000) and is characterised by sincerity, impartiality, frankness, tolerance, precision, personal expression and respect for oneself and others. This communication skill fosters mutual understanding and achieves shared goals (Lwehabura & Matovelo, 2000). Thus, assertiveness becomes a powerful tool for establishing healthy relationships and achieving goals effectively.

According to Gil'Adí (2004), assertiveness involves the ability to express our emotions and thoughts in a way that allows us to act in favour of our interests and rights without harming or denying the rights of others. It involves the ability to spontaneously express personal tastes and interests, to speak about oneself without feeling inhibited, to comfortably accept compliments, to openly express disagreements, to request clarifications and to say 'no' when necessary. Rodríguez (2002) argues that assertiveness is based on respect, which implies the freedom to express ourselves by considering others and being responsible for our actions. On the other hand, some scholars (e.g. Delamater & Mcnamara, 1986; Sheinov, 2018) affirm that assertiveness is a social skill that can vary in degree among people and that can manifest differently depending on the situation, that is a person can show a more or less assertive response depending on the situation they are facing and the moment in which this situation arises.

Consequently, assertiveness is an essential social skill that improves communication and interpersonal relationships. By assertiveness, we can establish clear boundaries, constructively resolve conflicts and express our needs and desires effectively, contributing to better coexistence and greater personal and professional satisfaction. It is why assertiveness is fundamental to individuals' personal and professional development. Those who can express their goals and aspirations clearly and directly are more likely to obtain growth opportunities and advance in their careers. The ability to negotiate, defend one's rights and establish healthy boundaries promote professional development and recognition in the workplace.

## **The Importance of Assertiveness in the Business Environment: Its Role in Effective Communication and Business Management**

As various studies have pointed out, assertiveness is fundamental in building healthy work relationships in a business environment (Dasgupta et al., 2013; Filipeanu & Cănanău, 2015). Assertive employees can communicate effectively with their co-workers, superiors and subordinates, facilitating collaboration, conflict resolution and teamwork. In addition, assertiveness maintains a positive work climate and reduces stress and tension among team members (Ibrahim, 2023; Pipas & Jaradat, 2010; Thangal et al., 2023).

Decision-making is a constant activity in the business environment, and assertive individuals can make informed decisions and communicate them effectively to others (Filipeanu & Cănanău, 2015). Assertiveness allows them to express their opinions and defend their ideas clearly and convincingly (Dasgupta et al., 2013; Ibrahim, 2023). Moreover, assertive employees are more likely to propose innovative solutions and take on responsibilities, contributing to competitiveness and organisational growth (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

Today, companies value adopting assertive attitudes to foster enthusiasm among their members and strive for excellence while focusing on achieving goals that make them more competitive and collaborative. It highlights the value of the human factor as a fundamental pillar (Torres-Silva, 2011). Facilitating assertive interaction among employees in the work environment promotes the creation of connections and bridges between them, which is highly valued by business people today.

It has been observed that initiative, persistence, concern, commitment, persuasion, self-confidence and assertiveness impact entrepreneurial initiative and business success (John et al., 2008; Kaur & Bains, 2013). Additionally, an assertive work attitude leads to employees exercising organisational commitment, boosting the competitiveness of organisations as Torres-Silva and Díaz-Ferrer (2012) point out. This assertive work attitude involves a continuous desire to remain part of the company and be involved in its success, seeking the well-being of the organisation and all its members.

Several studies also highlight that assertiveness is a crucial personal characteristic for entrepreneurs and can significantly impact business success (Caliendo & Kritikos, 2008; Nandram & Samsom, 2020). Assertiveness is considered an essential social skill for entrepreneurs as it allows them to attract customers, make effective decisions during negotiations, maintain a positive attitude in the face of any situation, avoid conflicts caused by disagreements and understand that opinions can differ between individuals, promoting a harmonious environment and increasing company productivity (Ojeda-San Juan, 2017; Reyes & Hidalgo, 2020). An assertive entrepreneur will always strive to communicate and negotiate politely, clearly and concisely, with the common good as a goal.

Assertive communication plays a crucial role in job development across all areas of an organisation. When people maintain effective communication, they work together to achieve individual goals and the general objectives of the organisation, facilitating integration with other areas to achieve shared objectives.

Communication flows within the organisation in different directions: upward, from the employee to their boss; downward, from the boss or leader to the employee; and laterally, among members of the same team and with other areas they must collaborate. Assertive communication not only boosts self-esteem but also contributes to establishing genuine relationships and more efficient activity in the position as indicated by [Filipeanu and Cănanău \(2015\)](#).

On the other hand, according to the findings of [Ninawati \(2012\)](#), there is a relationship between assertive behaviour and cooperative skills, where a higher level of assertive behaviour is associated with greater cooperative skills and vice versa. This correlation has been backed up by [Pearsall and Ellis \(2006\)](#), who affirm that the assertiveness of key team members when expressing their opinions influences the performance of the team and their job satisfaction. Critical and assertive team members contribute to developing specialisation, credibility and coordination among group members.

Assertiveness is also fundamental for effective leadership in the company. An assertive leader can establish clear boundaries, delegate tasks effectively and promote cooperation and teamwork. Additionally, assertiveness assists leaders in making difficult decisions and communicating them clearly and respectfully to team members, facilitating efficient and fair conflict resolution ([Ames & Flynn, 2007](#)). It has been observed that a leader with assertive skills fosters a more enriching, human, caring and rewarding work environment. This leads to employees forming a general perception of the level of appreciation and concern that supervisors representing the organisation have towards them. This perception is known as ‘perceived organisational support’ ([Donsbach & Rhoades-Shanock, 2008](#); [Eisenberger et al., 1986](#); [Rhoades-Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006](#)).

In the business context, assertiveness can be an essential component of effective leadership and, in turn, a factor contributing to leadership problems when it goes wrong. Studies have shown that extremely low and excessive assertiveness can influence the general perceptions of failed leaders ([Ames, 2009a](#)). Various studies have examined how extreme behaviours, either very low or very high assertiveness, can be ineffective or harmful. One of these studies, a meta-analysis by [Judge and Piccolo \(2004\)](#) on transformational and transactional leadership research over the past decades revealed negative connections between leadership effectiveness and passive and laissez-faire styles, including unassertive leaders who avoid making decisions and resist acting. On the other hand, research has been conducted on destructive, toxic and abusive leadership, with several articles and books highlighting the harmful effects of bullying and aggressive behaviour as pointed out by authors such as [Kellerman \(2004\)](#), [Lipman-Blumen \(2005\)](#) and [Tierney and Tepper \(2007\)](#). Thus, the analysis of assertiveness in its extremes demonstrates that assertiveness may be negatively related to effectiveness, suggesting that highly assertive (e.g. destructive) and unassertive (e.g. laissez-faire) leaders could face higher chances of failure.

Various researchers ([Carnevale & De Dreu, 2006](#); [De Dreu et al., 2000](#); [Komorita & Parks, 1996](#); [Van Lange, 1999](#)) argue that extremely low or high assertiveness is a conscious, deliberate and accepted feature of the person. On the other hand, studies on the positive impact of considerate styles and behaviours of

leaders towards their subordinates (showing concern and support for followers and their well-being) were positively associated with leadership effectiveness (e.g. [Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999](#); [De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2004](#); [Judge et al., 2004](#)). This perspective prevails in the literature on negotiation and conflict where individual differences in competitiveness and cooperation are often attributed to styles with labels like 'pro-self' and 'pro-social' ([Carnevale & De Dreu, 2006](#); [Grant, 2007](#)). 'Pro-self' individuals are more concerned about themselves and less about others while 'pro-social' individuals show the reverse pattern. Both cases describe the resulting competitive or cooperative behaviour as intentional, deliberate and motivated.

As leaders within a company or organisation, managers employ different communication styles but often adopt a dominant one out of habit. In the passive communication approach, they avoid expressing their needs and feelings, feeling insecure about defending their rights. On the other hand, with an aggressive approach, they express their opinions and feelings in a way that violates the rights of the employees. Passive managers often need help fully conveying their message, leading to irritation, delays and the need for repetition. On the other hand, aggressive managers are more concerned about maintaining their status and power over employees than advancing goals although they may succeed in the short term in achieving results ([Newbold, 1997](#)). Among the extreme communication styles mentioned, there is the assertive approach. Assertiveness is a way of behaving that allows managers to act in their interest and defend themselves without harming the rights of others ([Arredondo, 2003](#)). In other words, it involves expressing your needs and opinions clearly and respectfully, seeking a balance between your interests and those of others.

Assertive managers show consideration for the needs of the employees and are dedicated to reflecting on what information is relevant to them and how to convey it properly. Furthermore, they have the ability and confidence necessary to face ambiguity and correct misunderstandings in communication ([Newbold, 1997](#)). That is, assertive managers show empathy towards their collaborators and are prepared to address any challenge in the communication process. When managers communicate directly and accurately, employees perceive their reliability ([Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000](#)). This openness promotes the understanding of employees of tasks and encourages responsible decision-making ([Moye & Henkin, 2006](#)). Therefore, a direct and clear communication style fosters trust in managers and contributes to efficiency in task execution and decision-making in the work environment.

As mentioned above, assertiveness is crucial in various business aspects. First, it fosters clear and effective communication among team members, promoting mutual understanding and coordination in task execution. It also establishes and maintains healthy and productive working relationships, creating a more harmonious and collaborative work environment. Also, assertiveness facilitates effective leadership by allowing leaders to express their ideas and needs clearly and respectfully, inspiring trust and motivation in the team.

Another critical aspect is that assertiveness efficiently promotes negotiation and conflict resolution. Workers and leaders who are assertive can address