



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRAINING AS METHOD TO INCREASE SEAFARER COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract: *Seafarers' competitiveness is a maritime company's key aspect for gaining competitor advantage in the financial crisis environment. In order to become competitive in a dynamic and turbulent environment, seafarers need guidance for professional development and such development can be mainly acquired through training inside or outside the employing company. Though managers of maritime companies consider that human resources are the most valuable assets, yet there is no orientation in establishing a training strategy based on seafarers' leadership. The paper presents a new approach in seafarers' training, with focus on professional development through leadership. The research is a contribution for improving the training strategy and is useful for seafarers' training centres and maritime companies.*

Key words: *competitiveness, training, seafarer, leadership, shipping*

1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is on presenting specific training objectives that are needed to be taken into consideration in order to develop professionally both deck and engineering officers. The paper presents a new approach of professional development through leadership in maritime businesses. The findings will help seafarers' training centres and maritime companies to improve their training strategy. In order to acquire competitiveness, the training strategy should focus on seafarers' leadership skills. The limitation of the research consists in focusing on the importance of training through leadership skills and not in pointing a methodology to change the actual training strategy that is mostly common in maritime companies.

As in other industries, leadership on board brings great benefits both to people and to business as it enhances competitiveness. In some companies from maritime industry, personnel development training efforts are already included in the principal management strategies. Consequently, we consider that a maritime company should focus on sending employees to training courses with specific professional development objectives like: improvement of general knowledge of navigation, legislation and vessel technology issues, development of skills for shipping management activities and operating vessel, improvement of communication skills and the most important, acquiring leadership capabilities.

2. DEVELOPING COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH TRAINING

Competitiveness in maritime domain can be defined as a comparative concept of the ability and performance a seafarer can illustrate while obeying the legal norms of seafaring stated by the International Maritime Organisation and other international and national institutions, related to safety, efficiency and efficacy issues. Competence is a blend of technical skill and sufficient mastery of the social structures which inevitably embrace all activities (Lane, 2006). We

consider that a complete definition of competitiveness should integrate the pecuniary aspect like a lower level of wage that a competitive seafarer will demand and accept, compared with other seafarers, at the same work performance.

A training strategy should focus on acquiring certain skills and competences appropriate to maritime domain. A research study done by Southampton Solent University between 2004-2005 lists the qualities that a successful seafarer must detain in order to be competitive and to be valued by shore employers. First of all, seafarers should know the suitable technical language that characterizes maritime environment in order to be able to converse with other interested parties and other seafarers. Here we can point an issue that should be taken into account: the lack of real socialization and the lack of communication skills in the multinational environment for new generation of officers or ratings that prefer virtual social networking instead of real socialization. In other periods of time credibility of seafarers was given by the maritime institutions that trained seafarers. Today reliability of training methods is questioned, as newcomers' essential knowledge level is decreasing. Seafarers should be independent, self-reliant and resourceful workers. They should be able to handle uncertain situations, to find solutions under time and stress constraints and to be responsible with the rest of crew, cargo and ship. All seafarers have leadership potential inside, but only some of them discover this potential.

Competitiveness is influenced by motivating factors like wage level, rank and status of this profession and opportunity for early promotion.

Maritime navigation is a unique work domain. Competitiveness in this domain cannot be compared with the one in other domains, because the ship represents an unusual and often harsh working environment. Crew members are required performance in performing their tasks with in a moving narrowed space for a long period of time. This environment is also characterized by lack of contact with families and friends from shore and by different nationalities and cultures working and living together. In such enclosed environment often appears boredom and that enhances the incidence of risk of errors (Grech et al., 2008).

What happens when accustomed motivation techniques don't provide the desired results of performance and competitiveness? In such cases a change in the mentality and behaviour of seafarers is needed and this can be obtained by enhancing leadership capabilities through training. A feasible method of developing competitiveness is through training and long-life learning. Training is delivered for undergraduates (future seafarers) in maritime schools and in maritime universities. For ratings and graduates the training path starts or as appropriate continues in maritime training centres or in the employing shipping company. While establishing the training strategy, a particular attention must be given to transmission of adequate knowledge for gaining competences and competitive abilities and not only theoretical insights.

3. COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

Leadership and management are two distinct concepts. The interest of this paper is not on establishing the differences between these two, but on trying to answer a key question examined by many researchers: "What makes an effective leader?" (Van Seters & Field, 1990). In seafaring there are a number of different styles of leadership and management that are based on different assumptions and theories. The most known leaders are the charismatic ones who have the ability to communicate and behave in ways that reach the emotions of the followers, inspire and motivate. According to other specialists, there are four types of leaders based on Freudian distinctions: the authoritarian type, the narcissistic type, the narcissistic-coercive type and the erotic-narcissistic type (Winkler, 2010). Another classification of leadership types includes participative leadership, situational leadership, transactional leadership and transformational leadership. A distinct type of leadership is eco-leadership which takes into account cultural and environment issues. Eco-leaders redesign communication with their followers accordingly with sustainable development principles (Bocanete & Nistor, 2009). Training maritime leaders as eco-leaders will increase competitiveness because crew and ship will be placed in foreground in a sustainable manner.

The best case for acquiring competitiveness on board is when the commander (also named master) is not only a good manager, but is also a leader. As a manager, he organizes the activity on board from the operational and managerial point of view. He has the right, given by law, to be a representative of the public authority and has the following responsibilities: officer of civil state, public notary, and organ of the fact-finding of the crimes committed at board. He bears the disciplinary authority and order on board related to respecting the laws or maritime regulations (Iordanoia & Nistor, 2008). As a leader, he motivates and inspires crew members, leads by example, demonstrates confidence especially in risky situations like storms or piracy attacks. The commander who is also a leader empowers people while maintaining proper order and discipline without constraint ways. He/she communicates openly with crew members, listens and supports them, encourages group decision and uses team approach as an effective tool for competitiveness. In some situations can appear informal leaders on board, for example an officer or a rating who has not an administrative or managerial function but has leadership skills.

Acquiring leadership skills are very important for solving difficult situations which are happening on sea or in harbours, for the cohesion and unitary action of crew. Improvement of leadership capabilities through training is not easy, as leadership cannot be observed directly. Individuals of a training group take note of the behaviour of other members with leadership capabilities or deduce a particular behaviour from observed effects. Based on this information they assume certain leadership abilities and try to experience it from their own point of view. Maritime leadership training should consider following guidelines. Usually a trainer who teaches leadership skills should come from sea service. It is suitable to be a former commander or chief engineer with experience on board. The trainer should inform trainees that seafarer leaders take extra responsibilities when given the opportunity. They don't run from risky situations but confront them; still they try to spare crew of risky and unsafe situations. Leaders can be trusted and depended on and on board should be a climate of trust and confidence. Unfortunately this situation is only a desideratum in many multinational crews, but the seafarer in command should make his/her best efforts to create a climate of trust on board.

Trainer should teach students to be approachable and accessible. Authoritarian commanders don't manage to communicate efficiently with crew members and many accidents happen on board due to lack of communication. On the other hand, many conflicts that appear between crew members should be solved through proper communication. Communication skills are important for creating a good social environment, especially in long voyages with multinational crew.

Also, the trainer should point that any discussions between crew members can successfully start by simply saying „hello” in the native language of the other person. This is a very efficient tool for interacting on board and has many good consequences. By telling some words in his/her native language, the leader makes the seafarer feel important.

Though, being a leader is not an easy assignment. A commander who is a leader must find time to communicate efficiently with crew and hear their problems and discontents but also must have time for daily tasks, drills, filling reports, communication with shore management, deck routine duties etc. Therefore, in a leadership development training program a distinct course should be assigned for improving time management skills.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Today, in the knowledge-based society there have been made increasing efforts to gain an awareness of human element issues. The traditional view that human error is the major cause of all accidents was the most suitable opportunity to focus on seafarers' skills and abilities. Leadership can increase seafarers' competitiveness and all seafarers should be trained and accustomed to leadership skills. Training leadership skills is a process that has extraordinary great results starting with small steps. Being a leader on board is not an easy task but for such a leader being open to crew members and helping them to develop brings a great satisfaction. Increasing competitiveness on board depends on creating a climate of trust and confidence which strengthens crew cohesion and enhances work performance.

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