Aspects of decision-making in a multicultural shipping environment

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ABSTRACT

Little research has been done into the influence of differences in cultural backgrounds of maritime personnel on working in groups and arriving at agreements and decisions. Such an internationalisation of working groups can be expected to intensify with the increasing globalisation in the maritime field.

There is a growing conviction among seafarers and persons working in the land-based sector of the maritime industry (including ex-seafarers) that staff on board and on shore should be prepared to work with crews and groups, whose members come from different countries and cultures and speak different languages. There is also growing concern that preparation for this should be offered at MET institutions, either in a separate professional development course to ship officers or as part of a regular syllabus to students.

It is an obvious part of such an approach to use a common language - almost always English - to ensure communication. There are, however, nearly no research findings yet on what a programme should comprise that aims at facilitating comprehension and appreciation of influences from differences in cultural backgrounds on group performance and decisions.

This paper is a report on research done at World Maritime University (WMU) on how post-graduate students holding unlimited certificates of competency, as well as holders of university degrees with experience in the maritime industry or administration, can make a consensus decision.

The multicultural issue will be seen from an angle different to the normal onboard ship view. This paper will specify the need for further research and discuss the methodology. A short remark on a few observations will be discussed. Perhaps cultural differences can be developed from an assumed hindrance into a catalyst for stimulating national appreciation and cooperation that works very well at World Maritime University.

1. Introduction

This paper addresses a fundamental challenge, new or old, in the shipping industry. Do we have an understandable communication system between various operators in the industry? Are we au fait with each other? It has evidently become important to be able to communicate and be quickly understood both ashore and onboard. It becomes even more important in emergency situations (crisis- and crowd management). One should not forget the multicultural and multilingual presence in the boardrooms of shipping companies and in the lecture halls of MET institutions. The language problem and the cultural problem suddenly have become hot issues in different maritime scenarios. Within a year, three major studies have been presented on mixed crewing with its advantages and disadvantages. Findings vary.

One could ask oneself if the above really is a problem or if it is a self-made problem to find reasons and excuses for accidents and incidents at sea. Has the discussion become a cover-up for technology and other aids introduced onboard ship - aids that have made the work situation on the bridge and in control rooms almost impossible to grasp for normal human beings. To change the already far-gone introduction of high technology innovations in shipping is probably more controversial and expensive than to blame the human being that is working in an ever-inhuman environment. Perhaps it would be wiser to attack the hardware (machines) instead of the software (human brain) in order to remedy the reason of accidents where the so-called human factor is to be blamed. Perhaps the explanation for many accidents at sea is to be found in the pure lack of communication and lack of understanding behaviourism. If this is so, then of course we must put an emphasis on this in MET. A better/new program should be introduced on; understanding people, leadership, English language and cultural differences. Recent reports indicate both the advantages and disadvantages with multilingual and multicultural crew combinations. Young people travel abroad more now than before. At a young age foreign cultures are visited. This would argue that people, in general, know how to handle cultural challenges before going to sea. In reality this argument might not be totally correct.

The subject was debated in IAMU 2. In an IMLA context the subject has also been dealt with but only one time in it s over 20-year history. That paper was given a few years ago. Recently at IMLA s Workshop on Maritime

English (WOME) the issue has though been debated. This must be an indication that this is a rather new phenomenon in the industry. Or is it? The problem, or better the challenge, has always been there. It becomes clear through the studies by Moreby. Today, with the minimum number of crew and because of this, peoples low stress threshold, we cannot afford to have any misunderstandings in our different ways of communication. It has become a real challenge, both for ratings and officers, to master cultural differences and human behaviour.

1.1 Terminology; an explanation of a few keywords

For the sake of good order the reader should understand words used in this context. In the following shortened definitions of a few keywords concerning group dynamics are given:

What is the meaning of a decision?

A decision is a step in a process comprising initiative, preparation, *decisions*, implementation and follow up. A number of considerations and actions lead to a decision. Implementation is mentioned as a step in the process because not until the content has been formulated, and this usually happens during the implementation, can a decision be taken. In other words it can be described as a choice between alternatives that will have an impact on a future situation (Ring, 1983).

What is a group?

Most organisational decisions are group decisions. Ring (1983) states that all members should have full individual capacity as decisionmakers in their own areas of specialisation.

Why group-decisions?

We have group-decisions because the possibilities for better decisions are increased. A synergy effect is achieved. The whole is usually more than the sum of each individual s general input. The effect of the outcome from a group decision reaches its apex with about 8 persons participating in the group. Arfwedson (1992) says that if the group is bigger than 5 persons (during a learning activity) it will not work efficiently.

Classical studies of decisionmaking suggest that group discussion contributes something over and above the statistical pooling of individual contribution (Ring, 1993, p.17).

Ring (1983) also notes that a study of group behaviour usually identifies weaknesses like:

- q Why do some persons turn passive?
- q Why do some persons become governed by an extreme belief in authority?
- q Why do some group constellations tend to come to a hasty decision?
- q Why do some persons avoid giving alternative suggestions with a clear effort not to challenge and thereby prolonging a decision?
- q Why do some people think they are better than they are when appearing in a group?
- q *When is a group sensitive to friction disturbing the work?*

To the last question, one could add, as a follow up, the following two questions:

- q How does the *language* influence a homogenous decision?
- q Do *cultural differences* influence the achievement of a good decision?

What are social loafing and groupthink?

Social loafing effects is understood to be the human being s tendency to reduce its work assistance in the group when it is not clear who is contributing to what for the benefit of the group — a motivation loss. This phenomenon is often the result of cultural differences. Cultures with a high level of individualism show social loafing most. If social loafing strikes the group the cohesiveness in the group might be lost and a consensus decision difficult to achieve.

Groupthink is understood to be a phenomenon where people are not able to think critically. Group members are sometimes afraid of questioning an alternative. This is a very bad occurrence in group decisionmaking because a collective decision is best formed under conflict and individual s effort in seeking his/her own way. In the process the consensus-seeking attempt could lead to what is called *groupthink*. Conflicts are frequent when different cultures are merged. Companies can grow faster and develop more with some domestic conflicts than if the staff is totally homogenous. This means that in the shipping industry we should *be able to have* many sub cultural conflicts. If this is correct it should be an advantage to the industry and the industry, should carefully take advantage of this.

What is triangulation?

A combination of research-methodologies clearly strengthens its validity and reliability. Some researchers feel that a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methodologies should be used more frequently.

Patton (1990) identifies four basic types of triangulation:

1. Data — the use of a variety of data sources
2. Investigator — using several researchers
3. Theory — interpretation of data from many perspectives
4. Methodological — using several methods for the same problem

This means that a variety of mixes and sampling strategies are possible. At the same time it is a recognition that the researcher is open to look at things in more than one way. The crosschecking of data also strengthens the conclusion.

In the WMU study questionnaires, observations and conversations are used. The conclusion is based on different perspectives. The interpretation is based on culture (the culture of the students), the WMU method and the condition to pass on knowledge (because decisions are based on acquired knowledge) and decision-making (how group-decisions are made in a multicultural multilingual environment).

What is phenomenography?
Phenomenography is a fairly new research specialisation describing conceptions of the world around us. The

Questionnaires   Conversations   Cultu Decisionmaking education

Observations
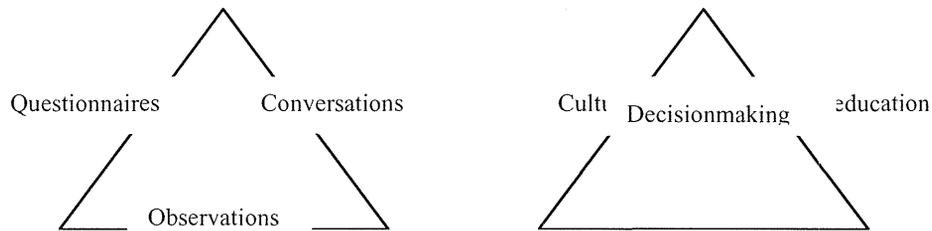
empirical study- method describes how people experience, conceptualise, understand, perceive and apprehend various phenomena. The different ways in which people see a phenomenon using words, as those just mentioned, depends on how they describe them. This we can say because it is impossible to deal with an object without experiencing or conceptualising it in some way. When a person with these words experience/understand a phenomenon it also tells us a lot about how the subject, that has been subject for this description, is conceptualised. This research method is the complementary to other kinds of research. The method is directed towards experiential description aiming at description, analysis and understanding of experiences. We cannot separate what a person has experienced from the experience per se. Psychologists would aim at learning about how people experience things, how people perceive and conceptualize the world. In phenomenography thinking is described in terms of what is perceived and thought about. Psychological models are not particularly helpful in solving practical pedagogical problems. On the contrary, phenomenography is interested in the content of thinking. Descriptions of perception and experience have to be made in terms of their content. Between the common and idiosyncratic there seems to exist a level of modes of experience worthwhile of study (Marton, 1981). This means that this method is non-inferential in the sense that there are no hypotheses to be tested.

According to Wittgensteins philosophy a line should be drawn between what we can speak of and what we must be silent about. What really matters is that we cannot speak of. However what we cannot speak of we can still show — we can point out in the way we live and the way we act when talking about a phenomenon. In these situations a domain like phenomenography would give light to our research efforts.

2. Objectives

It would be of interest to find a method or system on how decisions in culturally mixed group-compositions are carried out. Such findings would make it easier for decisionmakers to make a rational and quicker decision. Rational in the meaning based upon reason rather than emotion. This is even more important when realising that too many decisions are a result of coincidence. Knowledge, experience and engagement play a key role when taking a good decision. With knowledge is meant not only the knowledge in the related subject but also knowledge on how people react and behave. The objective therefore has to be formed from many different available resources.

This issue is a case for the top management in any company playing in the international market where contacts have to be taken with multicultural partners/customers.

Another challenge is that during debates and lectures on how the management/operation of a port/shipping company can be improved the students, from some countries, almost always see the suggested improvements as impossible to implement; the reason is that they often believe that it is their cultural background that shackles their efforts to become capable operators. Everyone should realise that it does not matter from where on earth you come or what historical, cultural, ethnic or religious background you have in order to improve. It is always possible to change procedures if you have the right *attitude* and understanding of the value of a certain improvement. To understand your colleagues, your international colleagues, and be able to play on an even playing field and discuss, with the

knowledge that differences exist between people, then your decisions in this environment will be of benefit to all — a win-win situation. To change a student s attitude, knowledge and practices is a key attempt and mission in all learning processes.

The pedagogues will equally benefit from such knowledge. The world is getting smaller and education will more and more be carried out within a multicultural student body. The pedagogues working in MET should take a closer look at the shipping environment and become more international in their thinking. Decisions in the classroom can then more easily be defended and explained. A fairer assessment can be made.

This research will help to fill a miserable research-gap within the shipping industry.

2.1 Purpose of the research

The objective of the research is to be able to get answers to the following questions:

A   Are people with a shipping background less influenced by multicultural differences when making group decisions in a multicultural environment than people with no seagoing background at all?

B   How do seafarers and people working in the shipping sphere take group decisions when doing so in a multi-cultural setting, assuming all groupmembers have a managerial background?

C   Is senior shipping staff persistent, or less inclined to negotiate, when taking decisions in a multicultural and multilingual environment?

D   Have teachers in MET institutions anything to contribute to students in group work where consensus decisions need to be taken?

E   How should cultural awareness be passed on to future officers practising teamwork on i.e. the bridge?

In shipping circles where people have been to sea for a number of years on international voyages, the problem of co-operation and working in multicultural and multilingual settings *should* not be a major problem. MET teachers should be trained and educated in cultural awareness as well. In the near future shipping shore personnel also have to get ready to work with mixed nationalities in their own playground.

Teachers should be encouraged to have students work in groups. The reason is that it has been indicated that learning in certain areas of the education is increased, the social contact between students is enhanced and often the students themselves find this method of learning very rewarding. It is fostering the human in many ways.

Group work, which is carried out in a multicultural environment, needs other methods than group work in a hetero-cultural setting. Working with adults, already in decisionmaking positions requires additional considerations.

A teacher assessing a mixed group composition has to consider the cultural impact. Fair should be fair and non-technical matters should not have an impact on students marks.

Being part of a management team made up of members from different cultures is becoming more common (beside at maritime institutes and onboard ships) at shore establishments of shipping companies. Swedes and others do not see the work onboard ships as a future career anymore (unless reputation and conditions change). The consequence might be that a Swedish owned shipping company, that has its headquarter in Sweden, has to employ non-Swedes to work ashore in its headquarters. This might not sound attractive to start with, but might be a necessity because seafarers are normally needed in headquarters.

The composition of group members should never be ad hoc. The reason is that intercultural differences could then be negative to the group result. Possible differences must be known to the teacher in order for him/her to make up groups with a fair chance to achieve the highest possible output. If there are goals to reach, among groups working on the same challenge, then a group with a poor composition has an inherent difficulty in being successful. Contrary random group member composition would apparently be of minor importance if the group-work also seeks to teach people how to work together.

Every society consists of diverse cultural groups. Cultures are also linked to identities by the meaning differences, which means that *all relations, within all societies, are intercultural* (Coulby, 1997).

From theories and models an interesting target also is to get verification on the *dominance* and psychological (*inter-cultural*) processes. Therefore, it is important to get a concentration on the actual decision process more than pre- and pro- decision-making processes.

The theoretical aim is to test the influence that language- and cultural differences have in this process. S*ocial loafing* is studied with the object to see if students with a seafaring background, compared to students with an academic background, have a negative/positive impact on the group s efforts to make a consensus decision. It might be that one of the two categories dominate the group and then the *groupthink* phenomena would be studied. The *social cognition* theory will be used to find out if group members treat information differently depending on what culture they come from. The *cognitive dissonance* theory will show if there is social interaction between the two categories.

3. Theoretical starting-points

What have researchers published in decisionmaking and cultural behaviour and what theories have been developed from such research.

3.1 Literature

Several researchers have studied how decisions are made but they have mainly discussed what, how and by whom decisions have been taken and carried out (Ring, 1993). Little research has been done on the pedagogic influence of decisions taken in groups in both multi-cultural and multi-lingual environments.

Decisions are mainly discussed when taken by one *lonely* decisionmaker, for instance the managing director of a company. The rationality in the decision would then be limited. In contrast, many decisions are taken in a *group* where the groupmembers are required to come to a consensus decision. The goal and the resources are then tackled at the same time. Psychologists have studied this category of decisions but rarely pedagogues (Ring, 1993). In a modern company decision-participation is often called for by a greater number of employees. Staff who will be engaged in the implementation of the decision should be required to participate in the decision process also.

Lane (2000, p.4) wrote in The Sea on mixed nationality crews: Not only have we found no evidence whatever that nationality is a barrier to forming a cohesive shipboard society, but we have also found many seafarers who actually prefer mixed nationality crews . In the year 2000 working culture elements in shipping have been assessed in a EU research report which found that differences in national culture are likely to be related to differences in work culture (Workport, 2000). The Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC) released, last year, a report Transnational Seafarer Communities . The researchers have testimonies that there are only benefits with mixed crew (Kahveci, 2001). A team with a Swedish ethnologist has made a voyage on a Wallenius PCC and has reported on life onboard with a mixed crew (du Rietz, 2001). Generally they encountered doubts with a mixed crew. The Philippine National Polythechnic (PNMP, 2002) has published a report Mixed National Crews: The Filipino Seafarers Experience . This report lists a few minor problems; language, communication, work cultures, behaviour, racial stereotyping etc. Evidently there are different opinions on the effectiveness issue of exotic crewing.

When studying decisionmaking, and include social psychological aspects, one has to study decisionmaking from a single individual level. When giving others the possibility to take part in a decision the phenomenon of *diffusion of responsibility, social loafing* and *persuasion* has to be discussed.

Distinction between normative and informal social influence is one of the most approved postulates in social psychology (Eisele, 1999, p.24). In this theory it is also noted that members have an excessive tendency to seek consensus. By admitting this members are led to suppress their own dissent in the interests of group consensus. Eisele also discusses a theory where we can measure a possible change of attitude and where one s cognitive response is more important than understanding the content of a message. The theory is called *Attitudes and Persuasion*. How are we being convinced? What kind of involvement inhibits persuasion? Other types of involvement are outcome-relevant and impression-relevant. Eisele also pictures that many suggestions of involvement exist: ego/personal, issues, vested interest, task and response involvement; just to mention a few. It is important to note that these differences affect also how group-members behave in a decision undertaking.

4. Framing of the problems

The discussion of mixed crews has taken form mainly for two reasons:

1   The frequent occurrences of shipping casualties
2   A future problem of scarcity of nationals going to sea and thus possible negative impact of having to recruit foreigners to work in the head office of shipping companies. If realised that non-nationals occupy decision-making positions in a company, these decisions have to be taken in a multicultural environment. The challenge is already a fact with the increasing number of shipping alliances. Certain pooling constellations had to be broken because of the adverse impact of not being able to come to quick decisions and the psychological fact that many people have problems in accepting company protocols. Misunderstandings could be a serious risk in achieving a quality operation/management. This plays a vital role in achieving what is defined as quality shipping. We cannot have quality shipping without a quality crew that is able to work together and communicate without hindrance. In the past the alternatives for such shipping companies have been either to close their sheer shipping activities or, if financially strong purchase (take-over) the other shipping company and keep the hegemony by building a new corporate culture. An example of a broken pooling arrangement is the famous *take-over* that the Danish container giant *Maersk Line* did when buying another major shipping company *Sealand.*

The second statement perhaps looks a bit paradoxical, but in Greek shipping the management normally is strengthened by a *majority* of ex Greek seafarers. If there were only a few Greek seafarers to recruit to office-positions a catastrophic situation could develop. In such a situation the challenge would be profound because a cultural hindrance would certainly come into being when decisions have to be made.

4.1 Need for research

Are decisions taken in boardrooms, onboard ships and in MET institutions the very best, remembering that decisions can easily be given a negative impact when people from different cultures and languages have to coordinate their opinions? Are cultural differences a detectable hindrance in taking qualified decisions?

There is a serious need to talk about this subject before we get provoked. We need to update ourselves on how to master multicultural decisionmaking in high-level management and training. Knowledge on how to master this challenge is needed.

5. Method

In order to try to answer the last question a study of students studying at World Maritime University (WMU) has been made. Observations of students solving problems in small groups, questionnaires on the work carried out in these groups and relaxed conversations with students, is the basis for the research. Some group-work has also been videotaped making it possible to analyse each group member s social interaction style. The reason for the conversations is also to find out if the education delivered at WMU is fostering future decisionmakers.

6. Some research findings

It has been well attested that a group of seafarers with multicultural backgrounds can discuss and take decisions together without making too much trouble. Perhaps this could have been expected. Master Mariners normally (as leaders in their right environment) insist on having their opinions/orders carried out. They are apparently ready to compromise but for the good sake of keeping harmony in the group and to show that the group can agree. Their ego and pride would be hurt if this could not be achieved. Teachers and captains usually are individualists.

The Asians, in this sample, like to take notes and also assure that what has been agreed also is taken to the protocol. The Americans, being outspoken, take the lead. The context of the exercise was very serious so the students did not use much time for laughter.

Table 1 is an example of two groups during an exercise to solve a certain problem linked to a serious maritime activity (Horck, 2001). A few remarks on the table:

A major contributor to ideas cannot be clearly selected from the two groups. One can find representatives from all continents in this. The Americans seem a bit more willing than others to contribute with ideas. To ask others for ideas has not been a characteristic for any of the participants. Evidently there has been no need for such an activity. The Asians have, a little more than the others, showed a need to remind the others of the task. Otherwise this seems not to be necessary either. The Africans[1] both support and disagree and at the same time suggest ideas. The Africans also wish to be confirmed in the decisions taken. They want proof and in this way they express a wish to learn.

In another study the following could be noted:

A.   Conflicts: were concluded as happening sometimes.
B.   There are generally no joyful moments in these groups. It is a conclusion with slight modification for the groups with only seafarers where a slightly greater animation prevailed.
C.   The seafarers did not naturally take the lead in the groups in which they were represented.
D.   Misunderstandings often happened.
E.   With some difficulties these groups have been able to come to a consensus decision.

The seafarers did not directly take command of the groups but might have had an indirect command. Seldom a clear group leader was appointed. A tendency is that the person who possesses better knowledge in the subject takes the lead in the group. It is not the person with better-spoken English or the captains who leads the group. Students emphasise that the result comes from joint efforts. Some difficulties were shown in these groups because the seafarers probably had different opinions than the members with academic backgrounds. The technical language used by the seafarers and also their different way of pronouncing words in the English language could explain some of the misunderstandings. The academics are not used to such kind of talking . Many seafarers are naturally serious because of their high work responsibilities. In this exercise all students took the situation equally seriously and therefore not much room was given to joyful moments.

Table 1. Behaviour observations

Behaviour	Group 1 and 2		
	America	Africa	Asia
Contributes to ideas	40	31	22
Asks others for their ideas	5	2	5
Reminds group of the task	5	4	9
Summarizes ideas	15	11	10
Asks others for facts, proof, reasons	2	21	13
Offers support for other positions	8	13	6
Disagrees with other ideas	6	14	10
Suggests alternatives	5	12	9
Points out differences among ideas	4	6	4
Points out similarities / relations among ideas	2	2	2
Adds humor	3	2	1
Acknowledges others feelings	0	2	1
Interferes in others talking	18	10	8

Remarks: Format adapted by A. Soucy from Johnson & Johnson, 1987.

The following has been noted from a 3rd group exercise:

A   No distinct conclusion can be made that seafarers more easily adapt to work in multicultural settings. Seafarers, like everybody else, apparently need education in intercultural understanding.

B   Contrary to groups with only women or groups with no seafarers the groups with a mixture of seafarers and landlubbers had more difficulties to come to a smooth consensus decision. The seafarers did not take the command in these groups either. Perhaps they realised that there are others who have greater competence and skill to lead the discussion.

C   The cooperation between senior shore staff clearly shows that conflicts in group decisionmakings are not a serious problem. Is this because of the generally high intellectual level of the students?

There is a growing need to exchange ideas between people. The various ideas should be fertilising and not blockading. This behaviour of exchange appears to be different in different cultures. Swedes, for example, are known for avoiding discussions with people with different opinions. Ethnographers mean that, e.g. Swedes prefer to discuss with people with similar views to their own (Arfwedson, 1992).

The group members positioning around the tables could have an important impact on the possibilities to convince during discussions. The decision quality depends on the possibilities to have your voice heard. It is known that persons sitting opposite each other talk more to each other than people sitting side by side.

According to Arfwedson (1992) individual relations increase faster than the number of individuals in the group. It is important to realise this when deciding how big a group should be. It is crucial how fast the group can produce something with quality.

Groups have a tendency to focus on shared information and neglect information that is unique to a single group m̲e̲m̲b̲e̲r̲.̲ ̲G̲r̲o̲u̲p̲ ̲m̲e̲m̲b̲e̲r̲s̲ ̲o̲f̲t̲e̲n̲ ̲d̲o̲ ̲n̲ot consolidate the decision made by the group. With this follows that respect fo ͏[1 Africans are North Africans excluded]͏ principles of a multicultural society. The observations in the various groups clearly indicate that the students show respect for each other. No harsh words were uttered and nobody raised their voices. Students seriously met the ideas and honestly tried to come to a unanimous decision.

The element of divergent thinking is one of the most difficult aspects of group decisionmaking (Kaner, 1996). Different cultural values make people disagree rather than agree. This becomes more evident when the person comes from a culture that is a lot different from the rest in the group. In these circumstances intercultural co-operation has become a prime condition for the survival of mankind (Hofstede, 1991).

A very important observation is that students respect each other very much and realise that they can learn from each other, though all come from peripheral countries. A major problem might be that very seldom a 100% understandable sentence is formulated. Ce que l on con oit bien, s nounce clairement et les mots pour le dire arrivent ais ment. However students are normally given time to talk without being interrupted. Another observation is that the values of words vary. These two observations must be serious in crises situations or in board-meetings where quick solutions and decisions have to be taken. In a normal classroom obscure words are equal to dim thinking, and then it is interpreted as lack of knowledge.

4. Future research

In the future similar studies should be performed on a bigger sample. There are obvious differences that need to be better understood in MET institutions and in boardrooms.
It is also important to explain why seafarers differ (if they really differ) from people who have no seafaring experience in their contact with cultural differences. Little knowledge only increases misunderstandings. We cannot expect to be all-alike but we can be more cosmopolitan in our thinking.
Group discussion is characterised by a unique information exchange that is different from any information flow that goes on in the individual s head (Eisele, 1999). Group learning is not much used in MET institutions and should therefore be introduced. A study is then needed to figure out if this is feasible or not.
The only IMO model course that has a lecture on cultural awareness (one hour) is the Ship Simulator and Team Work (1.22). In MSC 75/15/2 on the human element it is noted that a working group is set to identify necessary *mandatory* training on cultures, decisionmaking and group work principals in the industry.
The impact of women in the shipping industry should also be studied. IMO is promoting this, but what are the consequences and how can the industry take maximum advantage of women in the industry? Do women in multi-cultural decisionmaking groups participate and contribute in such a way that the group decision would be of higher quality? Can perhaps women contribute in making groupmembers play a more active role in the group? Do they have a positive impact on ex-seafarers in board meetings?
More research should be done to find out how seafarers mixed with non-seafarers take decisions in a multicultural environment. I am not fully in agreement with Sampson who says that the Cultural differences appear to have no impact on teamwork (Lloyds List, 2001, July 3). I think they have.

5. Discussion

To survive in a multicultural world one does *not* need to think, feel and.act in the same way in order to agree and co-operate (Hofstede, 1991). Understand your own cultural values and the cultural values of others with whom one has to cooperate and the basic skill of survival will be achieved.
The involvement or active participation in groups has more generally been steered by the effort to be able to show that the group has been able to formulate a viable and technically correct answer to a given problem. Due to the task-oriented group members in this study the involvement could be categorised as value-relevant. In this way the members are led to suppress their own dissent in the interests of group consensus.
Groups inhibit natural criticism (Eisele, 1999). This came out quite well in this study. No inconsiderate words between the members in any groups could be noticed. This is a result of the statement but could also be a result of the fact that group participants of this category are not inclined to argue because of the nature of their work and their intellectual level. The consensus-seeking tendency had taken over and had become more important. People from different cultures seem keen on coming to a consensus decision.
Social loafing had been a tendency but mostly by the experts on an expert subject. Nothing extreme, because all students have realised that they are at WMU to learn and there is no natural competition element between students. Students not being subject to loafing (if one can for sure conclude there is no element of this) are the students from America. None of the other nationalities can be assumed to have stopped the Americans for doing their share of the workload and contributing to good results.
Social influence tends to be stronger in groups that discuss until participants agree, so called consensus groups (Eisele, 1999). The discussions in the groups in this research were fairly quick and therefore did not contribute in creating any deep social bonds. According to Eisele the level of involvement can be defined as: Personal relevance, personal importance, future consequences and responsibility. The psychologist Janis (1984) says in his work Groupthink that a major challenge exists if there is a relation between the decision process and the decision content and if there are special risks when the decision is taken in a small group. In a small group the group thinking can be too mechanical. Then again it is important that the composition of the members in the group has been considered.

As a logical consequence of this an important power will be vested in the person recruiting staff-members in the company because it will have consequences on how the decision process will be structured in the decision groups. A group has to have a minimum of collegiality in order to function. The group should also be properly mixed to give a better balance between ideas and interests. Here our challenge will be manifested. If members come from different cultural societies it is a fact that some are more immune than others to group thinking. Although newcomers in the group usually adapt rather quickly, maybe too easily, it still gives reason to discuss the group composition. If all becomes equal, conforms, we will have an obstacle to development. Tuchman (1984) shows in her book The March to Folly that too many yes-speakers are a real threat to wise decisionmaking.

Intercultural education is a relatively new field. Education is needed both in order to understand how people react in a group in general and how it is done in multicultural and multilingual group-settings. Future officers at sea should be given time in the curricula to discuss these phenomena. In addition they should be trained to be aware of their own stress reactions and the handling of these to manage decisions in a group and to make better group decisions. To know the theories in group-decision-making under stress should be included in the education of all decisionmakers.

Misunderstandings are a great threat to safety in the shipping industry. This is a hazard that today should be considered with greater efforts. *Too many seafarers do not master the English language.* Accidents have met in-proportional consequences because of language difficulties. More emphasis should be put on pronunciation in the English language courses. *Exercises on how to be distinct in pronunciation are evidently needed.* Sadly, there are no statistics where we can see if an accident is really caused by cultural behaviour and/or lack of communication. It is not backwards to say that merchant mariners in general should take lessons from the navy on how to behave on the bridge. A clear order/*repeat* policy perhaps has got lost on the modern merchant bridge with the introduction of high tech instruments. The vocabulary has now been adopted with IMO s SMCP[2]. We still need verbal communication. Both IMO and ILO are shifting the emphasis onto people. Then communication should be underlined as well. Breaking cultural barriers in giving respect, realising the benefits and teamwork in mixed groups would give flexibility, pleasure and profit.

Some institutions have already realized the need to educate people working in a multicultural and multilingual mixture. In an article in the Financial Times (2002, March 29) MBA for Europe s managers it is reported that three European Universities have made joint efforts on crossculturalisation and are convinced that MBA-graduates need an advanced understanding of European business contexts, language skills and practical international experience. The future business leaders must understand Europe, both culturally and commercially, and must also be able to realise the needs of such knowledge. MET institutions should also aim at this. Many seafarers later might join the office of a shipping company and be involved in the business on a more academic and intercultural level than they have been during port visits and onboard. The industry needs cosmopolitan managers who can both negotiate and manage people from different cultures. Crosscultural understanding is needed to avoid getting stereotypes. The stereotypes that we see in others are usually wrong and are highly dangerous to good communication. To get this perception proper education is needed.

The Ecole Nationales de la Marine Marchande (ENMM) in Marseilles has taken a new, innovative approach to maritime training. New programmes to accommodate the industry and the legislators have been introduced. In addition, the doors are now open for foreign students also. They have considered it high time to enhance its specialisations in terms of maritime training at an international level. If they have not thought about it then it is high time also to give professors, lecturers and instructors a few lectures in cultural awareness.

The Numast newsletter (2002, June). explained that the UK Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is encouraging the dissemination of a *partnership culture* throughout the shipping industry. The idea is to move away from traditional confrontational relationships to a new way of working together.

Future managers need to know the terminology and understand activities in the operational department of their co the company leaders they impossibly could have a short, quick and correct understanding of how the people, who are the bona fide contributors to the companies earnings, tackle their challenges. If the message from the floor is not passed on correctly the managers don t have a sound base for their decisions. This is what was discovered in the WMU study where the seafarers and the non-seafarers misunderstand each other because of terminology and technical jargon. Universities who wish to serve the industry therefore must not forget, in the programme, to pass on knowledge in non-managerial subjects. Managers need a lot more than economy, law, finance, management principles etc. Besides operational subjects should therefore not be left to something like an introductory course and in the worst position perhaps not even assessed. The issue is too important to be left as an encumbrance. Today most managers get their good insight in what is happening in the operational department of their company but that knowledge has been achieved by their own

2. SMCP: Standard Marine Communication Phrases, adopted in 2001

initiatives and many times at the cost of the company. We joke about accountants being managers but it would be accepted if they had also achieved proper knowledge on what is happening on the floor so to say. Today a fast expanding CEO is more risky when the expansion (as we can read in the papers) is built upon buying assets instead of looking after the welfare of his operational department and be able to listen and understand (communicate) what constrains that exist in his company. An investment in the human being includes communication.

We have to find another way to break these deadlocks at board meetings

Source: S.A. Beebe (1989), *Communicating in small groups*, p.216

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