

Competent Students and Staff: Where Do We Find Them?

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Abstract The global shortage of seafarers continues despite events resulting from the economic downturn, such as scrapping of older vessels, cancellation of newbuilding orders, laying up of vessels. This means that any efforts for retention of seafarers or recruitment of new intake are as essential now, as have ever been in the past.

Numerous efforts have been developed and initiated over the years to attract new generations of youngsters into the industry. A few examples are highlighted in this paper.

A shortage of seafarers will also result in a shortage of teaching staff. How to attract teachers and what career is available for them is a further essential component to consider in assuring that qualitative MET will be available in the years to come.

In the Netherlands at one time there was a qualifying academic programme for maritime lecturers and instructors. This system was abandoned a number of years ago due to the reorganization of teaching qualifications and academic programmes.

However the lack of well prepared, trained, educated, MET providers is beginning to become a major concern in the industry. Lower educational standards, outdated educational programmes, more and more short teaching programmes, followed by instant on board promotion and thus lower standards of competence are becoming reality.

In order to offer a proper upgrading programme for MET staff a new, modular online MET staff development programme is being initiated which, when fully completed, will lead to an MSc degree in dedicated maritime education and training.

Keyword: *MET, students, recruiting, seafaring career, lecturers, staff development*

1. Seafarer shortage

The global shortage of seafarers continues to hit the industry, despite actions resulting from the economic downturn, such as scrapping of older vessels, cancellation of new-building orders, laying up of vessels, slower sailing, utilizing vessels as storage facilities etc. This means that retention of seafarers and recruitment of new intake are as essential now as they have ever been in the past.

Various studies over the recent months have shown the following facts and figures:

- The global officer supply in 2009 is some 517000
- This is an increase of 28% since 1990 and of 11% since 2005
- Nevertheless in 2008, the officer shortage in 2009 was assumed to be 34000
- And recently in 2009 the updated shortage figure is still estimated at 33000
- The forecasted officer shortage in 2013 (with fleet growth 14%) is up to 56000
- And even if the fleet growth is 10% lower, a shortage of 42000 is estimated.

One could ask the question which circumstances have created this seemingly structural shortage phenomena which in fact has existed for many years now? And is there finally a solution to solve the problem?

It is often argued that there is too much wealth in western countries which makes the attractiveness of a seafaring career a lot less. Why bother going to sea if there is no financial need to do so?

Cheap airfares are also a lethal component in the promotion of the attractiveness of a seafaring career. 500 euro takes you halfway around the world, when ever you want, probably including full accommodation in your holiday destination as well!!

Obviously because of the decrease in numbers of seafarers the profession is becoming less well known. In the old days there were four professions for a young man: one could become doctor, farmer, administrator or seafarer. Nowadays a student in Netherlands can choose from some 388 degree programmes in the Universities of Applied Science. It will be difficult to find that single one called seafaring!!

Furthermore there is the continuous stream of mainly negative publicity about seafaring as if journalists are only trained to report on negative news. Polluting accidents, sinking ferries, pirate hijacking, all do not improve the perception the general public has of the shipping industry.

And finally the outdated perception of the profession is heard amongst youngsters, that they do not want to be away from home for 10 – 12 months!! As if this would be the case in any of the structured and reputable ship owner or ship manager routines.

When talking to young people as potential seafarers, the criminalization of the master is mentioned as a not very attractive outlook. This together with the sometimes multi- multi-cultural crew and the overall decreasing esteem of the profession makes it difficult in the western countries, to continue to interest the new generations.

2. Present generation

Whereas much of the abovementioned circumstances are related to western oriented societies, there is no doubt that in maritime developing countries these situations and attitudes will also develop, as the standard of living, in that country, rises.

Many psychologists, sociologists, marketeers , are doing their utmost to identify what the present generation is like and what it is that makes them function, be motivated and perform. There are many reasons for wanting to identify this.

Since the Second World War a distinction as below has been recognized and named

- Babyboomers 1945 – 1960
 - Generation X 1965 – 1985
 - Generation Einstein 1990 – now
- (also called “more and more generation”, “pc screen generation”, “image generation”, “thumb generation”, “pick and mix generation”)

With this present Generation Einstein a new approach is needed to get them involved based on their characteristics and attitudes which can be listed as:

- Fast, clever, sociable
- Society conscious
- Keen on intimacy
- Loyal, functional
- Learning visually, not verbally text based
- Creative and imaginative
- Commercially oriented

- Media smart through 24/7 information society
- Computer as a social machine and part of life
- Continuous contact by internet, MSN, chatten

Drastic and very unconventional measures will prove necessary to attract this generation of youngsters. If we are really serious about manning ships with young intelligent new generation persons we will have to offer good working conditions, extreme internet access and a modern relevant and practical educational system.

3. Educational systems

Obviously what the new generations do not like is non-functionality and unnecessary work, procedures, activities. Which brings us to one of the prominent problems in many MET systems. Very often extremely traditional education forms and content are very de-motivating for our young generations.

In the Netherlands we have tried to improve this aspect by incorporating both MoE and MoT exams into one activity, as we were probably one of the rare fields of study where a student was examined twice on the same subjects, but for different authorities. (Because we have always been doing it that way??!!)

Besides that the educational system was transformed from a knowledge based system to a very practical competence based programme. Some characteristics along that path included

- Form mono to dual purpose
- Subjects to modules to competences
- Knowledge based was transformed to competence based
- Examination to assessment
- Diploma to degree incl. Dublin descriptors
- European Credit Transfer System was introduced
- Quality Assurance systems initiated

Assuming we will find enough interested youngsters to take up seafaring and believe in the industry, our worries for the quality of this MET should become apparent.

Seafarer shortage automatically implies teaching staff shortage. And if we can find individuals willing to change from sea to shore, decent employment conditions (read salary) is the least requirement necessary. Once that is solved the teaching capacity of the ex seafarer must be evaluated and where necessary upgraded and updated.

The way this was achieved in the past in Netherlands is described hereafter. However what is a past without a future, so how are we going to meet the needs to come.

Obviously it will be very beneficial similar to any professional education that the teaching staff has some experience in the field he or she is supposed to teach. Apart from a good theoretical background having had the own hands on experiences is important.

4. Staff development

As an established maritime nation the maritime education and training system in The Netherlands has a long history and excellent reputation. This reputation is partly due to the high standards required of the teaching staff.

After the highest professional qualification and ample seetime the prospective MET lecturers seeking the highest level of teaching competence were required to follow a dedicated teacher training programme of five years fulltime compressed into a parttime format.

This programme was unique in its kind and officially known as the "Vereniging Cornelis Douwes" courses. There were four specializations in the course depending on the entrants background and chosen topics: Navigation, Seamanship, Engineering, Radio Communications. The course resulted in a multiple MSc and provided the assurance of a fixed contract in the then Higher Dutch MET institutes.

However, the efforts required during a five year period, usually aside a teaching job necessary to make a living, hardly generated a great popularity for the programme. The number of students in these teacher training programmes slowly decreased and since some years there are no entrants at all and the system ceased to exist.

5. MET Master

Apart from the seafaring bachelor level staff, many organizations in the maritime field have the need for further educated professionals. Besides that, numerous students both seafaring and maritime shore-based have the potential and ambition to take on further relevant studies.

With this in mind a number of new Master programmes have and are being initiated both by MIWB and in various MIWB collaboration arrangements with other organizations. These consist of tie ups with Dutch and European universities focusing on transport and logistics, nautical and engineering sciences as well as the unique programme of MET Master.

Where there is a global demand for scores of quality seafarers the realization is coming about that without proper MET educators and trainers there are no qualified seafarers. Many shortcuts and adhoc solutions are sought to try to overcome the existing shortage of qualified teachers.

The MET Master course objectives are clearly to enhance the professional expertise of those wishing to pursue a career in the maritime education and training field by offering indepth knowledge and background information on maritime subjects. Furthermore all elements of pedagogics and teaching didactics are offered.

As MET teachers or instructors, a good deal of personal expertise is required to offer a qualitative teaching programme. Therefore one of the entry requirements apart from the academic basic qualifications is the possession of a certain certificate of competence in the nautical and or engineering discipline.

As the maritime business is an international activity and as the maritime language is English it seems obvious that the MET Master programme is conducted in English. This also makes entry by foreign participants from any maritime country an easy route to follow.

The fields of study are various but the programme modules can be divided into general and specific modules.

- General module topics such as International regulations, Management, Law, Applied mechanics and mathematics, Computer technology, Teaching pedagogics and didactics, Simulation, Marine pollution and prevention.

Depending on the background expertise a choice can then be made between the nautical or technical stream covering

- Nautical module topics a.o.:

Shipping economics, Cargo and transport, Shiphandling, Naval architecture, Navigation and systems, Communications, Safety and survival, Meteorology and oceanography

- Marine engineering module topics such as :

Automation and control systems, Diesel engines, Steam systems, Refrigeration systems, Marine electrical engineering

For those not wishing a career in MET a selection of the professional modules can be chosen and for those not wishing to complete the entire Master programme individual modules can be followed as postgraduate courses during a suitable timeframe.

6. Conclusion

In this way we hope to offer both the right content for individuals and the new ideas for institutions to improve the overall quality of MET and make the MET profession an appreciated career change.

Hopefully this will bring the quality of seafaring and shipping overall to a level that once again is something to be proud of and an enviable and natural choice for the generations to come.

Within the present day situation, where economics seem to be overruling anything and everything, anywhere and everywhere, anytime and every time, it seems important to realize that students and staff are really very essential in both MET and far beyond!!

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Professional memberships :

- (IMLA) International Maritime Lecturers Association (Committee)
- (INSLC) International Navigation Lecturers Conference (Steering Group)
- (IAMU) International Association of Maritime Universities
- (Global MET) Global Association of MET Institutes (Advisor)
- (NI) Nautical Institute (Fellow)
- (RIN) Royal Institute of Navigation (Associate Fellow)
- (IFSMA) International Federation of Shipmasters Associations
- (IMSF) International Marine Simulator Forum (Chairman):