

Enhancing Maritime Officers Opportunities for Managerial Level Positions

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Abstract In the past few years, we have all witnessed and felt the effects of the global financial crisis. Consequently, maritime universities must continuously update their curricula so as to offer their graduates the advantage of a successful career in this most competitive domain.

Under the provisions of the Bologna Treaty, the period of technical higher education studies for bachelor's level were reduced from 5 to 4 years. With great efforts we manage to adapt the new curricula in order to maintain the license in waterborne transport engineering. The Romanian Naval Authority considered that in 4 years of study and maintaining the engineering specific courses there were no enough time left for all the compulsory maritime courses at operational and managerial level. The consequence was that part of the compulsory maritime courses with subjects for the managerial level had to be shifted to a new professional Master course. As most of the students envision a career at sea for no more than 10 years these Master's courses have proved to be very important for their career both at sea and on shore.

Keyword:

1. Introduction

The maritime transport industry has always been and will be a profitable endeavour, marked by fierce competition at every level. From this continuous and merciless competition, perhaps unsurprisingly, there are survivors who raise on top all the others. To be more specific the companies that have been in the business the longest, have managed narrow situations, and have seen through crisis times, world wars and many other difficult periods. A survivor in this line of business is an entity that aside from gaining a considerable wealth has something which is priceless, and that is a name with tradition and prestige, along with the respect of the entire maritime business community.

This being the general rule, it also extends to all industries related to maritime transport, and incidentally to the educational institutions that provide the necessary trained man-power for ship, cargo and port operations. All new maritime education and training centres are initially viewed with suspicion, and it generally takes tens of years before they are accepted [6]. During this period, it is not the quality of the teachers nor is it the quality of the school's equipment that is primarily evaluated [1], though these factors are regarded as important and they are certainly taken into account. Instead, everyone is analyzing and evaluating the performances of the university's graduated students, while at the same time quantifying how many of them managed to reach managerial positions both on board ships and onshore. Moreover, it has been observed that students coming from prestigious universities have little to no problem in attaining some of the highest positions within a company relatively quickly [11]. It is somewhat expected of them, and when they do, it reassures everyone's belief in the educational level of that particular institution.

Constanta Maritime University (CMU) has nonetheless attracted quite a considerable amount of international attention. We have managed to do this because during our entire period of activity we have managed to deliver good, reliable and conscientious men and women to all branches of the

maritime industry. In addition to this, we would also like believe that we are known through educational programs with international participation such as RoNoMAR, where we have Norwegian partners. Furthermore, it is believed that another interest factor is our rather high number of students. Some 600 future deck cadets join with us each year, and we have numbers for future maritime engineer and electrician officers also. However this high number of students may be, it also raises a problem in the way of what we, as a institution can do, to help them insure a future in this highly competitive industry. This paper deals with several ways our institution has envisioned to give them this most necessary help, and to aid them transform their hopes and visions of their future into concrete bright careers.

2. Enhancing cooperation with the maritime industry

Although the world financial crisis is not something new, it is of the utmost importance in every decision and long-term plan. In addition, before we could analyse how to improve the career progression of our students, we first started to concentrate on how to help them at the beginning of their careers. Before the crisis was felt, there was a staggering deficit of qualified maritime officers particularly at the managerial level [7]. That encouraged us to analyse our facilities for the purpose of extending and increasing the number of students that could study at our university. In the end we decided that the risk was acceptable and the student's response was excellent and the maritime community, especially the crewing agencies, happily saluted our initiative.

As we increased the number of students, we also took into consideration that there was going to be a ever increasing difference between the number of students entering the final years of their studies and wanting to undergo their on board training and the existing absorption rate of the industry. Without much effort, one can realise that in order for a student to reach an operational position on board a ship, he or she must gain some on board experience, working as a cadet. In addition, we have observed that the 12 month on board training experience is crucial for the cadets and their development as officers. More importantly, it confronts with the realities actually of working on board a ship. For many of them being the first time they actually step on board a merchant vessel, it creates an impression that will last their entire life, and thus does much to influence their career progression [16]. We had some unpleasant situations, with cadets returning home very disappointed after a rather dissatisfactory seagoing experience.

In an effort to correct the situation before it further developed, we have signed cooperation contracts with the more important crewing agencies, as well as with some shipping companies [13]. These initial efforts eventually developed into collaboration programs between CMU and them. The purpose of these early programs was straightforward: to identify the specific needs and problems of both our cadets and of the shipping companies. One example was the PRACNAV program, which focused on the cadet training programs [7]. It prioritized training steps and periods, while also requiring the companies to implement a fleet wide cadet program. Another program requirement was the creation of positions such as Company Training Officer (CTO) and Ship Training Officers (STO's). These persons, apart from supervising the cadet program, were also responsible for securing feedback information to CMU, about each cadet performance, and about any irregularities or recommendations that they might had. Later on we added more programs that would involve special training for these officers so that they would have a better understanding of their role as trainers.

After the crisis, hit most of the maritime transport companies cancelled their cadet training programs, and we anticipated that there was going to be a significant drop in the number of student's applications, as well as an increase in the number of cancellation of studies. However, the impact was not as severe as anticipated. We believe that there are at least two plausible explanations.

One is that since our institution was founded we have managed to build a good image in our country as a tough maritime university that opens good opportunities for the future, along with a solid international reputation as a reliable source of good officers. The other explanation is that by attracting international attention we have ensured that our students have a competitive edge in their search for both employment and rapid career progression.

The international attention that we have spoken so much about was materialized in programs international participation and scholarships. The programs referred to at the beginning of the paragraph are, at least at the moment, aimed at improving the training of the trainers, and are also focused on experience exchange both for teachers and students. The scholarships are, private programs organised through CMU by witch international shipping companies sponsor a selected group of students throughout the duration of their studies. At their graduation, the students have a contracted obligation to work within these companies for a determined period of time.

These collaboration programs paved the way for an open dialog between CMU and the maritime industry, in such away that we were able to identify some specific needs that required modifications of our curricula. These requirements were especially focused on more detailed study of the ships electronical equipment, especially the navigation equipment [12]. In our interpretation of the instructions, this included a much more intense simulation-training programme in the 3rd year of the curricula. During these simulator-training sessions, the future officers are encouraged to make the most of the different electronical equipment, in order to have a better knowledge of what they will find on board a real ship [2].

This proved to be an invaluable piece of information, because due to the Bologna Treaty, the period of technical higher education studies for bachelor's level were reduced from 5 to 4 years. As a direct result we had to change and adapt the curricula, and seek the best way to educate our students, and to give them the edge they require when searching for a job.

3. MET for the Managerial Level

CMU has always taken pride in the fact that graduating students apart from becoming maritime officer are also licensed as engineers in Waterborne Transport Engineering. Over the years we have noticed that due to this double qualification, after having acquired some experience on board ships, our graduates are more easily employed within a company in a management position on shore [10]. With great efforts, we have managed to adapt the new curricula in order to maintain the license in waterborne transport engineers, which has been no mean feat.

The main problem was that the Romanian Naval Authority considered that in 4 years of study and maintaining the engineering specific courses the was not enough time left for all the compulsory maritime courses at operational and managerial level. The consequence was that part of the compulsory maritime courses with subjects for the managerial level had to be shifted to a new professional Master course. This was emphasized by a decision of the Romanian Naval Authority, that all new graduates in order to become Chief Engineers, Chief Mates or Masters must graduate a Master's course [4].

There was still the problem of identifying the most appropriate Master courses. Again, the dialog between the maritime community and CMU proved to be of great importance. Of course, the former students themselves are also a reliable source of information about what master courses we should develop [5].

In the majority of cases the former students, now maritime deck officers, choose the Maritime Transport Master Studies, which is designed primarily for future Chief Mates and Masters. The aim is to further the student's knowledge of how to safely load and navigate different type of ships, planning a voyage while taking into consideration all kind of safety measures. This is why students undergo a serious and rigorous simulation training exercises both in the Cargo Operations Simulator and in the Navigation Simulator. Furthermore, the curriculum contains management and international maritime law courses. After completing this course students should be better prepared for the on board necessities and should have all the knowledge required for them for the position of Chief Mates. Detailed curricula of this master course in shown in Table 1.

COURSES	No. of hours / week			
	Course	Seminar	Lab	Project
1st YEAR – 1st Semester				
Maritime Insurance	1		1	
Voyage planning	1		3	
Tanker operation	2		1	
Advanced Naval Architecture	2		3	2
Maritime Transport Routes	1	1		
1st YEAR – 2nd Semester				
Research Methodology	1		1	
Economics of Maritime Transport	2	1		
Integrated Management Systems	2			
Risk Management in Maritime Transport	1	1		
Safety and Security Management in Maritime Transport	2	1		
Multimodal Transport	1	1		
Project Management	2	1		
2nd YEAR – 1st Semester				
Information Management in Navigation	1		1	2
Bulk Carriers Operation	1		1	
Ship management and Administration	2	2		
Ship Handling in Special Conditions	2		2	
Leadership	2	1		

Table 1. Curricula for the Professional Master Course

As we can see from the above curricula this professional Master Course has a lot of disciplines related with various aspects of management in the maritime field. It is also obvious that this Master Course exceeds the requirements mentioned in STCW regarding training for maritime managerial level [3].

Another significant proportion of the former deck students, along with an increasing number of lawyers, choose the International Maritime Law Master Studies. Although it was not specifically required by anyone, CMU felt the need for this Master because during the last 8 years we were constantly asked to organize refresher courses on topics that ranged from lay time calculations to maritime insurances and global limitation of liability. Initially the target group for this project were the officers that already had a managerial position both on board ships and on shore. However, it soon began to be evident that these studies were attractive to persons working in other branches of the maritime industry or related to it. To begin with, in Romania at least, there is no so great tradition in maritime jurisprudence to speak of. Quite the contrary, the legal system during the last few years underwent a complete overhaul in an effort to comply with the relevant international conventions signed by our state. As a result, there were great deal of lawyers and quite a number of magistrates and judges that showed and interest in this Master degree.

The Management and Engineering in the Maritime and Port Operations Master Studies, was the CMU response to a very specific set of needs (table 2). One such need was from the administrative department of the Romanian Naval Authority to elaborate courses that will satisfy European requirements for their personnel, which would certify their qualification for this highly specialized field of operations. Another group of persons that required this Master Program are the maritime officers, either from deck or from the engineering department, with a desire to work on shore in maritime related businesses [9]. To cope with this wide range of requirements, this master has to offer a broad range of information. This includes resource, personnel and business management courses, along with administrative and maritime law. Other courses refer to economics, business implementation, logistics, and port equipment and operations, and multi-modal transport.

At the completion of this Masters, all graduates have a much better understanding of the economics that govern the maritime industry as well as a more comprehensive view of how this industry connects

with other transport methods, and influences the business environment both locally, within the immediate geographical distance from the ports, and world wide [14]. This is why they have a much better chances of successfully getting a job on shore, or have a greater chance of being successful in their own maritime related private enterprise.

COURSES	No. of hours / week			
	Course	Seminar	Lab	Project
1st YEAR – 1st Semester				
E-Shipping	2		1	
Operation of port Systems	2		1	
Financial management in Maritime transport	2	1		1
Optimization of maritime Transport	2	2		
Geopolitics and Geostrategic	1	1		
1st YEAR – 2nd Semester				
Research Methodology	1		1	
Economics of Maritime Transport		2	1	
Risk Management in Maritime Transport			1	1
Safety and Security Management in Maritime Transport			1	1
Maritime Management	2	1		
Multimodal Transport	1	1		
Project Management	2	1		
2nd YEAR – 1st Semester				
Legal Aspect in Maritime Transport	2	2		
Port Marketing	2	2		1
Flag State Control and Port Authorities	1		1	
Port Information Management	2		1	
Integrated Logistics Systems	2	1		

Table 2. Curricula for the Maritime Management & Engineering Master Course

4. Conclusion

From the moment our university was founded it had undergone an uninterrupted process of change. However we would like to consider these changes as a matter of adaptation to the necessities and day to day hardships that not only we as an educational institution face, but anyone working in the maritime transport has to deal with.

Over the years CMU has confronted many problematic periods such as loosing its main training vessel the Neptune. She was a beautiful cargo vessel, but she had reached the technical limit of her service period. At that time we were confronted with two choices: one was to invest a considerable sum of money in her modernization or to do something else. In the end we had to let her go, although in doing so we lost our primary tool for training our cadets, and securing their onboard training period.

However, we managed to turn this loss, which many considered to be a capital disaster for our university, into outstanding and highly successful training programs. Through the foresight of the university's council, CMU adopted a new strategy that we still maintain to this day: a continuous and open dialog between the local crewing agencies and maritime related business companies in order to identify the most appropriate course for our future and current development.

These dialogs made quite clear from the very beginning that the maritime industry, at that time not worried by the crisis, was in dire need of well trained officers. As a result we purchased simulators, and proceeded at improving and modernizing our training methods. A direct consequence of all these actions was that CMU had a much better international public image. Indirectly our students were also beneficiaries: apart from being better trained, they had improved chances of both being recruited by

local or foreign company and reaching the highest position possible for them within the shortest time possible.

Now that the entire world still suffers from the effects of the crisis, the cooperation between us and the industry is ever more important. Most if not all companies are desperately looking to cut expenses wherever they can, and as such recruitment of new personnel and promotions are almost nonexistent [15]. However dire this reality may be, we are proud to see that all our efforts have not been in vain and that the programs started not so long ago are still functioning, while talks to begin new programs are underway. This is why, at CMU, we believe that communication and cooperation between any maritime university must be the key of the educational process, in order to ensure both the bright and smooth career progression of the students, and the survivability of the institution that trains them.

Most of the maritime transport companies cancelled or reduced their cadet training programs, and we anticipated that there was going to be a significant drop in the number of student's applications, as well as an increase in the number of cancellation of studies.

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