

PARTICULARITIES OF MARITIME HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF KNOWLEDGE BASED ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

We currently live in a period when knowledge and competencies have become strategic resources that brings a company's success. In maritime field, the company's ability to use seafarers and employees' intellectual capital and proper technologies is what makes it competitive on market and able to develop innovative integrated solutions that create value for customers. In the knowledge-based economy, focus in sea transport is not solely on technical operations and maneuvers but also on the human dimension that was previously neglected, and particularly on leadership and command techniques. Today, an essential importance is given to research of human resources – a veritable strategic resource for this domain.

KEYWORDS: *Maritime human resource management, maritime transport, captain, crew, shipping.*

1. Introduction

In the older days, the Master was often the owner or co-owner of the maritime company and all decision were taken by him: from furnishing to booking cargo and signing stevedoring or maritime transport contracts. He was also responsible to maintaining discipline, signing on crews and signing them off.

Today, in the context of growing competition in the shipping industry, and the development of means of communication between ship and shore, the decision makers are no longer on board ship but on shore. Today the ship's Command have less authority but still is the person responsible with returning the ship, crew and cargo safe to destination. Decisions, control, supervision, planning and performance monitoring are mostly carried by computerized programs ashore.

2. Importance of captain in maritime human resource management

On board ship, the decision-maker is the captain or master, which is the person in charge, along with the Chief Engineer who keeps up for the mechanical issues. When someone is promoted as captain, it is done with the expectation that he or she will demonstrate two qualities. First is the overall quality of performing in a professional manner, managing the resources. The second is that he or she will accept and function as a leader. As a professional, it is expected that they will always operate the ship and conduct the cargo in accordance with corporation policies and international regulations, and that

they will employ good judgment to the highest standards of proficiency. A captain guides and directs others in order to operate in a professional manner. The captain is one who commands, leads, or guides others and supervises. The captain is a figure in the forefront and ultimately a leader.

Personal qualities of successful captains are their knowledge of ships, shipping, systems and maritime processes. They are also able to converse with clients and other seafarers using the technical jargon and language of the sea. Generally, ex-seafarers are more comfortable discussing marine issues in the corporation of other ex-seafarers than with non-seafarers.

Another quality is their maritime credibility. This is related to the above but comes with experience at sea, which is why this factor is often sought by shore employers in maritime related businesses.

Successful captains have the ability as independent, self-reliant and resourceful workers. Seafarers are generally good at handling uncertain situations as they develop, and are regarded as responsible employees who are committed to getting the job done.

The last but not the least, captains have or should have leadership potential. Officers are also regarded as potentially good and pragmatic leaders who are good at making decisions and creative at solving problems.

A seafarer's education may be too preoccupied with narrow operational technical questions for some management positions ashore. Prospective shore employers may consider that these characteristics are especially true of senior officers, who may be seen as being fixed in their ways and averse to change and the authority of others.

3. Particularities of Maritime Human Resource Management

Compared with other domains, in maritime transport managerial decisions are the most difficult ones to be made, as they have to be moral, ethic and legal. Employment, promotion, professional development, motivation, dismissal etc. represent complex managerial acts, as they involve people with specific needs, characterized by their own personality, with their own objectives and personal problems to deal with. The adoption of certain managerial decisions in a knowledge based maritime company can affect individuals' health, their career, professional development and even their life. Within human resources department, managerial decisions should be responsible (towards society), un-discriminating and flexible (towards individuals). Management decisions should not lead to social conflicts, misinterpretation or reading between lines. Decisions should be adapted to the personality of the applicants and to their educational and professional background.

Captains should take into account the fact that personnel are not a heterogeneous group; crew should be regarded as a group of distinct personalities, with individual targets, hopes and objectives. This aspect is more difficult to cope with when we are talking about working in the maritime sector.

Those individuals who stay in the seafaring profession are perceived to be the more practical minded, often with a long held ambition to become a Captain or Chief Engineer. They are people who appreciate the job and the seafaring lifestyle, and the rewards that this brings. There are also those who find fulfillment of their personal ambitions outside their working life and find seafaring conducive to the pursuit of these other activities. Perhaps they are very active in other areas, for example, managing small private businesses while ashore. In contrast, there are also the more academically inclined, who may from the outset, regard the officers' vocation as merely a step on the ladder to a

maritime career ashore and who will often plan for additional education. Another factor that may determine the length of time spent at sea by an individual is “fast track” promotion, which in some companies has become the rule rather than the exception. Within a few years, an officer’s salary may be at a level that is difficult to match in a normal shore job. Often this high salary will be followed by financial commitments, sometimes referred to as the “mortgage trap”, which may be difficult to meet with a “normal” salary. Fast promotion has now reached a level where some interviewees considered it a problem. This may be the case where it could result in an entire group of officers possessing only a limited amount and diversity of experience among them. The problem is accentuated by the fact that no differentiation is made between sea time earned on small and large vessels, making it possible for officers with experience from only small vessels to obtain senior officer positions on large vessels, with no prior experience in such vessels. In earlier times, the shipping companies themselves would have largely prevented this, but now they may not have the possibility of choice in the present situation. A possible solution put forward by interviewees would be a requirement for more sea time during the basic education period.

A significant problem in maritime transport today is a lack of understanding about the differences in management styles. For example, some personnel in sea transport have characterized certain senior captains from the other services in joint appointments as indecisive or not forceful enough, or the small stature of sea captains in the context of their less than adequate leadership. On the other hand, there are certain senior captains in joint appointments as “all muscle and no brains” or micromanagers because they try to make forceful interventions in areas where they have little expertise. Many of these views are based on service-based expectations about what good leadership looks like.

There are distinct differences in the management styles commonly used in maritime transport and each nation has a singular culture that is another variable in the maritime management equation.

The most precious thing to a captain in sea operations is his/hers ego. Nothing feeds or destroys that ego quicker than the quality of the last voyage. Besides mastering the skills required to make good voyages, there are many other skills a captain will be asked to demonstrate. In addition, the Second Officer has a recognized responsibility and importance as he stands near the captain when the ship is on sea. He also occupies a point of strategic importance in the financial well being of the airline.

Today shipping companies all over the world hire consultants to analyze and study their operations in an attempt to either correct safety problems or prevent human factor caused accidents. The answer to many of the audits uncovering human safety shortcomings is simply good training programs. In recent years, quality, health and safety requirements in many countries have been more stringent than was the case previously.

Bearing this in mind, generally Deck Officers may expect to be two years as a Second Officer, two years as a First Officer and six years as a Chief Officer before command. Engineer Officers benefit from a shorter ladder, and from a higher flow of people, as Engineers generally have more opportunities to leave the seagoing career than do Deck Officers, and they tend to leave at an earlier stage. In some countries there is the trend regarding Deck Officers is changing now towards the pattern of the Engineer Officers.

Former deck officers are valued as leaders and will often find employment in middle management in generalist functions within administration, general management, sales, HR, education, classification or as self employed.

In the specialized literature there is the assumption that crew on one hand and master and Head Office in the other hand is “culturally homogeneous”, that means there is a common language beyond nautical terminology and infinity of tradition, customs and

behavior based on education, training and experience, creating loyalty from crew to superiors and vice-versa.

Culture is something that is often an underrated and overlooked aspect of our business. It is the basis and the driver of our actions. It determines who fits into the organization and who the outsider is. It is people that make up our organizations, they crew ships and they do good things or not based upon their personal backgrounds and national and organizational cultures.

High power distance cultures are ones in which there are many ranks and status is important; seniors are obeyed and respected and there is a large “distance” between the common person and the nation’s rulers. Flatter hierarchies exemplify low power distance cultures; there is more equality between individuals and less distance between “the man in the street” and the power of the nation’s leaders.

In a maritime context, this becomes apparent in the differences between those countries where parts of the maritime sector are quite independent and separate from each other, with their own hierarchies, systems, and those where the boundaries are far less rigid. A good example of a high power distance culture in this respect is Greece where the hierarchical systems for the Coastguard, Hellenic Navy and administration appointments are quite separate from the shipping industry itself. Italy and Spain share this trait to a lesser extent. In comparison, in the Scandinavian countries, the UK and Netherlands, the boundaries are less rigid and many of these shore-based appointments will come from ex-seafarers. This may in part explain why clustering of shore-based maritime activity is more or less formalized in the various maritime activities is more or less formalized in the various Member States.

4. Conclusions

Generally speaking, maritime labour market is extremely vast and varied. There is a huge number of competing navigation companies and seafarers have the possibility to choose the company that best suits them. The working conditions for a seafarer generally differ from one voyage to another according to the main factors which are: crew members, type of vessel, navigation area and duration of the contract.

Referring to mentalities, customs, individual and group behaviors, people are relatively conservative; economic and social values are differently perceived by different individuals. Therefore, managers of the knowledge based maritime company must have the capability to positively direct individuals and to underline their own values.

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