



## On Cross Cultural Communication in a Mixed Crew

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 28<sup>th</sup> December 2014;  
in revised form 30<sup>th</sup> January 2015;  
accepted 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015.

#### Keywords:

Mixed Crew, Cross Cultural  
Communication, Working Synergism,  
Cultural Diversity, Maritime English  
Teaching

### ABSTRACT

The article is dedicated to some issues of cultural diversities which are available now in mixed crews. The new perspectives to overcome the difficulties of work in a mixed crew are offered. Nowadays all people working in the shipping business face the new challenge that is the globalization of the whole marine and shipping industry. People from various countries and of completely different cultures, work together in the same crew, on the same vessel. To gain optimum working synergism on board, it is necessary to realize the differences in values, beliefs as well as the practical issues such as language, religion and diet. The objective of the paper is to create a strategy important for every seaman, especially for an officer to build an efficient cross-cultural crew. Differences should be understood by all and respected, before any effective work relationships can be established. Multicultural crews are a new reality. The results of the research can be applied both during the training of deck and engine cadets in the course of Cross Cultural Communication at maritime universities and on board ship in a mixed crew.

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## 1. Introduction

The global economy and the shipping market have changed significantly in the past years. The research carried out for this report demonstrates that there will still be a substantial demand for appropriately qualified seafarers who are able to work successfully with their colleagues from other countries and cultures and there is likely to be a shortage of such people.

Special attention should be paid to cross-cultural relations while working in a mixed crew. The rules and standards of one culture are completely different from the rules of another culture. Therefore, it is important for every seaman, especially for an officer to have a strategy to build an efficient cross-cultural crew. Section 2 of the article is dedicated to the description of the current tendencies on the world's maritime labour market,

ways of tackling cultural differences in mixed crews and efforts taken by the Black Sea Maritime Institutions to cooperate in this field. Section 3 contains some generalized conclusions based on the review.

## 2. Development

### 2.1. Crewing Issues Overview

Recently there has been a tendency of world seaborne trade volume increase caused by both world economy globalization and world population increase. Around 80 per cent of global trade volume and over 70 per cent global trade value is carried by sea and is handled by ports worldwide. Fuelled by strong growth in tanker, container and dry bulk trades, world seaborne trade grew by 4 per cent in 2011, taking the total volume of goods loaded worldwide to 8.7 billion tons. World container port capacity increased by an estimated 5.9 per cent to 572.8 million 20-foot equivalent units in 2011, its highest level ever. This increase was less than the 14.5 per cent increase of 2010 that sharply rebounded from the slump of 2009 (UNCTAD secretariat, 2012).

Over the last decade, the situation has been observed with a vivid deficiency of officers as well as ratings on the world

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maritime manpower market. The world maritime community is monitoring the processes taking place in this area. Recent research (Manpower, 2010) points out the corresponding reasons such as: a shift in the balance of number of seafarers from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development countries (OECD) to the Far East, Southeastern Asia and Eastern Europe; an increase in general demand for seafarers and for some groups of specialists and types of vessels; early retirement of seafarers and personnel shortage for their substitution; necessity of training improvement and increased recruitment of seafarers as well as reduction of their outflow; a decrease in the interest in the maritime career among young people in the EU countries, a tendency to continue career ashore.

The Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO) and International Shipping Federation (ISF) carry out research and publish relevant reports about tendencies on the world's maritime labour market every five years. According to the latest report the total amount of officers of seagoing vessels in 2010 was estimated as 532000, which is 32% more than in 1990, and 14% more than in 2005. Therefore, the shortage is 29800 (5.6%). According to the forecast the number of officers should have increased up to 607000 people in 2014 (14% more compared with 2010). Shortage is anticipated to halve to 14300 (2.4%). As of 2015, the number of officers required to man the total fleet is estimated at 562,000, with this calculation taking into account vessel numbers, typical on-board officer numbers per vessel type and average back-up ratio to cover leave. Referring to the assessment of experts this shortage of officers in the world shipping will make 5.9% - about 25000 persons by 2015 pursuant to the investigations of BIMCO.

Besides, Drewry Shipping Consultants Ltd. annually publishes reports based on their own research devoted to the topic considered (Manning, 2010). The Drewry/PAL Global Manpower Model distinguishes the following the main supply regions:

- Western Europe 15%;
- Eastern Europe 22%;
- Far East 37%;
- Rest of World 26%.

The top officer supply areas in 2010 were Far East, India and Eastern Europe.

In this concern, it is necessary to mention that Admiral Ushakov Maritime State University is a member of BSAMI (Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions). The University has its own crewing company and does their best to investigate the situation in this area. It should be highlighted that Eastern Europe, which includes the Black Sea region countries such as Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine, has been assuming even greater importance due to the increase in the number of officers over the recent years. The Black Sea region has seen the fastest proportional increase in officers supply over the period from 1990 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of officers and ratings in the countries of the Black Sea Region (according to BIMCO/ISF [3])

Nº	Country-Supplier of Crew	Officers	Ratings
1	Turkey	36734	51009
2	Ukraine	27172	11000
3	Russia	25000	40000
4	Romania	18575	5768
5	Bulgaria	10890	22379
<b>Total in the world</b>		624062	692542

Source: Authors

It should be noted that although Turkish seafarers occupy the leading position in the region, more than a half of their officers have licenses with restrictions in areas of navigation, tonnage or power plants capacity (Sag, 2010, 2013). According to the quantity of the seafaring officers, Ukraine is the 4th in the world (6.2% of total number).

The European ship-owners and managers facing the ratio 'cost-quality' tend to prefer the seafarers from Eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, etc.).

It is sometimes believed that seafarers from most Black Sea countries are most willingly employed by international companies as they are ready to work for small payment as low-cost workforce. However, it does not appear to be proved. For example, the table below shows the average pay rates of a tanker master in 2010 for different countries (see Table 2).

Table 2: Average Pay Rates in 2010 on the International Labour Market at the Tanker Fleet for Masters from different countries in US Dollars (according to Drewry Publishing Information [4])

Country-Supplier of Crew	Pay Rates
India	13500
China	10500
Croatia	15750
Philippines	11250
Ukraine	13750
Romania	14700
Russia	13550

Source: Authors

The figures show that Romania is the leader as for salaries following only Croatia with Ukraine and Russia being third and fourth. This can serve as an evident proof that seafarers from the Black Sea Region are employed not because of low salaries, but due to high professionalism of theirs.

Following the adoption of the Bologna Declaration, Admiral Ushakov Maritime State University started using a graded system of seafarer education. The graded system involves navigational practice lasting 6-12 months. The above mentioned system has the following features: it meets the requirements of STCW Convention, combines theory and practice (working knowledge) and successfully prepares students for work on board.

## 2.2. Cross Cultural Differences on Board and Ways to Smooth them over

Quality shipping relies heavily on well-educated and trained seafarers. The STCW Convention (Standards of Training, Certification and Watch-keeping for Seafarers) is the benchmark against which countries (both EU and non-EU) providing EU flagged vessels with seafarers are measured. This international convention provides a minimum standard for maritime education and training (MET) and certification systems. The emergence of cross-cultural communication, business etiquette and of English as a genuine world language achieved especial prominence during the 1990s. To gain optimum working synergism on board, it is necessary to realize the differences in values, beliefs as well as the practical issues such as language, religion and diet.

Each voyage has immediate linguistic consequences. A language has to be interpreted, learned, imposed, and over time a cross-cultural trend can develop into a major influence. Recent studies in the area have displayed a contemporary movement towards global English use (Crystal, 2004), therefore, we would expect it to be particularly noticeable in this domain. For seafarers, whose international travel brings them into the world of cross-cultural voyage, business meetings, international conventions, professional occupations and other 'official' gatherings, the domains of transportation and language are of vital importance. Safety instructions on international sailings, information about emergency procedures, and directions to major locations are now routinely in English. Most notices which tell us to find life-boat stations or check the location of the emergency stairs give us an option in English.

A special aspect of safety is the way that the language has come to be used as a means of controlling international transport operations, especially on water. English has emerged as the international language of the sea, in the form of Essential English for International Maritime Use, often referred to as 'Seaspeak'. Progress has also been made in recent years in devising systems of communication between organizations which are involved in handling emergencies on the ground—notably, the coast guards, the fire service, the ambulance service and the police.

The foundation of any strategy has to be an awareness of the real differences in various cultures. Every officer should answer the following questions at the very beginning of the voyage:

- what is the degree of difference between the cultural norms within the crew?
- what is the relative status of the different cultures within the crew?
- what impact can officers and shipmasters have on the effective working of the crew, based on an understanding of their own cultural norms as well as those of the different groups on the vessel?

In case critical moments or incidents occur, feelings of discomfort can arise as seamen face the realities of confronting

issues of diversity. Therefore, sensitivities and understanding on the part of the officers can turn these into breakthroughs.

Differences need to be understood, acknowledged and respected by all members of a crew, before any effective work relationships can be built.

Training in cross-cultural awareness is common in many multinational companies and national companies, Novoship, for example. Such trainings play a valuable role not only in building better teams, but also in creating more enriching working experience, and boosting morale as well as motivation.

It should be stressed that multicultural teams are a new reality. They need active cultivating in terms of understanding and handling the cultural differences to maximize the potential of everyone and create an even more enriching and effective working environment.

The main issues which are to be addressed and which can turn into real problems on board ship are as follows:

### a) Hierarchy and Status

In Eastern cultures and as it has already been mentioned in this article many seafarers are from such countries as the Philippines, India, Pakistan, China and etc., one is not expected to question authority. A particular challenge in this respect is that of the 'yes' culture, whereby people will always say 'yes' when the real answer may be a 'no', or the question or instruction is not understood.

There can occur serious equipment damage or delay in cargo operations due to such difference in cultures. European seafarers usually try to clarify things for themselves if they do not understand the instructions of senior officers while Asian seamen do not.

### b) Face Saving

Face saving means being sensitive to preserving personal status and dignity. Being criticized or belittled in public can be considered as shameful in many Eastern cultures. In Russian maritime universities and academies, including Admiral Ushakov State University both deck and engine cadets live on campus in dormitories. During the whole five years period of their studies, every morning before classes they have morning formation on the parade ground where their commanders-tutors praise them for their success in studies or reprimand for poor studies or bad behavior. In the Russian culture it is considered that it is good to have both positive and negative examples. When our students graduate from the University and become senior officers, some of them try to criticize and reprimand seafarers of other cultures in public considering that it is good for everybody. As a result, at the next port of calling the seafarer who considers that the Russian officer offended him complains to the inspectors or trade union representative about the behavior of the officer. This is a situation of a real conflict and sometimes it is very difficult to solve it.

### c) Implied Context

The implied context is important for non-western cultures in their thinking and communications. Europeans tend to be focused in a linear way, and therefore, frustrations can result.

#### d) Diet

Cultural distinctions are observed in every aspect of everyday life on board including food preferences, for instance, Muslim seafarers do not eat pork and do not drink alcohols while Hindus are pure vegetarians. All crew members should be aware of such customs.

#### e) Religion

Muslim seafarers require praying five times a day as well as fasting in the month of Ramadan.

#### f) Language proficiency

The English language in maritime shipping clearly impacts matters of safety, effective communications and following or giving instructions and the potential for enriching experience.

Being a seafarer implies the need for constant improvement and knowledge verification due to rapid development of equipment, risks affecting the safety of crew, cargo and ship. Seafarers are submitted to permanent knowledge and skill verification on the international labour market. Consequently, seafaring requires continuous education provided by some certified training centers offering upgrading, refreshing and specialized courses.

### 2.3. Maritime Institutions International Cooperation in the Solutions to Cross Cultural Diversities

Recently there has been observed a tendency of the Black Sea countries to consider the necessity of cooperating with each other in order to make efficient efforts to solve current regional problems.

The six Black Sea countries sharing 20% of the currently existing seafaring officers of the world and having a logical reason for founding a common platform of collaboration has taken innovative initiative in the sectors of capacity building of qualified maritime human resources of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thus, maritime universities from six countries - Nikola Vaptsarov Naval Academy (Bulgaria), Batumi State Maritime Academy (Georgia), Constanta Maritime University (Romania), Admiral Ushakov State Maritime University (Russia), Maritime Faculty of Istanbul Technical University (Turkey) and Odessa National Maritime Academy (Ukraine) - founded the Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions (BSAMI) on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, 2010 at Maritime Faculty of Istanbul Technical University.

BSAMI considered supporting the exchange of information and experiences with regard to the modernization of the educational systems in the BSEC Member States aimed at increasing sustainable growth and the establishment of knowledge based societies.

The issue of cross-cultural communication in a mixed crew is urgent not only for our University but for the majority of higher institutions training cadets for work at sea. It is one of the most urgent problems at sea. It is realized by all maritime international teaching community. We have very impressive practical results of our research. Thanks to the close cooperation with the Maritime Faculty of Istanbul Technical University (Turkey) and a joint project on cross cultural training with the exchange students and visiting professors who deliver lectures

and seminars on work in a mixed crew, we have generally managed to eliminate nearly all the divergences and cultural misunderstanding which existed among Russian and Turkish students in our Universities, in spite of the very complicated and unfavorable political situation between the two countries.

The objectives of BSAMI are to meet the liabilities as a team to further promote ourselves as the major global center of the highest quality maritime human resources through knowledge, innovation and implementation towards the future.

Currently, the Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions is in the process of establishing partnership with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), which came into existence as a model of multilateral political and economic initiative aimed at fostering interaction and harmony among the Member States, as well as to ensure peace, stability and prosperity encouraging friendly and good-neighbourly relations in the Black Sea Region.

### 3. Conclusions

The study has revealed that the Black Sea countries, and Admiral Ushakov Maritime State University in particular, have a potential for further increasing of the amount of maritime professional's training, paying special attention to cultural training, and good prospects for successful competition on the world labour market under the conditions of increasing demand for qualified maritime professionals in global maritime shipping. The existing issues of the mixed crew require special attention. They can be divided into two categories, such as core issues, typical of all cultures and nationalities including religion, diet and language aspects, which should draw the attention of all shipping, manning and crewing companies and soft issues requiring specific understanding and treatment on the part of the officers on board. Shipping companies' cultures tend to reflect their 'home' countries. However, special cross-cultural training will enable future officers of merchant marine, sensitive to the complexity of international cultures, to increase the necessary flexibility without trying to impose excessive company 'culturalisation' and bring out innovative potential of a multicultural crew.

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