

Progressive training techniques; meeting the change by a possible solution

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History

Formal training of seafarers began early last century mainly in the then domain of colonial powers. Before then seamen were deemed to be made from father to son and learning “art” of navigation and seamanship the hard way – Columbus way. Between the two time periods several important physical discoveries and inventions took the shape of Iron Age and engines followed by electronics.

Some of us were lucky as I was in 1966 to be part of early form of formal training on a 1927 British troop ship T.S. DUFFERIN commissioned by the British in Mumbai. In India it preceded all forms of training for army / navy / aviation. This training ship provided good training to a cadet for 2-3 years with minimum basic general education and prepared him for real hard sea life. Merchant ship sea service was then and is still today unnatural habitat and dangerous vocation, second only to deep sea fishing. Therefore, main object of such training was and should be to make a person observe time tested observance of good seamanship.

Background

With advent of machine age and increasing global trade but lack of interest in the then developed (Western) countries for producing seamen, International Maritime Organization IMO made first attempt to produce minimum uniform Standards of Training Seafarers in 1978 for use globally. This first attempt was only partly successful in achieving desired result because of various marine administrations interpreting the requirements less than uniformly to suit its individual requirement. While in some countries good seamen and officers continued to be produced on training establishments like T.S. Dufferin and equivalent college ashore for Marine Engineers, there was evidence that accidents and claims were increasing due to human errors. Latter should also mean to include bad ship management. Therefore, IMO undertook a comprehensive review in 1995 of the said training standards and introduced safety management code which is in force world wide today.

Current situation

The new STCW 1995 mandates function based training and competencies in less liberal description of competencies in internationally agreed competency tables. For the first time training has been encompassed under quality and company responsibility. However, only so much consensus was possible in 1995 for the new Standards to come into force sooner than later. The net result is that to cope up with modern shipping these standards are also now inadequate and although compliance measures are better than before we have not arrived at uniformity for the purpose as is in civil aviation. This is mainly because STCW 1995 is still hanging on weak Articles of STCW1978. By broad consensus strong Articles and enabling Regulations are required. There is need to agree on provision for person to be trained as per STCW requirements on board like a co pilot, trainee pilot, or a medico in city hospital. I believe the new goal should be producing many quality seafarers. The famous BIMCO study finding in early 90s on manpower shortage is still showing no sign of improvement.

Progressive training

From base of STCW1995 we need to equate nautical and marine engineering training as closely as possible. Dual and alternate certification should be made possible up to the level of operational and support level. This must be done pragmatically by prescribing equal amount of education and training for both the streams. Equal amount of structured on board training under prescribed quality system and company responsibility. This does not necessarily mean double the time to produce a dual certification. Training schemes should be developed for shipping not other way round as is often the case in some countries at the fore front of manpower supply.

New trainees coming now to sea going career need the assurance of rising to be in management role on the ship and beyond in 10-12 years time. Before 1980 Masters had this benefit but lately with split second communication, authority of Master and Chief Engineer has been grossly eroded. It is working both ways. Less than best Master and Chief Engineer whose training input itself has been bad all the way is preventing companies from re-giving them authority for more on board management decisions. Unfortunately, in some countries this has taken the form of very high academic score for joining an approved pre sea institution (where no such requirement exists in STCW1995) and more than the prescribed minimum training period serving training end only!

Education and training are two different things and cannot be made suitable for good sea going career. What is needed is minimum interference in industry identified training (customer feedback) for its own use. IMO therefore should

mandate standards based on minimum general education for nautical, engineering streams and allow trainees to gain credits in much more liberal way. And, Marine Administrations should be satisfied with determining total available functional competency on board.

New learning

It must begin with emphasis on producing good trainers. Not all Masters and Chief Engineers can be good trainers. But, they can all be made to do their bit when trainees are undergoing training on board / work place. Every medical doctor is supposed to be a trainer for their juniors in clinical practice. We in maritime industry must embrace this model of learning.

There is need also to give credit / recognition to more simulator training. However, this is again only as good as the trainer. On the other hand, IMO has been embroiled in stating simulator specification. With galloping changes in electronics and communication this is not easy task. Therefore, agreement is necessary only what a simulator should be able to do as a minimum. A trainee doing more than that should get equivalent benefit. For example, training ship, ship in campus etc. is also a kind of simulator and should be considered for benefit and its use encouraged – positive action. Some 20000 trainee cadets have been trained in last ten years but a prolonged process, procedural delays and poor training establishments which have not satisfied the trainees in all respects has resulted in – many having left marine industry in general and sea going service in particular.

To induct and retain new trainees there is may be need to follow or redevelop European model of vocational qualification administered by few central bodies like PSC MOUs. May be larger role for professional associations.

Slide show suggests one such possibility and reasons for it. The most important being that talent is the most important resource in any business organization – not money and material. The shipping industry now urgently requires smart, sophisticated, technologically literate, globally astute and operationally agile crews.

Way forward

Coaching new trainers and trainees on cross cultural issues. This is very important on multi cultural crewing prevalent and likely to grow even further. Managing relationships across diverse cultures cannot be overemphasized. Connecting people is a subject of study that cannot be ignored any more. Company's HR department,

Master / Chief Engineer on board as part of top management of the company must make these changes happen.

Management of training function – systematic need for determining need, its effectiveness, policy and objectives, presentation skills, participative training methods, coping with management information systems etc. should do well to attract and keep flow of trainee at least constant. Otherwise I fear at least in metros trainee population will soon dry up.

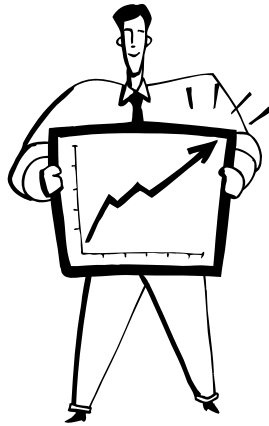
Nautical training establishments need to work in public private partnership to retain trainers, world class infrastructure including research facilities. And, to retain and attract younger workforce at sea, management on board and ashore must get away from idea of all work and no play and non involvement of seafarers in drawing business plans and targets. This can only happen when IMO mandates Companies to train their Masters and Chief Engineers to take on such responsibilities and are respectfully cared for. Role play training, development programmes, open houses, work environment studies and on leave tenure to ship management / ship owner office should help as cost effective incentive. Similarly, there is need to prepare new trainees for taking decisions. STCW does not presently prepare any body for taking command or become a trainer. It only prescribes training requirements. Even trainee definition is missing!

Good communication and risk assessment skills especially on board ships today which includes training in good listening, reporting and responding is vital. New trainees will benefit from this wherever they go. Trainees must get such training which they can use to develop themselves over and above STCW mandated requirement. This will also help in achieving cross functional responsibilities on board.

We must go beyond in-box thinking and begin using creative ways such as large scale interactive processes to involve ship / shore employees across the globe – lessons from behavioral science – for new culture to take root. A Company can make this as measurable objective for enhancing safety and quality culture.

Use of on demand learning, e – learning, long distance learning are both cost effective and flavour of the time. We in shipping have been awfully slow due to lack of interest in marine administrations and conventional places of shore based training. All of these technologies are waiting to be used by modern trainee coming from high A level / Science Graduation score. STCW 1995 is not good enough for them. This type of learning shifts the experience from a single discrete event into a process that is embedded into the daily workflow. Individual, team and

organizational level learning to keep pace with fast changing corporate world. In this alignment process, leadership – formal, shared and consultative - is the key element. If it is missing it has to be learnt.



Conclusion

Expectation of modern seafarer is going beyond sea service and traditional role of Master / Chief Engineer. He/she expects to be respected by staff ashore. He/she expects to be helped to develop his potential as much as possible. He/she expects to be made part of ship management process by adoption of good training policies and framework for it.

New trainees are already alarmed by inaction in the debated but done nothing scenarios of fatigue and criminalization.

Industry also expects modern seafarer to be able to deliver good service on board, ashore and when interacting with port / cargo facility.

Marine Administration and IMO expects modern seafarer to be able to cope up with new rules and requirements rapidly and dovetail into coming of new training for formal safety assessment approach to rule making.

Society demands – safe clean secure - best shipping service at yesterdays prices.

In 10 years we have to meet the challenge by better selection of trainees, induction process and training assistance in both good and bad times of cyclical shipping phase. There is no option.....