

## **Bridge Team Terminology in the Master/Pilot relationship**

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After the collision of the *Cosco Busan* in San Francisco Bay communication in the master/pilot relationship has become a hot item again. Masters and pilots are becoming more aware of the importance of clear and unambiguous communication. And if not so, the world around them is pressuring them to work and communicate together as a team.

Last month I flew from Amsterdam to Stockholm and saw the cabin and the cockpit crew of my flight meeting for the first time. It was clear that they did not know each other.

The pilots were laughing, making jokes and shaking hands while the cabin crew was just a step away. There was a polite nod to them but they were not directly addressed. However during the flight I overheard their communication and it was clear that they used standard phrases. This is the result of extensive training. They are unambiguously informed and know exactly what to do and what to expect from each other. They love working this way and love their jobs. I realised that in the past this was not normal at all. Power distance, lack of assertiveness and no delegation were the basis of day to day behaviour but the consequences of that in flying were disastrous.

Standard phrases were introduced and clear standard operational procedures were stated and now every crewmember is aware of his or her duties. Extensive training on simple and clear behaviour makes all the difference

As a BRM Workshopleader I have often been told that my workshop is good for awareness but not really giving good workable answers.

As a marine pilot I understand these remarks.

Maybe the time has come to give a different solution for the cooperation between pilots, masters and crew: Bridge communication and terminology can be standardised. VTS, the airline industry and industrial plants do it. Even hospital crews do it. To be honest when I have to be hospitalized, I surely hope doctors and nurses are communicating as a team and understand each other clearly.

We, masters, watch officers and pilots, can work on improvement. Briefings can be clear and checklists used. Standard operational procedures can be trained by all professionals in shipping in the same manner.

State clearly and unambiguously what you want to know and do not assume anything about the intentions of the other party. Much of this has already been developed. We miss simple and clear modules for training to put this in practice.

The question is: Do we realise that we function better as part of the bridge team or do we still believe that sharing professional doubts weakens our status? A single person error can easily happen when information is not shared.

In a challenge and response environment the master brings in his responsibility for his vessel and the pilot his local knowledge, that means teamwork with clear and simple ways to communicate. We can develop a Bridge Team Terminology for normal and everyday piloting. The pilot can ask

who of the bridge team is responsible for the navigation; a mate reporting vessels nearby is not weakening his position. A pilot may expect to be warned when anything comes within a range of 100 meters. When called by VTS it is normal to translate the conversation for the bridge team. The wheelman can be given special attention and can be checked by a third person at all times. In short the pilot should never be working alone.

Then the pilot is a truly skilled and appreciated professional instead of just another stranger on the bridge.