

Allowing time for safer and better operations

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Summary:

When there are statistics given for accidents and causes as well as near miss cases, there are hardly any talk about time allowed for such operations which having been done incorrectly or erroneously, led to those accidents.

The usual accident forms have columns in relations to how many hours the person involved in an accident has worked prior to and during - for instance - the day before the accident. They do try to concentrate on the fatigue issues in a way rather than see how long the person involved has been on the job and the elements like haste or alacrity.

This essay tries to look at the time allowed and see that how time in relation to Human Element issues can play a vital role in daily routine operations as well as in emergencies.

Main part:

Imagine you go to a museum where they keep various artifacts from older days. You see a lot of finely developed equipments that have been extremely finely crafted. As an example the metallic armors that the chivalry fighters used to wear. You will see excellent curves and fabulous angles, corners, connecting pieces and a real collection of things very difficult to make.

If you asked an engineer expert in machining, you will probably get to know that even with the today's sophisticated technology and fancy equipments, to get such fine curves will be very difficult and surely quite expensive. Now the question is: how in the centuries ago the craftsmen could reach such results? The answer is time, allowing it for better results ending up to perfection.

The same reasoning goes for many things of the sort - if you want to cook something well, you need to allow time. By hasty work the result is usually below satisfactory.

If we extend the point above to the maritime industry we might see the things from another view. Let's elaborate a little on various aspects of haste in our field:

1. Hasty training and education:

As a basic requirement, everyone should be going through the STCW process to be able to work on board. There are times that we try to stick to the bare minimum. Economic crisis may be a good reason to say that okay let's teach the minimum so it can reduce the cost for training, saving time and thus money. I remember that in the older days we had a college principal that used to open his arms as wide as a metre and saying that we teach you this much, then reducing it to a tenth of it and say we examine you this much and at last we expect you to remember a finger-length of all to be able to do the ship's job. Now if we are only teaching that little, how can we expect the future personnel to be able to do the job?

There are times that decision makers may see the statistics show that very few of the information taught are being used in the daily operations and having observed the minimum of STCW are still more than that little; they say it will suffice if we stick to the bare minimum requirements.

In an emergency the actions taken are quite a lot dependent upon the knowledge we have acquired although not often used.

2. Hasty promotions and allocation of more sophisticated tasks:

The other point to consider is the competence which is a status achieved through education, training, skills and experience. It is obvious that to have competent personnel you need to allow time. No matter how smart the officer is, you just cannot make him/her a tanker operator unless certain periods in different ranks on a tanker are fulfilled. When an officer comes out of school and passes the competency examinations, that knowledge should be accompanied by certain amount of skills and experience that will allow him/her to take charge of a ship. Some companies have been too hasty by employing the inexperienced into higher ranks thinking that having well experienced senior officers on board, the things will be under control. But if we continue this way, there will soon be a time that no one will remain with that kind of experience to count on and the problems will arise.

3. Hasty operations:

The competition in the nearby ports from one side and the economic crisis from another have caused the operations in general and port operations in particular to speed up into dangerous limits. It is not hard to see that the gantries in a large port to work in dense fog and almost any weather conditions. The motto is faster-better. No doubt that in many occasions the safety of the whole operations is compromised. Existences of Key Performance Indicators in many regulatory systems have not helped the situation but in some instances have even worsened regarding safety aspects.

Once every normal operation is done in haste, the emergencies which require certain amount of speeding up will have more tendencies to go out of control.

As we can see the element of time is not being taken care of properly. If we want a good result both in the professional aspect as well as the presentation, we need to allow sufficient time. We have crowded the ship's bureau with many forms and checklists, but we do not allow time for their filling up.

One of the main root causes of accidents can be not abiding by the procedures, one of these procedures being the proper following of the Aide-Memoirs (check lists). If we rush the personnel in the operations, we actually do not permit a realistic approach for filling the check lists.

On the other hand we have not let the taught material to suitably be apprehended and, probably due to shortage of seafarers, have given a job too early for the person in question considering his/her experience. The result is not going to be very favourable.

What we are trying to pinpoint here is the fact that there should be some red-lines and limits for these speedy functions. We can not set the criteria for faster-better motto - or we else we shall suffer from grave consequences.

One cannot expect the ship-managers to operate ships with so many people on board so everyone can have enough time for smooth working. Nevertheless we cannot keep on reducing manpower and push the system beyond limits.

To get a fine polished/varnished result, you should allow time and workmanship.

The suggestion can be offered to management system consultants and auditors to examine the possibility of procedures laid against the time allowed as well as the number of people involved or in-charge.

The inter-relation between accident causes and hasty operations or too many errands to run, can also be studied while carrying out an investigation.