

Need for specific training

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Summary:

There are pressures on today's maritime education and training to shorten the courses and produce officers and ratings as quickly as possible. This in first attempt may mean faster courses and dried out examinations. It can damage the authenticity of the certificate as well as efficacy of the training.

This essay tries to look at different aspects of hasty training and give suggestions especially in the area related to the training of ratings.

Main part:

It seems as if there is no room for arguing that we are going to be short of competent officers and professional crew in the near future. Many shipping companies and owners push the administrations to stick to the minimum requirements and produce manpower with maximum capacity. From a point of view we might argue that a certain amount of time should be passed before granting admission for examinations or any certification and even if this time is allowed, we need to scrutinize the process of training to get reasonable results.

The requirements of STCW convention will supervise and to a certain degree guarantee a minimum level, but looking at that of ratings it may not be so assuring.

This essay looks at some aspects of crew training.

The idea of training general purpose ratings may be a good one but not so safe! When we look at the number of accidents with respect to personal injuries; we see a large percentage related to minor injuries, most of which have not been reported to insurance companies and consequently the shipping companies/owners or operators have taken the costs.

There are regulatory requirements such as basic safety and security familiarizations given in the courses for new joining seafarers, but they do not seem to be enough. There is a drawback in the system that most people consider these basics quite known and primary matters of common sense, hence many might not take it as serious.

On the other hand, even if these basics are properly taught and learnt; we may still need further follow ups and training sessions.

Some companies may only recruit those ratings with previous experience in that position or job, but many of the recruited staff may not have that experience in an acceptable level.

We will get into trouble in particular cases such as when a ship is going to be off-hire or due to some exceptional circumstances, need to take ratings on urgent basis. In normal occasions as a hidden matter of chance; usually nothing serious will go wrong; but strangely enough when you are in dire situations and have done something out of necessity; accidents do happen.

The accidents are also more likely to happen for less experienced crew members. If you employ a general purpose rating as an Ordinary Seaman on board a ship, you expect the OS to attend mooring stations in general and on some cases to be a sole watchman who should attend ropes, wires, etc. This can happen for sure on the ships with minimum manning scales. On many ships nowadays you will get a single watchman along with the officer on duty. This guy should carry out many tasks amongst which are many dangerous operations.

Now imagine this person has not got enough experience with this sort of tasks, he/she might have only worked in the engine room or galley during the previous services if at all any. You will then be putting the life of a person and somewhat the safety of the ship in danger. This can easily happen with those who are assigned duties in engine room. The idea of general purpose ratings may be good to have people available for many positions. It will work for rather small or river ships, but for variety of ships today; it might not be very good, unless we provide additional training.

Perhaps many involved in the MET institutions will agree that the training for a deck rating is different than that of an engine/galley rating.

While we are allocating personnel for lifeboat duties or emergency and muster stations; this fact will become so obvious. Although we expect them to have a primary knowledge of basic operations, but we should not stop at that. Remembering that these are emergencies where even an experienced person is prone to making mistakes and act on misconceptions or errors due to lapse, confusion or panic.

So what can we do then? The suggestion is to have the ratings trained in the specific areas. If a rating is going to be on deck; he/she should be taught of specific dangers awaiting. People have a tendency to forget the basics unless practiced. A mere knowledge not to stand in the bight of a rope, must have been told to them in the primary phases, but do we expect a mess-boy to be as vigilant as a deck ordinary seaman in that respect?

The solution might be in the risk-based training and surely in keeping the people in the same atmosphere of work as much as possible.

The amendments to the ISM code; namely requirement of having a risk assessment system should be taken to advantage here. For operations where risks are involved; precautions are to be taken along with contingencies. A part of this can be related to the resources and personnel. When we might need to use engine crew for deck jobs; this can be seen as a risky operation, so a particular briefing or familiarization will be required.

Up to now we emphasized on the safety aspect as a major concern for the ship operation and accidents as well as insurance involved; but we should bear in mind what will be the implications on the day to day operations. For a recruiting agency, a GP sailor can fill up any vacancy of that category but for ship managers this may not be enough. Once the ship is filled with the manning scale number; the vessel may be able to proceed to sea with regard to personnel; but the workmanship leading to maintenance and finally economic matters will be highly affected by those on board and if we put people who only know basics; the result is surely going to be costly.

We must train all staff in the designated specific area, this should include the ratings. An Ordinary Seaman should be familiar with specific tasks on deck and dangers involved; so

should be for an engine room or galley rating. Part of this training is to be done ashore but the main part is on board. The result of risk assessment analysis should be used to enlighten the crew members for particular dangers and tricks in the operation. The task should take into account many factors in addition to previous work experience on various types of ships, gravity of the peril exposed to and language / cultural barriers.