

Probing into the acquisition and maintenance of high quality seafarers

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ABSTRACT

The current status of crew-manning market needs to be paid with more attention. To acquire and maintain sufficient and stable high quality seafarers are becoming more and more difficult. Statistics reveals that the number of the seafarers is difficult to meet the needs of world fleet, and the further study indicates that the number of those who truly meet all the requirements set by the international shipping market is less than the statistics revealed. Furthermore such a number is dropping remarkably. It is adverse for the sustainable development of shipping industry. Therefore, the necessity arises for the maritime industry to probe into the acquisition and maintenance of high quality seafarers.

This paper analyzes major difficulties in acquiring and maintaining high quality seafarers confronted by major partners in shipping industry, and then introduces some practices and attempts having been made for the solution of those difficulties. Finally the paper brings forward some suggestions to different parties in shipping industry.

Key words:

Seafarer, Manning, Maritime Education Training, Shipping Industry, Ship-owner, and Quality Seafarer

1. Introduction

The problems that the international crew-manning market is confronting can be summarized as follows: Most of European maritime countries are facing with the shortage of seafarers, while other man-supply countries such as the South-East Asia countries are facing with the concerns on quality of their seafarers. The shortage of seafarers in the worldwide is obvious, particularly in the aspect of high quality seafarers.

The estimation of supply and demand of world seafarers table - 1

District	In the year of 2005				In the year of 2010			
	Senior officers		Ratings		Senior officers		Ratings	
	Demand	Supply	Demand	Supply	Demand	Supply		
OECD	162000	231000	129000	169000	166000	233000	113000	150000
East Europe	36000	40000	62000	122000	37000	40000	62000	138000
Africa/ Latin America	131000	157000	39000	95000	134000	156000	44000	102000
Far east	89000	148000	134000	332000	91000	147000	140000	342000
Indian Sub- continental	15000	26000	35000	115000	15000	26000	39000	127000
Total	432000	602000	399000	832000	443000	603000	397000	858000

Source: BIMCO/ISF 2000

Balance of supply and demand in future

Table - 2

	In the year of 2000		In the year of 2010	
Senior officer	- 16000	- 4%	- 46000	- 12%
Ratings	+224000	+27%	+255000	+30%

Source: BIMCO/ISF 2000

The gap between the demand and supply is not so big (see table—2). However the in-depth analysis reveals that the number of high quality seafarers truly meeting the requirements of crew-manning market is in sharply shortage. The reasons of which are complicated.

2. The understandings on high quality

Before looking into the shortage of high quality seafarers, full understandings shall be given to the term High Quality. The concept of Competency introduced by STCW 95 convention is hereby helpful for such understanding.

The essay deems that full understandings on the term shall be based on the latest development of shipping industry and navigation profession. Today, the trends in shipping industry are faster ships, larger ships, more automation technologies applied onboard, stressing more on management, and the navigation professionalism. These require correspondingly the operators of oceangoing vessels:

- a) Shall be equipped with the traditional and modern navigation technologies, safety management technologies, and computer operating skills;
- b) Shall master supporting techniques or skills such as communication/language, leadership, management, human relationship, etc.,
- c) Shall possess the quality derived from navigation professionalism, i.e., the seafarers being with profound seagoing experience, career commitment, profession ethics, etc.,

So to sum up, the High Quality means in the essay that fully meets the requirements of STCW 95, possessing the knowledge and skills in respects of navigation technology, computer, English, management, and navigation professionalism.

3. The difficulties in acquiring high quality seafarers

3.1 The Mobility of high quality seafarers

Undoubtedly, those seafarers with quality as defined above possess a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, which is very much competitive for working ashore. If the basic equivalency cannot be achieved when comparing with the posts onboard other vessels or the similar jobs ashore in respects of salary, welfares, etc., the mobility then exists.

With the aim to educate and train high quality seafarers, the maritime universities in China promoted the standards of MET, more than 1400 graduates being awarded with Bachelor degree every year. However, the following-up problem is that up to 60% of those graduates left navigation in a period of around five years after their graduation, seeking opportunity of working ashore. The high quality given enables them to be easily employed in shipping business like cargo forwarding, ship agency, ship management ashore, and even maritime insurance, for which the shipowners feel quite unsatisfied.

There are different views on such mobility in maritime industry. For MET institutions, particularly those aiming to educate and train high quality seafarers, the mobility of human resource is normal and beneficial to the industry, because it is first of all not controlled by a certain entity. Secondly, it helps to balance the interests of the seafarers and shipowners in respects of salary and welfare etc. And thirdly, it helps to form a positive circulation of MET resources, and to promote and maintain higher quality human resources for the industry, which finally constructs an advantage and competitiveness over other modes of transportation.

For the shipowners, a modern vessel with more than 5000 TEUs represents more than hundreds of millions of USD. The quality of seafarers is particularly important for the operation and management of such a big value, and for the competitiveness of the shipowners. Realizing the importance, the shipowners usually invest in certain forms for the formation and acquisition of high quality seafarers. As a business rule, the shipowners require certainly profits yielding from such an investment in a way of making use of the seafarers. Therefore, the shipowners make effort to avoid the mobility of high quality seafarers. Unfortunately, such efforts include sometimes the reduction or degrading of MET standards.

3.2 The difference in understanding MET Standards

Although the STCW 95 has set down the minimum standards for the competency of seafarers, in the reality most of international shipowners use in more occasions the standards by their understandings. This is so-called Market-oriented standards in which the types of ships, the nationality of seafarers, the salary of seafarers etc., are taken into account comprehensively. Apparently, such standards are flexible and high. To comply with them,

the seafarers shall not only meet the requirements set in STCW 95 as competency, but also possess the knowledge and skills on shipping management, shipping economics, profession ethics, culture of enterprises, etc. Thus the quality of seafarers under the market-oriented standard is a kind of high quality.

The MET institutions also agree with the role of market-oriented standards leading to high quality of seafarers. But they argue that they are not in a position to be responsible fully for the MET in compliance with the Market-oriented standards due to the shortcomings of shore-based MET. Instead the MET would like to equip the seafarers with adequate navigation or Engineering knowledge, practical skills as much as possible, and the commitment to career, etc. The shipowners are obliged to provide further education and training for the seafarers particularly in respect of practical skills (including culture of enterprises).

But from the point-of-view of many shipowners, the standards or the requirements set by the shipowners are the supreme standards for MET activities, and meanwhile the graduates or trainees shall be able to put into practical use right after graduation. In other words, the shipowners take the view that the MET institutions shall undertake full or the vast majority of responsibility for the formation of high quality.

It can be concluded that both the MET institutions and shipowners agree with the market-oriented standards, which shall be followed up firstly and importantly. Surely it is right. But the question is that there must be matters that they shall place emphasis on respectively and adequate co-operations between those two in the progress of seeking for high quality.

3.3 Problems existing in the MET

The MET undertakes no doubt the unshiftable responsibility in the formation of high quality seafarers. Although the MET institutions are implementing the STCW 95, the problems that MET institutions are facing with are: on the one hand, the development of MET has to follow up with the latest navigation technology (generally the rule is that the practices accumulated from knowledge or theory, and then disseminated); on the other hand, the shipowners put forward more requirements on MET according to the fast changes of the market.

The problems of MET internally are those related to the enrolment of new students, quality control, funding, instructors, and various resources, etc.,

3.4 The problems of shipowners

There is still a lack of smooth communication between the shipowners and MET institutions as to the MET standards.

Some shipowners do not pay enough attention to the further training or motivation or promotion of the graduates employed, which may lead to the running-off the high quality seafarers.

4. The acquisition of high quality seafarers ---- some meaningful practices

The whole MET consists of in a systematic point-of-view the software, the hardware and the management schemes related thereto. The acquisition and maintenance of high quality seafarers are actually a question of the whole system, and are the product of successful operation of the system. In such a system, positive circulations in respects of human resources, funds, and other resources are particularly important.

The SMU did many practices for the resolution of the above questions and problems encountered in seeking for high quality seafarers, and for the way of utilizing adequately the human resources, funds, and various resources provided by different partners in the shipping industry.

4.1 Full co-operation with large shipowners for course running

The NYK lines is co-operating with the SMU for a course running. Starting from the Oct. of 2002, a new project is introduced to educate and train high quality seafarers. The concept of this is that three parties (the shipowners, the manning agency, and the SMU) jointly operate and manage two classes of students (one for Navigation, and the other for Engineering). The project will take three years, featuring with the full involvement of the shipowner and MET including the selections of students in different phases, the formulation of curriculum, the arrangement of onboard training, and the practical instructing etc. the advantages of the project are to overcome the problems occurred in MET and the understandings on training and education standards, and to use the strengths of each party in forming high quality seafarers.

The scheme attracts more large shipping companies. COSCO follows soon with a contract of another two classes.

4.2 Partly participation of the shipowners in course running

It means a small part of the lectures or training items are conducted by the shipowners after the entry into the contract. This is not so much used in SMU, mainly in some short courses.

4.3 Little participation of the shipowners in course running

The scheme has been operated for about five years. It means that the shipowners are involved little into the practical teaching and management after contracting, such as the contract entered into between the SMU and Shanghai Harbor Authority.

5. The maintenance of high quality seafarers

The generality between the acquisition and maintenance of high quality seafarers is that they are both the contribution of the whole maritime industry, while the difference is that different parties may function differently in the system. In the maintenance of high quality seafarers, the administration and shipowners shall assume more responsibility.

Particularly, the strategy of maintaining high quality seafarers by the industry (mainly the administration and shipowners) can be:

- a) The policies based on an attitude of motivation or protection
- b) The policies of educating and training large number of seafarers, but leave out (1)
- c) The policies balancing (1) and (2)

According to the (1), the shipping industry or even the society promotes the navigation profession in respects of salary, welfares, and social status, to be equivalent to or above the similar profession ashore. The profession will thus become attractive to more people, and the high quality seafarers are then maintained. While in case of (2), the manning market will become competitive because of the unbalance between the demands and supply of seafarers. It sounds good. But further questions are firstly the difficulty of large enrolment of new seafarers, secondly the pressure to be put on MET resources, particularly because of the costly MET, and thirdly the possible large unemployment. The (3) is advisable for its more practicability by balancing the quality, quantity, and the promotion of seafarers salary and social welfare as the rule of social developments..

6. The solutions

6.1 The efforts to be made by the MET institutions

- a) To improve the quality and adequate number of new enrolments
Many MET institutions and shipping companies have made attempts. In China, such attempts include the establishment of human resource bases in under-development areas. This is proven to be a useful way of absorbing high quality enrolments, and eliminating the mobility of high quality seafarers.
- b) To enhance the education on the servicing consciousness, profession ethics, and commitment to career.
The curriculum shall include such education, and for this purpose the communication with the shipowners is necessary, combining the education of the culture of the companies.
- c) To conduct MET based on STCW 95, aiming at the market-oriented standards
The MET shall endeavor to meet the needs of the shipowners and market. Necessary communication and co-operations between the MET institutions and shipowners shall be carried out for the detailed MET activities.
- d) To optimize the MET activities internally
The MET shall investigate itself internally in respects of curriculum designing, instruction methods, etc, to keep pace with the development of navigation technologies and meet the needs of shipowners.

6.2 Efforts to be made by the shipowners

- a) To communicate with the MET institutions for the detailed MET, taking active participation in MET.
- b) To pay attention to the following-up training of high quality seafarers
- c) To motivate high quality seafarers

6.3 Efforts to be made by the administrations

- a) To take measures to facilitate the adequate number of high quality enrolment
- b) To regulate by reasonable legislation the mobility of human resources

- c) To promulgate the shipping industry
- d) To support actively and adequately the MET in respects of funding, policies and management

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