TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS OR HOW TO BECOME A CROSS- CULTURALLY INTELLIGENT SEAFARER

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ABSTRACT

When Romanian seafarers meet seafarers from other cultures, they generally perceive them as very similar to themselves, very dissimilar, or something in between. Thus, there is a continuum from the very similar to the totally foreign. Where Romanian seafarers mentally place foreign seafarers on the continuum affects their communication with the foreign seafarers – even their willingness to communicate. Cross-cultural communication on board tends to be more successful in terms of interaction and outcomes when seafarers are culturally close and less successful when they are culturally distant from each other. Cultural distance between seafarers is a major determinant of stress and leads to failure to communicate and build relationships on board. An important indicator of cultural distance is variations in pronunciation and usage of Maritime English. Therefore, the ability to interact effectively with culturally diverse seafarers is not a skill possessed by all; yet it is becoming more and more important in today's global maritime world. This skill is labeled cultural intelligence (CQ) and has caught the attention of maritime educators and researchers alike. It is an important step towards cross-cultural competence. Developing cultural intelligence and acquiring intercultural skills can help maritime Romanian students develop a successful career on board. Learning how to instruct maritime students in the art of cross-cultural communication is a necessary prerequisite of effective maritime lecturers. More importantly, maritime lecturers must take the lead and develop strategies that assure their students will learn not only navigation and marine technology, but also intercultural communication skills. Thus, maritime lecturers must be master communicators who can influence young minds in positive ways and help improve education based on intercultural communication skills.

Keywords: *intercultural management skills, cross-cultural intelligence, maritime English, culturally diverse seafarers*

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective communication skills, as well as intercultural management skills are necessary prerequisites for modern seafarers operating in a multicultural environment. That is why, one of the main challenges facing the current maritime sector lies in the cultural and linguistic diversity and in how to develop its strengths and eliminate its weaknesses.

The international shipping companies are calling for objectives whose purpose is not only to ensure safety, increase security and protect the marine environment, but also to promote unity amongst seafarers and respect diversity on board merchant ships. Since most of the world's merchant fleet is operated by multilingual crews, the demand to explore and encourage intercultural competence in seafarers has also become the present concern of several MET institutions.

Thus, in the present paper we purport the idea that seafarers high in cultural intelligence CQ will be more adept at developing and maintaining onboard cross-cultural relationships. Understanding his/her own culture, learning about another culture, and then determining the differences provides the seafarer with knowledge that is a first step to becoming culturally intelligent. Focusing also on a survey-based research questionnaire conducted within Constanta Maritime University, the paper also aims to emphasize and analyze why it is important that our seafarers grow into onboard intercultural managers. Shipping is a global industry and with this globalization comes social change. The seafarer is now swept along with myriad changes in the industry and while he is sometimes encouraged to enhance skills and to increase his flexibility in terms of work roles, he is more often than not left alone to come to terms with his limitations because of nationality on a multinational ship. The need for clear verbal communications between parties in the merchant marine environment is multi-faceted as the ship is the working environment, learning environment and social environment for its crew.

2. ON SEAFARERS' CROSS-CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

With the increasing tendency of globalization, it is getting more important to provide maritime students a university education with intercultural aspects and onboard experiences. In order to achieve this objective, education provided by MET institutions should be able to give students a background on intercultural communication and how to compete the challenges that will be faced in the intercultural maritime environment.

The global seafarer of today and tomorrow must exhibit the flexibility to adapt behaviors for each new cultural situation faced through knowledge and mindfulness. Increasing one's skills in these components of culture intelligence will make the seafarer more effective in the global maritime environment.

Cultural intelligence is an aggregate, multidimensional construct, consisting of a cognitive, metacognitive, behavioral and motivational component. Metacognition, cognition and motivation are mental capabilities that reside within the mind, while overt actions are behavioral capabilities (Ang et al., 2007).

The four dimensions are qualitatively different facets of the overall capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings (Earley, 2002; Earley and Ang, 2003).
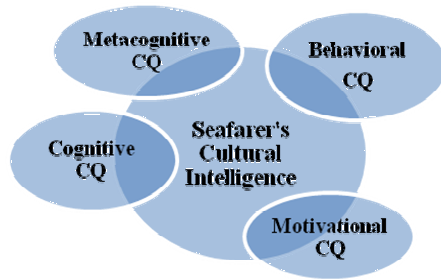

Figure 1 Cultural intelligence components

The dimensions may or may not correlate with each other; for example, a seafarer may be knowledgeable of a culture, but may lack the ability to act upon this knowledge. Thus, cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, behavioral CQ and motivational CQ are different capabilities that together form overall CQ.

2.1 Cognitive CQ increases the effectiveness with which seafarers adapt in intercultural maritime settings

Seafarers high in cognitive cultural intelligence have developed a thorough understanding of the norms, practices and conventions common to different cultures through their education and personal experiences (Earley and Ang, 2003). They understand political and economic systems, institutions and cultural values and have advanced cognitive categorization schemes through which they can recognize similarities and differences across cultures.

2.2 Metacognitive CQ increases the effectiveness with which seafarers adapt in intercultural maritime settings

Metacognitive CQ includes the mental processes seafarers use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge, including knowledge of and control over individual thought processes relating to culture. Seamen high in metacognitive CQ have advanced information acquisition skills and are consciously aware of others cultural preferences before and during interactions. They question cultural assumptions and adjust their mental models during and after interactions. They not only understand the processes through which they can enhance their cultural understanding, but also the means through which this understanding should be applied during interactions.

2.3 Behavioral CQ increases the effectiveness with which seafarers adapt in intercultural maritime settings

Behavioral CQ reflects the capability to exhibit appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures (Earley and Ang, 2003). Seafarers high in behavioral CQ are effective when adapting to the culture of their mates based on their broad range of communication capabilities, such as exhibiting culturally appropriate words, tone, gestures and facial expressions. These capabilities provide the means through which cognitive and metacognitive knowledge of culture can be applied.

2.4 Motivational CQ increases the effectiveness with which seafarers adapt in intercultural maritime settings

Motivational CQ refers to the level of attention and energy a seafarer directs toward learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences (Earley and Ang, 2003). We shall position motivational CQ as a moderating influence capable of differentially affecting the impact cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ and behavioral CQ have on adaptation effectiveness. The benefits realized through these capabilities will be either maximized or marginalized based upon the extent to which the seaman is motivated to act upon them. Motivational CQ is therefore the dominant factor influencing the effectiveness with which seafarers adapt in intercultural maritime settings.

2.5 The Profiles of Culturally Intelligent Seafarers

We consider that most seafarers fit at least one of the set of six cultural intelligence profiles brought forward by Earley and Mosakowski (2004). These profiles can provide a broad analysis of an individual's cultural intelligence level and are represented as follows:

➢ The Provincial: can be quite effective when working with people of similar background, but runs into trouble in a broader field.

➢ The Analyst: methodically decodes a foreign culture's rules and expectations by resorting to a variety of elaborate learning strategies.

➢ The Natural: relies entirely on his intuition and first impressions rather than on a systematic learning style. May falter in ambiguous multicultural situations.

➢ The Ambassador: upon coming in contact with a seafarer from another culture he doesn't know much about, he convincingly communicates the humility to know what he doesn't know.

➢ The Mimic: has high degree of control over his actions and behavior; great deal of insight into significance of cultural cues picked up; facilitates communication and builds trust.

➢ The Chameleon: possesses high levels of all four CQ components and is a very uncommon seafarer type; may even be mistaken for a native; possesses insider skills and outsider perspectives.

Having all these aspects in view, cultural intelligence in globalized maritime setting is an important skill set for seafarers enabling diverse shipping companies to achieve their goals by being more responsive to the global marketplace.

3. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ON BOARD

The logic behind sending Constudents for onboard experience is providing them with a short term international experience during which they can develop

required skills that will probably guide them in today's global maritime setting. We shall argue that these onboard experiences provide students with required knowledge, behaviors and skills for better intercultural communicative competence. The idea has to be pointed out that the onboard study experience leads to intercultural competence and as a result produces global maritime graduates.

Intercultural communication shapes the way seafarers contend with change, deliver messages across borders and cultures and revisit the fundamental properties of time and space (Monge, 1998). Effective functioning in an international maritime setting depends on the ability of seamen to adapt to the complexity of other cultures. Seafarers need to learn how to effectively understand, accept and respond to cultural differences.

Effective intercultural communication skill is "the ability of an individual or a group to achieve understanding through verbal or non-verbal exchange and interaction between cultures" (Ricard, 1993: 7). To achieve the desired intercultural communication competence, seamen have to possess a well-defined set of skills, including valuing, observing, listening, speaking and gesturing (Ricard, 1993). These critical skills differ depending on the cultural background and personal characteristics of the people involved in communication.

Communication researchers have many times attempted to describe intercultural communication competence and its underlying dimensions. Ruben (1976) identified seven dimensions of intercultural communication competence: the capacity to be flexible, the capacity to be nonjudgmental, the capacity to tolerate ambiguity, the capacity to communicate respect, the capacity to personalize one's knowledge and perceptions, the capacity to display empathy and the capacity for turn taking. There are three major factors of intercultural communication competence:

➢ the ability to deal with psychological stress,
➢ the ability to communicate effectively, and
➢ the ability to establish interpersonal relationships.

Intercultural communicative competence on board represents a seafarer's set of complex abilities required to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with other seafarers who are linguistically and culturally different. Seafarers' communication competency is a prerequisite for understanding the role that communication plays in the global maritime market.

At IMEC22 Cole and Trenkner (2010) brought forth the idea of "raising the maritime English bar" by referring to Manila Amendments (STCW) and improving standards in Maritime English. This means that all seafarers must attempt to promote "good communication through sound promotion of intercultural skills" (Noble, Vangehuchten and Van Parys, 2011: 146). Those on board must communicate between ship and shore when in coastal waters, between ships in areas of congestion or where avoiding action is required, or even during search and rescue activities. During periods of pilotage, English is frequently used as a common language and both Pilot and crew must be able to communicate effectively to ensure safety.

Communication on an intra-ship level takes place on a daily basis between crewmembers during operation of the vessel – when giving and carrying out orders under "normal" or "emergency" situations – and when the multilingual crew must interact to maintain "social harmony" in an off duty context and in their everyday "teamwork" to ensure effective day to day operation.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE "INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION ON BOARD" COURSE

Questions concerning how navigators should be effective in their discourse with their mates outside their boundaries lead to the development of the *intercultural communication on board* course. We strongly believe that this course will help our students function outside the script to understand the values and beliefs behind behaviour and ultimately, to make them realize how other different people think.

Constanta Maritime University is open to several students' placement programmes such as Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci that help our future maritime officers to find the "magic pill" for crossing cultures on their own. Several placement report questionnaires have been conducted and analyzed at Constanta Maritime University (Chirea-Ungureanu and Visan, 2011) and the results indicate that sometimes to opt for a multicultural crew is to favour the well known "technique of control, divide and rule". In this respect, the ability to communicate in an isolated and independent environment is crucial. Apart from the several placement report questionnaires developed in our institution, we have considered of utmost importance to come up with other important key questions (see subsection 4.1. below) related to intercultural communicative competence on board, questions that are especially connected to the introduction within the maritime curricula of the course on intercultural communication on board (Visan and Georgescu, 2012).

4.1. A survey-based questionnaire

The general question addressed in this study is concerned with the perception of students of Constanta Maritime University regarding the introduction of the "Intercultural Communication on Board Ship" course. This study attempts to answer the following research question: Can a course on multicultural issues increase the seafarers' competence?

The study was conducted at the English language Department in Constanta Maritime University, Romania. The participants in the study were one hundred students who had performed their on board training in multicultural crews. First, we explained to the students the intended goal. After explaining to them the tasks they would be required to perform, we assured them that confidentiality would be maintained. Each student was then given a questionnaire consisting of ten questions. The time allotted to answers was one hour.

The questions included in the questionnaire were the following: (1) What nationality did you have to work with at sea?; (2) Have you come across any

communication barriers?; (3) Can these communication barriers be put down to the linguistic aspect of maritime English in particular? (Can you give examples?); (4) Apart from language barriers, have you faced any other difficulties due to cultural diversity?; (5) Did you feel in your shoes working in a multicultural environment? If not, what sort of problems did you meet with?; (6) Do seafarers need to know the culture of others while working in a multicultural environment?; (7) Do you think that there should be a course on communication skills and cultural awareness within Constanta Maritime University? Why?/Why not?; (8) Do you think a course on Intercultural Communication will be useful to improve the safety and the working environment on board? Why?/Why not?; (9) Should this course be taken by ratings as well?; (10) What relevant topics should be included in the Intercultural Communication course? The outcome of the present survey is presented below.

4.1.1. Dissemination results

This section will deal with the participants' responses to the questionnaire (see 4.1.). From the responses to the first question we made up a list of nationalities that Romanian seafarers had to interact with.
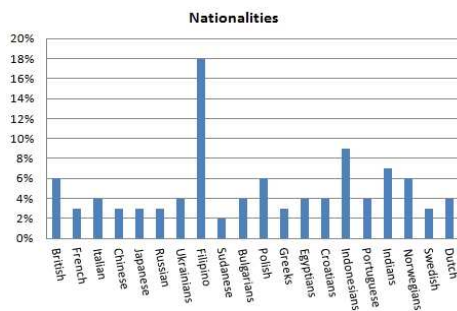

Figure 2 Nationalities Romanian seafarers interact with

Therefore, as shown in Fig. 1, the proportion of the nationalities was the following: British (6%), French (3%), Italians (4%), Chinese (3%), Japanese (3%), Russian (3%), Ukrainians (4%), Filipino (18%), Sudanese (2%), Bulgarians (4%), Polish (6%), Greeks (3%), Egyptians (4%), Croatians (4%), Indonesians (9%), Portuguese (4%), Indians (7%), Norwegians (6%), Swedish (3%), Dutch (4%), etc.

Answers to question number two reveal that 90% of the respondents did come across communication barriers. The next item pictures the most common linguistic barriers on board ships (see Fig. 3).
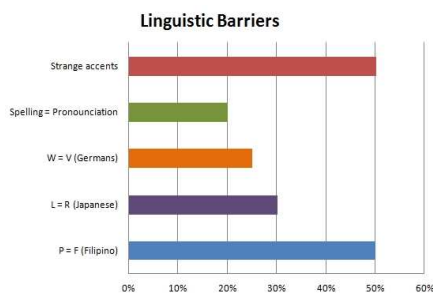

Figure 3 Linguistic barriers on board ships

Thus, 50% of the respondents acknowledged linguistic barriers arising from: strange accents, improper use of multi-word lexical units, lack of a basic knowledge of English. For example, 20% reported that when speaking English, Italian seafarers have a tendency to pronounce words and terms as they are spelled, so that ballast is /bʌlʌst/, guide is /ɡwid/. So do Romanians. This is also true for loanwords borrowed from English as water, which is pronounced /vatɛr/ instead of /□wɔːtə/.

On the other hand, 25% claimed that Germans pronounce English words beginning with a /w/ as /v/. This explains the mispronunciation of the English term winch as /vintʃ/. According to 30% of the participants, Japanese tend to confuse /l/ and /r/ both in perception and production. This is because Japanese language does not make such a distinction (Takagi, 2010: 199). Therefore, it is difficult for Japanese seafarers to identify the following minimally-paired words without context: pilot – pirate; ladder – rudder (id. ibid.). In a similar manner, terms and words such as rocket, rough, rate agreement would be perceived as lock it!, laugh and late agreement.

Another example is the substitution of [p] for [f] by the Filipino when pronouncing English words or terms containing /f/: fore which they pronounce /pore/, aft /apt/, funnel /punnel/, fender / pender/, fly-/ply/, fork as in fork lift would become /pork lift/ and funk hole /punk hole/. The given percent by the testees was 50%.

With regard to the improper usage of multi-word lexical units, a study by Visan and Georgescu (2011) suggests that collocational competence is an essential prerequisite for the overall mastery of Maritime English, perhaps one of the highest levels of linguistic proficiency that future maritime officers can attain. Answers to the fourth question show that cultural diversity can lead to a skewed perception of customs (Fig. 4).
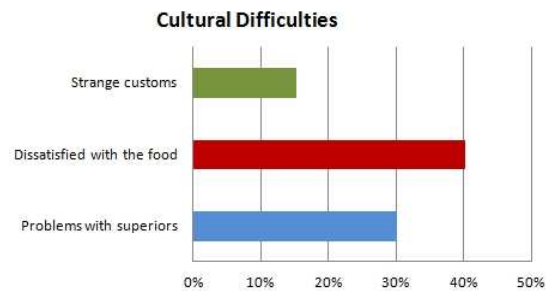

Figure 4 Cultural Difficulties

Strange customs have been noticed by fifteen percent (15%) of the respondents. For instance, the Sudanese males take foreigners by the hand when they feel like communicating something important, which is unusual in Romania. It is said that the most important person on board is the cook. But what happens when he makes sweet meals or very spicy ones? Crew members of different nationalities will feel very miserable; that is why, 40% of the testees were dissatisfied with the food. The attitude of the master and chief engineer was thought to be bossy and arrogant by 30%.
Although Romanians are sociable and tolerant people 54% of them met with problems.

Responses to question number six reveal that 85% agreed that knowledge about other cultures is vital for their future work on board. As for question number eight, 10% believe that the course will not be useful in improving the safety on board, on the ground that the safety regulations are strict and compulsory and everybody must comply with them. Answers to question number nine show that 15% do not think that the course will improve in any way the relationships between ratings. Finally, a large number of students contributed to the contents of the project course (see Fig. 5).
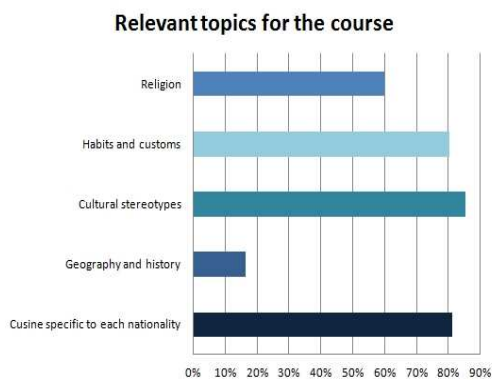

Figure 5 Relevant topics for the course

Thus, 60% suggested topics related to religion, while 80% favoured habits and customs, 85% requested lectures on cultural stereotypes; 16% are interested in geography and history; 81% considered that cuisine specific to each nationality should be included in the course.

Culturally responsive teaching in the maritime field sets the following tasks prior to the compilation of the course: (a) involving maritime undergraduates who have onboard training in the construction of knowledge: questionnaires; having students work in teams of mixed ability; providing authentic dialogues; raising students' awareness of the responsibility for their own learning; (b) validation of information on board ship: Presentation of scenarios in front of a multicultural crew; case studies; getting a positive response from the target nationality in each scenario in regard to the authenticity of material; a final indoor review and revision in the light of the information received on board.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Developing cultural intelligence takes time and experience to truly become confident that one can respond authentically in words and actions to different cultural situations. Understanding the nature of cultural intelligence, diagnosing one's cultural intelligence level and proactively developing a higher level of cultural intelligence can position a seafarer to succeed in a globalized maritime environment and support a shipping company's overall business goals. The importance of the course on "Intercultural Communication On Board" reveals its vitality as part of merchant marine students' curricular content.

A seafarer must be trained to demonstrate his ability

to communicate effectively and to exchange information accurately. With a view to this, the maritime lecturers have to find the best way to describe how intercultural communication should be taught. The compilation of such a course is meant not only to educate students, but also strengthen their ability to study and comprehend the foreigners' heritage background.

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