



Cultural and Gender Diversities Affecting the Ship/Port Interface: Maritime Education and Training Efforts to Bridge Multicultural Gaps

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Abstract

The shipowners' have been aware that diversities can be an additional safety challenge in the industry. Port and terminal operators find the ship interface communication cumbersome because of reciprocal mediocre English and lack of cultural awareness. To work and study in a multicultural context often leads to misunderstandings and misinterpretations that, in the shipping industry, can result in dangerous and costly situations.

This paper is a wakeup call on a challenge that casualty investigators have found to be one of many reasons to accidents and incidents in shipping. Emotional responses to dilemmas regarding mixed cultures are meant to be reduced with education in cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity training. The paper reviews challenges for maritime education and training institutions to be proactive and meet an industry need for better communication and a "more relevant" stereotyping. The shipowners cannot take the risk having a ship detained because of substandard crew.

A crew member not being able to communicate and that has problems working with colleagues having different or divergent views of the world easily becomes alienated and thereby a safety risk; a risk that also can affect the safety of the terminal.

The industry appears not being able to cope with diversity or hesitates to balance eventual advantages with eventual risks. Often, research studies rather confuse the industry instead of giving useful guidance; research results contradict.

Most likely, multicultural crew in the shipping industry are an irreversible trend. If courses in cultural awareness not become mandatory within international standards for training, certification and watchkeeping (STCW) of seafarers and if not the level of English is raised for shipping and port workers to be more than bare basic a cultural workforce mixture will continue to be a risk factor. In order to cope with this new challenge in the industry the maritime education and training (MET) institutions must supply such courses and conduct them also to teachers at MET institutions.