

The U in safety culture

BW raises safety standards by incorporating human factors to improve situational awareness onboard vessels.



ONBOARD BW ODIN Officers and crew gathered for a CRM meeting to discuss safety issues.

A well-managed vessel is never a given – behind the scenes is a dedicated crew whose expertise helps create a safe work environment at sea. “Safety is a top priority for BW. We are constantly reviewing our safety standards to see if more can be done,” says BW Executive Vice President, Fleet Management, Morten Martinsen.

The effort pays off: BW’s gas fleet recorded improved safety statistics in 2008. One big contributor has been the Crew Resource Management (CRM) programme on board.

Bergesen d.y. (now BW Gas) and Braathens (now part of SAS) collaborated to develop a CRM course for shipping in 1993. They took their lead from the aviation industry which first developed CRM in response to the role human error plays in accidents. This was a first of its kind for the industry, and in 1996, the course was broadened and implemented in the Ship Manoeuvring Simulator (SMS) in Trondheim, Norway.

UNIQUE INTERACTION

CRM focuses on six human elements that influence decisions: communication, stress/workload, sleep/fatigue, operational atmosphere, culture and procedures. These factors have considerable effect on vessel safety. Encouraging sea staff to consider these factors leads to better judgements, sounder decisions and ultimately, a safer environment onboard.

The CRM programme offers a comprehensive learning experience incorporating shore-based conferences, safety

meetings, individual trainings and case study discussions. The individual training consists of computer-based training, DVDs and workbook material. The case studies are approached from a human relations perspective, as opposed to a technical point of view, to examine the usefulness of the CRM factors in influencing situational awareness.

“We are now seeing clear results of the CRM programme with improved LTIF (lost time injury frequency) figures in 2008. The credit goes to our seafarers for being safety-conscious and much more aware of their surroundings,” says Ivar Wilhelmsen, BW Fleet Management training manager in Oslo. “However, we won’t get complacent just because the figures are pointing in the right direction. It is only through continuous assessment of safety standards that we are able to establish a high-performance work culture.”

PRACTISING CRM

Medium-sized gas carrier BW Odin’s master and crew have been among the most active in implementing CRM. The vessel has experienced fewer incidents as a result of CRM and has also seen other gradual improvements, such as more open discussions among officers and crew, and more people voicing their opinion about safety issues.

The programme has progressed to the fifth case study and BW Odin was one of the first vessels to

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conduct it when the ship staff gathered during a recent voyage across the North Sea. The meeting started with the master summarising the CRM activities they had previously completed. The fifth case study focused on what to do in a situation where a superior ignores advice from a subordinate more familiar with an issue.

THE CASE STUDY APPROACH

For case studies, officers and crew are divided into groups with a variety of ages, ranks and deck/engine responsibilities. The groups discuss a specific case study and associated questions for more than an hour and write down their answers. They then gather to present to the other groups. The master, who is not part of any group, can then challenge them with questions such as: ‘Why do you think they did it like that? Could that happen on our ship? Why? What do we do to avoid it from happening? Are we doing enough?’

“The CRM meetings where we discuss case studies have gradually created more discussion. It is fairly quiet while I am in the room but even when I am present there has started to be more discussion about the case,” says master Bjørnar Jenssen.

ENCOURAGING RESPONSES

CRM has contributed to improved safety. “CRM has made it easier to speak up if the pilot or captain has overlooked something when we are approaching a port, or when the chief officer has missed something during loading and discharging operations,” says third officer Ernesto Cabatic Ginez.

Master Bjørnar Jenssen added: “I view communication as the most important aspect of CRM. We have to discuss matters and get people to speak up if they disagree. All officers, including myself, must create an atmosphere where subordinates feel encouraged to ask questions and make their views known.” ●



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