1 MANAGING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

1.1 Introduction

Seafarers, like shore workers, have the right and expectation that they will remain safe at work.

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The Company and employers have a responsibility to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all seafarers and other workers on board.

Seafarers have a duty to take reasonable care for the occupational health and safety of themselves and others, and to cooperate with their employer and the Company in matters of health, safety and welfare.

By creating a culture where everyone takes responsibility for a safe working environment and takes care of themselves and one another, many work-related accidents and incidents can be avoided.

1.2 What does a safe working culture look like?

Extensive research has identified certain elements that contribute greatly to maintaining a safe working culture. These can be described as:

- clearly defined expectations;
- good communications;
- clear leadership;

- good planning;
- risk awareness;
- accountability;
- good safety culture; and
- effective knowledge management.

These elements should be both put in place at a Company level within the safety management system and implemented on board the vessel by the master and crew.

It is important that the entire workforce, from the most junior crew members through to the senior managers ashore, are involved in the development of these elements for them to be fully successful. Many of them are already present within management systems but often some are missing, which can create weaknesses in the management system.

A good approach is to conduct a gap analysis to identify those elements that are missing or weak, and amend the systems accordingly. The more developed and comprehensive the systems are, the more effective they can be.

Guidance on these elements follows, along with some examples. Although they may differ in detail between companies and vessels, the principles remain the same.

1.2.1 Clearly defined expectations

It is important that seafarers at all levels of the organisation clearly understand what is expected of them and what standards are required.

On every ship:

- The Company has overall responsibility to establish a safety management system and occupational health and safety policies and programmes, and to ensure that the master is provided with the necessary resources and facilities to operate the ship safely and in accordance with the Company's policies and procedures.
- The master has responsibility to implement the Company's policies and procedures on board the ship, and to report any deficiencies to shore-based management for rectification.
- Every person on board has a responsibility for their own occupational health and safety and that of others, including:
  - complying with instructions, safety procedures and any other measures in place for their own or others' safety;

  - reporting any defects in equipment or unsafe conditions to a responsible person; and
  - not interfering with or altering any safety device provided on board.
- All crew members should have a job description.

In addition, any seafarer should feel confident to stop work if they feel unsafe – sometimes known as 'stop work authority'.

It is important that a comprehensive and clear induction process is carried out, with respect to Company and vessel-specific requirements, for every joining member of the crew. The inductions should be used to explain the rules and expectations in a format that is easily understood. All crew members should be given copies or overviews of rules appropriate to them, along with information on where the full information can be found. Examples of these rules may include:

- the Company handbook;
- the vessel guidebook; and
- pocket cards.

More information on inductions can be found in Chapter 2, Safety induction.

There should be clear and concise policies, procedures and safety rules contained within the safety management system and associated documentation. These should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are appropriate, remain valid and can be communicated to the crew in various ways including:

- during the Company and vessel inductions;
- as part of the on-board and external training programmes;
- through on-board supervision and monitoring; and
- in safety committee meetings.

Seafarers need to be aware of what happens if rules are not followed. This can be achieved by using a just culture policy as described below and ensuring that all are aware of the *Code of Conduct for the Merchant Navy*.

Improvement plans with clear achievable targets and goals are useful in managing continuous and sustainable improvement. It is important that these plans are well communicated and that all seafarers are involved, both in their development and implementation. Improvement plans can be standalone or incorporated into other planning tools. They should be used to set priorities and measure progress.

1.2.2 Good communications

Effective communications and workforce involvement is crucial in ensuring a safe living and working environment. Communication is a two-way process. There is a need to be able to gain information and knowledge that can be acted upon and passed on to others who need it, and systems need to be in place to facilitate this at all levels in the organisation. Some examples include:

- ensuring everyone understands their roles and responsibilities;
- ensuring orders and instructions are properly understood, acknowledged and acted upon;
- passing safety-critical information between watchkeepers and changing crews;
- ensuring information posters, signs and instructions are clear and can be understood;
- ensuring safety alerts, memos and newsletters are clear and can be understood;
- encouraging feedback, improvement suggestions and safety observations, and acting on the information received;
- safety meetings should be minuted and the reports distributed and acted upon where appropriate; and
- ensuring a good, clear and reliable system of emergency response communications is in place.

Formal arrangements for consultation and communication (through the safety committee) are described in Chapter 13, Safety officials. However, communication should extend beyond those with a formal role under those arrangements.

There should be a clear and simple system for reporting problems and suggesting solutions. This would typically use an improvement suggestion system and a proactive reporting system for unsafe acts and conditions. These are at their most effective when developed in consultation with the workforce.

Clear, unambiguous language should be used at all times. Jargon and acronyms should be avoided unless everyone understands what they mean. Whilst it may be reasonable to believe that all seafarers understand common nautical terminology, it is not reasonable to expect them to understand terms found in local slang or dialects. The designated working language of the vessel should be used. On ships with multicultural crews, particular care should also be taken to avoid misunderstanding as a result of different body language or cultural norms.

Face-to-face communications should be actively encouraged and techniques to confirm understanding should be used. This can be particularly effective during visits by senior and line management, and can give a very strong indication of how the Company's values and safety procedures are being implemented.

Change should be discussed and input from all should be actively sought. Clear information regarding the reasons and need for the change should be given and discussed. Prompt feedback should be given on any issues raised, both positive and negative. This will ensure that all concerned are part of the process and help them to be fully engaged and committed to any necessary changes.

There should be an open-door policy that encourages and enables people to discuss any concerns and issues that they may have. Consideration and feedback should be given on issues and concerns raised.

Company magazines, newsletters and regular sharing of learning bulletins are all good additions to safety alerts and other official communications in getting the safety message across in an accessible and understandable manner, ensuring that credit is attributed to any contributing seafarers.

1.2.3 Clear leadership

Research both in the maritime and other hazardous industries confirms the huge impact of leadership on the safety of operations. The effectiveness of the International Safety Management (ISM) Code depends heavily on how leaders approach its implementation, and this in turn depends heavily on the skills and qualities of leaders – both at sea, at the ship–shore interface, and on shore.

Despite best endeavours to work safely, sometimes real life makes things difficult – time pressures, economic constraints and everyday circumstances sometimes seem to conspire against good safety leadership. What really counts is how leaders behave in everyday situations. Seafarers will draw inferences about safety leadership based on what they see their leaders do and what they hear them say, far more than what they hear in formal spoken or written communication.

There are many models of leadership, and some companies will run their own leadership programmes. The following advice is taken from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency publication, *Leading for Safety: A practical guide for leaders in the maritime industry*.

The ten core safety leadership qualities

1. **Instil respect and command authority**

The ability to instil respect from, and command authority over, seafarers is probably the first thing that comes to mind when people think of leadership. In many ways, it happens on its own when everything else is right. Leaders get respect and command authority when crews believe that they:

- are willing to exercise the power vested in their position;
- possess the necessary knowledge and competence;
- understand their situation and care about their welfare;
- are able to communicate clearly;
- are prepared to act confidently and decisively; and
- listen.

2. Lead the team by example

Leading the team by example is the combination of two things: being seen to be complying with the safety procedures, and working as a key part of the team, including being willing, where necessary, to get involved in subordinates' tasks.

3. Draw on knowledge and experience

Adequate knowledge and experience are prerequisites for effective leadership. In the context of safety leadership, this means in particular:

- good knowledge of safety-related regulations, codes and standards; and
- experience and skills not only in technical and operational issues but also in people management.

4. Remain calm in a crisis

People need strong, clear leadership in a crisis and rely more on their leaders than would otherwise be the case. Calmness in a crisis situation is a core requirement and will rely on many of the other leadership qualities described, including commanding authority and drawing on knowledge and experience. In particular, it is important to have confidence and trust in the crew's abilities and emergency preparedness. Attendance at safety training and at response drilling is essential for all seafarers.

5. Practise 'tough empathy'

Empathy is all about identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings and motives. It requires the capacity to put oneself in another's place, and the cultivation of good listening skills. Good leaders empathise realistically with seafarers and care intensely about the work they do – but this doesn't mean that they always agree with them or join in with concerns and grumbles. Instead they practise 'tough empathy', which means giving people what they **need**, rather than necessarily what they **want**. Another way of looking at this is

'care with detachment'. An example is providing staff with safety footwear that is comfortable and safe, rather than spending more money to provide a more fashionable style.

6. Be sensitive to different cultures

Crews of mixed nationalities are the norm. Good leaders are sensitive to differences in the social and behavioural norms of national cultures, yet at the same time value all seafarers equally irrespective of their nationality. They know how to interpret different behavioural signals, and how best to react in order to exert the strongest influence.

7. Recognise seafarers' limitations

Good leaders have a clear understanding of how operational and other demands can be realistically met by seafarers, and are able to judge whether fatigue levels are such that action should be taken.

8. Motivate a sense of community

Research has shown that people in work are typically motivated by satisfaction or pride in completing a good job, and the feeling of being part of a team – not just by money. Leaders have an important role to play in creating the conditions to encourage and maintain these 'healthy' motivators. Demonstrating respect for staff is often an essential part of this. Meeting someone's basic needs is often the key to keeping their motivation high.

9. Place the safety of crew and passengers above everything

It is universally accepted that commitment from the leader is an absolute essential for good safety. Leaders need to demonstrate this commitment clearly to their staff through their actions, rather than just through formal declarations or policy statements. In practice, this means showing that the safety of the crew and passengers is placed above everything else – 'nothing we do is worth getting hurt for'.

10. Communicate clearly

The ability to communicate clearly is important at all levels in an organisation. For a master, the key issue is most often how to encourage better two-way rather than one-way communication, balancing authority and approachability. Being open to criticism is a part of this.

1.2.4 Good planning

Good planning is essential in ensuring occupational health and safety at work. Adequate control of risks can only be achieved by ensuring that all involved are aware, activities are coordinated and good communication is maintained by all.

You should carefully consider what you want to achieve, what actions are necessary, how these will be carried out and what effect they may have on seafarers' health and safety at work, taking into account that there may be consequences that are indirect and unintended.

Consideration should include:

- what might cause harm to people and whether enough is being done or needs to be done to prevent that harm;
- how improvements will be prioritised;
- who will be responsible for occupational health and safety tasks, what they should do, when and with what results; and
- how achievements will be measured against objectives and reviewed.

The planning process should include participation for those involved and consideration for those who may be affected. Clear instructions for required activities should be issued and adequate time and resources should be provided. Confirm that all fully understand the instructions (known as closed-loop communication). Permit to work systems should be used where appropriate (see Chapter 14, Permit to work systems) and learning captured and applied to future work.

Management of change

The majority of effective change management on board is adequately controlled through the use of pre-existing processes such as handover procedures, safe systems of work and sound navigational practices. However, some changes introduce new factors that may not be covered by existing controls. These could include, for example, unexpected changes to personnel, fatigue, inclement weather, a change to the operation whilst under way or more complex changes, i.e. fitting new equipment or a change in operations.

Changes can become necessary for a variety of reasons. It is important that these changes are effectively managed in order to ensure that:

- they are necessary;
- they are realistic and achievable;
- they are planned and systematically managed;
- any impact on operations, both negative and positive, is understood and managed;

- they are effectively communicated;
- they are effectively implemented; and
- those affected are consulted.

The appropriate level of change management required will vary according to circumstances. Some companies have formal procedures in place that define the level of change management necessary. Annex 1.1 gives an example of such a procedure.