Although this is not a ‘sea only’ problem, there is no doubt that the nature of our work creates extra challenges, including the need to deal with several cultures, languages and countries, the distance between managers and seafarers and details such as time differences and the lack of physical presence in the office. As a result, our opinion gets soon forgotten. I guess that the best company to work for would be one where the sea going personnel and managers do not refer to each other as ‘us and them’. A lot can be said about a company from the way that the management treats its employees.

I am not sure that a Code of Conduct will solve anything, because the companies that will follow it will probably be the ones that do not need it in the first place, and the ones that need it will always find a way to continue the bullying, in more creative ways.

One could also ask whether there is: ‘Vanishing trust ashore?’ As a charterer’s representative I used to spend thousands of hours on hundreds of ships and was always surprised to learn how little ship’s staff knew about the commercial operation of their vessel. Few captains had any idea about the freight or demurrage rate of the voyage. Many showed no interest either. Almost without exception there was no copy of the charter party and voyage instructions on board. Perhaps there is a role for the NI to put some more emphasis on the commercial aspects of shipping. It will no doubt lead to higher standards in the profession and better wages.

What makes seafarers think they are any different from workers in other professions or occupations? Graft, mistrust, envy, jealousy, departmental differences - these human characteristics exist in all walks and levels of life and I suspect always will.

The ship/shore divide is widening with the burgeoning regulations our industry has been dealing with over the past decade with no sign of any reprieve in the near future. A ‘no blame’ culture could be part of the solution but an holistic approach is needed to reduce this gulf.

There are considerable stresses and pressures for both teams, at sea and ashore, where finite resources provide for little time to allow a better understanding of the responsibilities, duties and demands placed on the other side. This is how the ‘Them & Us’ mentality is nurtured.

We are all trying to be as efficient as possible, so much so that lessons of the past are being forgotten and we have lost the ‘grace’ of time in day to day activities.

This can only be rectified with either additional team members, or better and more effective systems of communication and data processing. Primarily, this should reduce the current duplication of information, data, processing and reporting to a single point of entry and action for all, both at sea and ashore.

This problem is as old as shipping. However, modern management systems and communication mean information should be freely available for shore as well as ship’s staff. There are companies with extensive and integrated management information systems which appear to be functioning well and improving ship-shore information exchanges.

On the question of mistrust between ship/shore, how can any seafarer develop trust in any institution when no one knows if he is going to be working with the same company in the next contract or not?

It’s so sad that shore based staff do not understand working conditions or culture on board a vessel. And when port state control demands $450 in cash ‘Or we’ll find something and come back again,’ I am not surprised by the attitude of ship’s staff. As a supercargo it takes me hours to get the message across that I’m on their side, and there to help not to critical.

Trade is the backbone of any economy, and making it more efficient by eliminating mistrust between ship and shore is crucial. I only suggest two things which aim to make the difference. First, create a common policy by every owner in maritime industry, ‘strict ban on facilitation gifts’. In respect to shore/sea staff working relationship, it is important to ensure compliance with sea staff rest hours as per ILO and more concern toward fatigue management at sea before meeting the extra needs of shore personnel. Safety at sea shall be at high priority, and proper rest is important for elimination of human error, which is still the major factor in accidents, incidents or mistakes.

The ban on bribes is strictly enforced by some of the oil companies. I know of one company that does not carry cigarettes or other bonded stores on their vessels. They suffer for this in certain ports, but they manage to survive. If it were possible to create a common policy for the shipping industry, that would be the way to go. However it would be like herding cats - and if someone thinks a case of cigarettes given to the right person will give them a commercial advantage, well, that’s the end of it.

From voluntary facilitation gifts to demanded commodities - where’s the difference? It’s similar misconduct under a different hood. A thoroughly professional approach by both ship and shore, working for the same cause, will assist in uprooting many of the evils we face today.

I personally believe that corruption and toxic culture have become a disease permeating the entire maritime sphere.

This does not surprise me at all. As we all know, before the crisis there was an even bigger shortage of seafarers. This means that after some years there will be - and currently is - a huge shortage of shore personnel with (strong) sea-going experience that used to at sea before meeting the extra needs of shore personnel. Safety at sea shall be at high priority, and proper rest is important for elimination of human error, which is still the major factor in accidents, incidents or mistakes.

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THIS MONTH, WE ASK IS THERE AN ISSUE WITH VANISHING TRUST AT SEA?

In the November edition of Seaways, Professor Helen Sampson of the Seafarers International research Centre at Cardiff University presented the results of research which pointed to a breakdown of trust between seafarers and shore officials, including those in their own company headquarters. The report made some 20 recommendations relating to the future improvement of ship-shore relations across the maritime industry.

THE INSTITUTE’S LINKEDIN COMMUNITY RESPONDED:

This report attempts to give a representative summary of the discussion – it is not possible to include all comments. To see the discussion in full, please visit LinkedIn.