The relationships between ship staff and ‘operator’ personnel

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Structure of Presentation

Modes of Communication (*Face to Face, Email and Phone*)
Blaming Seafarers
Lack of Understanding
Face to Face Interaction

Ship-‘operator’ personnel: superintendents
• Interaction takes a hierarchical form
• Interactions are mostly with officers and informal interactions are with senior officers
• Coordinate with captains to organise a series of meetings, inspections or trainings
• A change in the provision for travel at the end of contract

• Evasive, highly managerial and lacking in empathy

• Discourages future prospects of seafarers being open and forward with issues on-board

One example where interactions were not always very good
• 36% experienced a member of their company’s shore side personnel shouting at them
• 68% stated that this had taken place face to face on board
• Only 34% told their company’s shore staff ‘the full truth about the situation on board’
• 46% felt occasionally unable to tell the full truth
• 20% stated that they often felt unable to tell the full truth about situations on board

Problematic interaction and not telling the whole truth...
"I had someone who called me systematically 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning for 2-3 consecutive days to talk about some nonsense program. Finally, I had to raise my voice and she calmed down. And she stopped. Some of them they don't have an idea that the vessel is completely on a different time zone. They don't understand me or maybe they just don't know that there are different time zones. I don't know what's on their minds [...]."
32% had experienced difficulties with company personnel calling at inappropriate times.

When we considered the responses of captains alone, this rose to 38%.
“You know they'll call up saying that 'urgent query'. And anything that comes from shore is always ‘urgent’. But anything that goes from ship is never ‘urgent’. And I don't understand why, but it's that you know, 'Charterers are requesting, how much cargo can you take? Reply immediately'. And you know, it's basically if something like that comes up, then the Master, the Chief Mate and the Second Mate, the top three ranks are awake the entire night. Because the Second Mate then has to give the distance, from how much time it's gonna take for me to go from here and there. Then he has to give the distance to the Chief Engineer, who then has to calculate bunkers. Meanwhile he has to also help the Chief Officer calculate the cargo, how much he can load. And at shore, the guy is like, 'Oh, you're still not giving me a reply! Why does it take so much time?’”
“There are times [...] the ship is doing an operation, so everyone is busy. Then the company will send email asking for some information. But the captain is busy and can’t find time to check the email. Then the company will get angry. That kind of thing. This is very prevalent. How can you answer their email when you are very busy, say, you are in a port and all operations need your attention? They don’t consider that. They have no idea.”

**Problems with email...**
76% of seafarers had experienced some degree of misunderstandings when using email to communicate with shore staff

30% of such misunderstandings did not happen very often

40% stated that they sometimes experienced misunderstandings in relation to email

6% stated that they did so ‘very often’

- Email is sometimes more difficult than phone calls. It does not allow you to pick up on signals that come with vocal expression such as intonation
- Email is also more cumbersome inasmuch as although you may read it several times it does not lend itself to seeking clarification

**Problems with email**
Some suggested that the ease with which emails could be sent had resulted in a loss of autonomy on board such that officers could often feel held up waiting for authorisation from office staff for actions which in the past they would have been free to take themselves.
Benefits of email...

- Email as permanent record
- As a way to protect themselves

“Yeah, I think email is good communication because it is black and white. Everything is recorded. No one can claim that she or he did not say this and that when it is the email...”
Seafarers believe that they are ‘sometimes’ (50%) or ‘often’ (25%) blamed for things that are not their fault.

45% stated that they had personally been blamed for an incident on board which was not their fault.

85% of respondents considered that when a company blames seafarers for events on board this has a negative impact on future relationships.
A large minority (39%)

- 32% did not understand the situation on board very often
- 7% did not think that company personnel ever understood the situation on board.
• The captain had been prevented by ill-informed office staff from changing course in bad weather. Once the member of staff had checked up on the captain’s report by consulting another vessel they informed him that it was now alright for him to change course as he had requested. However, by this time the vessel had already encountered the related severe weather.

• The experience had clearly led to resentment and frustration.

Some possible results of lack of understanding...
Where captains stuck to their guns in relation to safety matters, and in the face of the exertion of considerable pressure from ashore, seafarers often felt that it was regarded as a ‘black mark’ against them by the office.

- Seafarers indicated that they had experienced being prevented by shore staff from taking an action which they felt was in the best interests of the crew (29%) and/or of the vessel (18%)
Such employment vulnerability makes it difficult for seafarers to effectively resist continuous shore-side pressures particularly in less clear cut situations where judgements about risk are problematic.

Posing risk to safety on-board
• Considerable gulf in understanding
• Damaging lack of trust
• Under a great deal of operational pressure
• Experience of being blamed

Conclusion
Salamat po!