The development of a shipboard safety culture is a requirement of the ISM Code, but how far it is actually happening across the industry? Nick Bailey of the Seafarers’ International Research Centre is trying to find out.

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afety is everybody’s concern. Nobody wants to get hurt or injured. Indeed, it is widely held to be a fact of human nature that, in general, people do their utmost to avoid pain and injury. Nevertheless seafarers continue to get injured or killed at sea. The question then is: why does this continue to happen? To address this, it is important to recognise that much of how we behave is shaped by where we live and work. Crew members aboard a ship are not isolated individuals but social actors operating in a particular social setting. Hence, there are ways of doing things in this company or organisation makes safety their top priority.

Research in shore-based industries has shown that managers need to take the lead in developing a culture of safety, but equally important is the active participation of employees in the company. This is what the International Safety Management (ISM) code is meant to achieve: the creation of a culture of safety. The system is based on the effective management of shipboard risk. Risks must be identified, assessed and appropriate steps taken to remove or manage them. This responsibility goes beyond fitting guards to machinery or producing procedures to do tasks. It includes ensuring that there are enough people who are right for the job, properly trained and sufficiently rested. Additionally, they must be provided with access to the right equipment, have enough time to do the job, and the conditions should allow for work to be carried out effectively and safely.

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Whatever the situation, the fact that seafarers are still being injured clearly shows that there is room for improvement. As a response to this situation, Lloyd’s Register has created the Lloyd’s Register Research Unit within the Seafarers’ International Research Centre (SIRC) to undertake research into human element issues to focus on to create a culture of safety across the industry as a whole. The Lloyd’s Register Research Unit has been conducting interviews with seafarers and ship managers and questionnaires are currently being distributed. If you receive a questionnaire, you have the opportunity to contribute your opinion to help improve safety for everyone.

Understanding shipboard risk

AN exercise on board the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) vessel RRS Ernest Shackleton.