THE IMPORTANCE OF INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND TRUST IN THE SHIPPING INDUSTRY

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METHOD

9 observational voyages
87 semi-structured interviews
303 vignette-based interviews
2,500 questionnaires
Without trust wheels of social interaction would grind to a halt (Georg Simmel)

Without trust society may be paralysed, chaotic and fearful (Lewis and Weigert 1985), Luhmann 1979)
Punishment-centred bureaucracies (PCB) are based on low levels of trust and are founded on notions of obedience, reprimand and penalty (Gouldner 1954).

Gouldner observed how in a gypsum mine one style of manager replaced another producing a PCB style of regime. This led to breakdown of trust and withdrawal of goodwill amongst workforce impacting on issues such as overtime.

A BIT MORE SOCIOLOGY:
BUREAUCRATISATION AND MISTRUST
As in Gouldner’s gypsum mine the shipping industry has seen a shift towards strongly punishment-centred bureaucracies at both corporate level and at the level of international regulation.

- ISM – procedures, paperwork
- MARPOL rules, records, fines, imprisonment
- STCW rules, records, vessel detentions
- SOLAS rules, records, vessel detentions

This has led seafarers to feel less trusted……
[There are] so many checklists [...] and the requirements have increased. Say the ISM, it requires a lot of paperwork. Or when you need to report [to shore-based managers] [...] the conduct of monthly safety meetings, drills and other checklists regarding tasks. Apart from that we also have to take pictures [photographs] of the equipment during maintenance. You have to explain also what you did and how it looked like before you did something to it. Then send that as evidence of your job. So it seems that they don’t really trust you with what you do on board. (Vignette-interview IA35)
THEY FEAR LOSING THEIR JOBS

Here is the truth, if you will not follow the office's instruction you will be in trouble and that is for sure. [...] Even if you are right but that means going against what they want then they will not want you in their company anymore. They will not hire you again. (Vignette-interview IA42)

WITH GOOD REASON.....
I joined the ship and went to the [previous] captain’s cabin and he told me that the gear’s teeth were broken [...] the whole thing could give way. [...] the personnel attending to the operation [...] risk their life. [...] they finally called a surveyor and he made a [written] remark. ‘The starboard anchor not to be used except during emergency’. [...] When you are entering Immingham you need to send a message what time the anchor is ready for use. I did that. From my heart I knew that I was not right [...] But I said, ‘otherwise I will lose my job’. [...]. Then we went to Columbia where we were supposed to use the two anchors in the anchorage. [...] I got a call from a senior manager, ‘okay, he said, you use both the anchors’ and I said “well until now you said ‘don’t use’ and now I can use them?” [...] I told him that the surveyor told me that I could only use the anchor in emergency. Then he told me ‘but this is emergency’! It’s funny. A normal routine has become an emergency! ‘Captain’, he told me, ‘I am asking you to use it but you can use your overriding authority and don’t use’. [...] We did as told but I got a very bad name [for my resistance], in fact I was sacked later. (Vignette-interview NT64)
We were facing a typhoon [...] master informed the owners or charterers that ‘I will deviate from this route it’s much safer’ [...] but the company [...] they don’t want it. But later on when we were in [the] bad weather then the company [...] called ‘OK [...] it’s up to you’ [...] she was relying on the information which was coming from another ship....and we were stuck in [the typhoon] and that was a dangerous situation. She would not trust us until she got an information from another ship. If something happened, then people will ask why the captain did not take the correct route but [...] this concept of the captain being the authority on the ship, it’s just on the papers, nothing else. (Vignette-interview NT14)

29% of respondents said they had been prevented by shore-staff from taking action in the best interests of crew and 18% in the best interests of the ship
The oars were lost, I don’t know why. I don’t know how and why, the oars are lost. [...] maybe it was pilferage or something so I told the captain that the oars were lost. After 15 days of search each and every corner of the ship [...] The captain told me ‘please I’m not telling this matter to the company because what they’ll do is they will blame you’. (Vignette-interview NT16)
ANOTHER EXAMPLE.....

- We had an issue where the second engineer, a qualified man, and we told him very clearly “This pipe might have some oil.” And he goes on and opens it and oil spills on the deck. Everything goes overboard. Say, 50-60 litres of black, heavy oil. [...] That issue never went out. [...] So, this is the reality because we managed it nicely. [...] it would really reflect badly on a good engineer. A person who is due for his promotion, he is going to be a chief engineer. So, why to spoil his..., you know. (Vignette-interview NT63)

- Only 36% of all questionnaire respondents said they always told shore-staff the whole truth about the situation on board
45% of respondents stated that they had been blamed for something which was not their fault.

I’ve seen many masters in front of me, ‘please send it to me by writing if you want me to do this and I’ll go ahead and do it’. (Vignette-interview NE23)
It has got to the point, I’ve seen now myself personally if some work need to be done, they won’t make the decision on ship, they’ll just go to the office and make the office make the decision (Vignette-interview NE11)
Due to the development of communication technology, captain’s decision making power is almost deprived of. Even if you want to abandon the ship, you cannot if the company does not give you permission. So this is common. (Vignette-interview LT24)
'Between a Rock and a Hard Place': The Implications of Lost Autonomy and Trust for Professionals at Sea

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Abstract
This article describes changes associated with increased bureaucratization and surveillance in the regulation and management of the 21st century shipping industry. Drawing upon 303 'real-life' vignette-based interviews, it describes how these transformations are experienced by contemporary navigating officers, and engineers, working on commercial cargo vessels. The article draws attention to the dysfunctional effects of distrust in organisations, describing how lost trust and associated fears impact on the decision-making process of officers thereby inducing a degree of organisational paralysis. This finding may be of particular significance to employers who have introduced punishment-centred bureaucratization in order to improve organisational efficiency and who are concurrently undermining it.

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