

DECISION-MAKING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WHILE TEACHING MARITIME ENGLISH

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Currently humanity lives in the ear of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity when fast and unpredictable changes of the social and professional environment pose constant challenges and thus demand new skills and abilities to allow for the adaptation and innovative solutions finding. With the emerging technological advances and increasing interest in the ethical and psychological aspects of human relationships it is not sufficient to possess technical skills only. The employers expect their employees not only to work with tools and devices but also to critically assess and analyse the situation, cooperate with the others, to be flexible and curious as well as ready to learn lifelong. In the sphere of maritime transportation with the introduction of the digital tools, automation of operations, international maritime trade globalization new challenges are faced and the requirements to the professional competencies of seafarers are heightened.

The annual analysis of the maritime transport industry's performance and future trends conducted by the International Chamber of Shipping highlights the need to introduce changes in professional training of future seafarers to ensure stable supply of human resources for the industry. These changes primarily relate to the need for identifying soft skills to be a learning objective at the same level as technical skills as they foster cooperation, teamwork and enhance shipboard operations efficiency. Being the main international standard for the seafarers skills and competencies requirements worldwide, the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) includes both technical skills, such as how various parts of the equipment onboard are to be operated and maintained, and non-technical skills, such as communication, teamwork and decision making to be the maritime professionals' core competencies. The latest revision of the STCW in 2010 increased the demands on non-technical skills (NTS) for officers onboard.

The «softened» interpersonal relations onboard have a decisive effect on the crew psychological well-being during long voyages [1] and thus are of great value in the shipping industry as they complement technical skills, and contribute to considerable decreasing of accidents at sea. Since non-technical skills are increasingly becoming more critical for the safety of people and cargo onboard it seems important to explore how they are trained and developed in the course of Maritime English. So, the paper is aimed at exploring the concept of «decision making» as one of the soft skills and suggesting the practical recommendations to develop it while teaching Maritime English.

The concept of non-technical skills has been applied to a large number of domains and is usually defined as «the cognitive, social and personal resources skills that complement technical skills and contribute to safe and efficient task performance» [2]. The common idea underlying the definition of soft skills in multiple research works analyzed: soft skills are argued to be the non-technical skills necessary for any professional domain and which determine how well a person can interact socially with other employees around. Another common fact that goes without saying in almost any research on the topic is the fact that higher education cannot be considered to study hard skills only.

We recognize the necessity for maritime education institutions to develop students' soft skills and to implement appropriate strategy and methodology at the lessons, particularly Maritime English lessons. In order to identify specific soft skills to be taught a survey has been conducted by the group of Maritime English teachers of the English language department for Deck Officers. The results of the survey allowed for the development of the three-set classification of soft skills essential for the design of the Maritime English study programme: communicative (persuasion,

negotiation and emotional intelligence), behavioural (leadership, teamwork, conflict management) and cognitive (critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making) [1]. We would like to focus more detail on the development of decision-making skill while teaching maritime English though as it will be shown later most of the skills are interrelated and cannot go one without another.

So, decision-making is an important part of leadership and can be described as a process of reaching a judgement or choosing an option. The study of maritime accident reports showed that the 85 per cent of collisions were caused by unsafe acts related to decision-making [3]. This fact emphasizes the importance of decision-making in maintaining safe watch-keeping at the bridge or in the engine room, and highlights the importance of utilizing all available resources in this process. It has generally been assumed that learning to make good decisions can only be attained through experience. However, research has shown that decision making skills can be shaped through training if to concentrate on strategies surrounding the giving and receiving information, as well as the processing of the information so that appropriate decisions can be made.

The focus of our research interest is the discovery of the efficient methods and teaching strategies for the soft skills development while teaching Maritime English. Thorough analysis and literature review as well as our own teaching experience allow for the conclusion that the use of Maritime Accident Report analysis for higher order thinking skills development (decision-making inclusive) is one of the best methodological options because it enables students' active engagement into meaningful educational activities. This method can be viewed as an extended version of case method as it involves reading of much longer texts, additional research done by students thus requiring blended learning technique implementation and can be done during few lessons.

Only under the condition of thoroughly planned and arranged sequence of communicative tasks the texts of Maritime Accident Reports may provide for the increase of students' interest and motivation, nudge them to participate in discussion and analysis and thus foster the new skills development. In our research we suggest four-staged process of developing decision-making skill while working with Maritime Accident Reports.

The first stage is gathering information (gaining familiarity). During this stage students need to be allowed enough time to read carefully the text of the report so that they could get familiar with all relevant fact, events, deeds, etc. thus gaining general situational awareness. At this stage we suggest to offer students to answer factual questions in small groups first to make sure they haven't missed any details or understood the situation correctly. After that each group shall present the brief description of the situation with the final formulation of the problem they have identified. During the whole class discussion the results of each group are discussed and compared. It is also determined here what additional information is needed and where the needed information may be achieved from. Students are suggested to discuss the possible scope of additional reading and research which will teach them to feel to balance between too little and too much of information. At this point we turn to the implementation of the flipped class technique and ask students to perform further reading theoretical reading including texts of relevant Codes, Conventions and the like. This part is done individually at home at the students' own pace and style of work so that by the next lesson they would have sufficient background knowledge and situational awareness for the next stage.

At the next lesson it is possible to move to the next step which is recognizing or identifying a problem. At this stage it is possible to critically evaluate and assess the information (the events, actions and conditions) received. We believe that critical thinking as a professional ability to analyze available facts or observations about a certain situation, process, state or certain relations is of primary importance for seafarers as they work in small crews onboard ships and frequently encounter unpredictable situations that require contending against imminent dangers. Tasks and questions to the MARs at this stage should promote higher order thinking skills development. For example, answering the question «What mistakes were made by the crew?» students are taught to analyze the situation and answering the question «Could the situation/action have had more severe consequences?» allows for the assessment of the situation. In other words at this stage the whole complex global situation is divided into smaller constituent parts/impact factors to establish a

logical pattern and clearly formulate a problem, establish chains of misdoings or wrongful actions by logical assumptions, critical and analytical thinking. In such a way, during this stage it becomes possible to identify the key input elements and the way they interact and influence one another in the whole system of an overall situation.

During the next stage — identifying and evaluating alternative solutions — we suggest a group project work where the key focus of attention is on the process of exploring possible options for coming to a rational solution of those matters. This step includes discussing probable causal or limiting factors, evaluating advantages as well as risks associated with each alternative and selecting the optimum one to present as a final project of the group. The information and situational awareness achieved at the previous stages becomes crucial at this stage as it allows to finally make a risk assessment and to eventually select and clearly state the best option. Teacher as a facilitator of the group project work shall make sure all the group members have an equal opportunity and enough encouragement to speak up. For that purpose it is highly important to make students aware that any objections from the «crew» shall be taken seriously, that everybody shall be open to suggestions so that an appropriate climate and favourable atmosphere could be created. Everyone is expected to share their opinions to make it possible to identify and critically assess all possible options and, as a result, to make sound shared decisions.

As the last step in this chain is evaluating the consequences of the decision. At this stage each group presents their final product — the decision made in the course of the alternatives assessment. After the presentation the whole class discussion is aimed at reviewing the possible outcomes of the judgement formed and communicated. This process serves as an opportunity to learn, assessing and verifying the consequences of the decision and actions considering and sharing with others the risks of different lines of action. It is essential in building a reliable organization because we believe that the possibility to avoid incidents, fatal in some instance, comes with the working environment where misdoings are welcome to be reported and analyzed in order to come forward with the best decision for similar processes in future and where open sharing of information is stimulated [1].

So, to sum up everything above, we argue that case studies and Maritime Accident Report analysis proved to be a perfect methodological tool for the soft skills development as they are detailed descriptions of the real events at sea in professional environment, thus, enabling the use of the knowledge gained in real-life professional situations in their further career. Texts of Maritime Accident Reports enable the analysis of wrong and right actions, the assumptions as for the reasons of this or that action/decision and the development of students' own alternative plans of action for the situation described. Sharp monitoring and the deep situational awareness during facts discussion, logical and critical thinking together with the systematic analysis during problem statement and alternative options creation stages provide for the development of decision making skill making your students able to adapt to the changing circumstances in the workplace.

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