

Leadership Profiling of Ocean Going Ship Masters*



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Abstract

Ship Masters of ocean going ships are team leaders and decision makers in charge of managing usually diverse teams that have to confront unexpected situations that might risk the life safety of crewmembers and the loss of the asset. Despite their critical role, research on the Masters' leading role is rather limited. Lack of relevant research becomes even more noticeable if one takes into account that the ocean going ship as a productive unit and working environment is paralleled with the "total institution", i.e. an isolated, enclosed social system that controls aspects of its members' lives.

This paper focuses on the ocean going ship Masters and aims at identifying their leadership profiles and understanding their attitudes and reactions in given circumstances. It analyses and discusses the results of a field study of ship officers of different nationalities employed as Masters

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on board ships of a leading international maritime group. Results of the research reveal that the characteristics and the competencies of ship Masters as identified using the specially developed questionnaire, are compatible with those proposed by situational leadership theories. Ship Masters seem to give priority to the people on board and their needs and try to be supportive in their decisions.

Key Words : Leadership, Ship Master, Situational Theory, HRM, Maritime, Total Institution

I. Introduction

Those involved in the maritime industry are aware of the significance of the ship Master as leader in maritime operations. The ship Master is responsible for the coordinated work of a diverse team of seafarers that make possible the effective and efficient operation of production units of high capital cost. This is also highly supported by maritime law, which renders the Master the administrator on-board. Seafaring is characterized by certain attributes that differentiate it from other onshore professions¹⁾. Such are the absence of seafarers from home for a considerable time period and the continuous exposure to sea originated risks. The nature of the profession is also differentiated as the ship is a continuously moving production unit, presenting high levels of hierarchical structures and features common with what Erving Goffman terms “Total Institution”²⁾. This is specifically examined in this research.

The significance of the role of a ship Master on-board constitutes per se a good reason for examining the leadership perspective of this profession, but it is not the only reason that could motivate relevant research. Issues such as the increased interest of the world maritime community in the human element and the limited research on the issue within the shipping industry may also be considered important. It is also interesting to examine the traits that may characterize the ship as a Total Institution.

1) Theotokas(2011)

2) Goffman(1961)

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