

{ VIEWPOINT }



Christopher
Wiernicki

Shipping must seize the day to land next generation of talent

The industry needs fresh talent that melds traditional skills with those of the digital era, says American Bureau of Shipping chief executive Christopher Wiernicki

The “new norm” of a data-driven, digital shipping industry is being reshaped daily by new technologies, mindsets, skill sets, expectations and regulations. Increasingly, strategies executed in all these areas are balancing data and experience-driven decision-making.

This is important because people can and will continue to play a pivotal role regardless of machine learning or unmanned, autonomous vessels. Despite how fast the technology evolves or how quickly we adopt it, the new norm is ultimately about people.

However, with technology impacting on us almost daily and companies planning and executing digital growth strategies, we are going to have to fight to secure the people we need.

Historically, age, experience, skills and training have defined talent and led shipping organisations to determine where someone is in their career, and possibly their trajectory within a company.

Today, that equation is being redefined; technology and people are coupled together, creating a new dimension that requires a new approach to talent development.

We must redefine our talent needs related to new types of skills such as data-driven decision-making, predictive data analytics, systems and design thinking, integration engineering and cyber awareness.

The rate of technological change is also redefining how we characterise talent, create learning mindsets and the ability to rapidly and effectively embrace change. After all, innovation is nothing more than fast learning.

At an industry and company level we need a culture that can blend these together and recognise the need for specialists and generalists in terms of strategic decision-making.

We need to develop a workforce capable of handling the traditional areas such as structures, machinery, and marine operations that tend to focus on isolated



LEARNING CURVE: An instructor demonstrates a full mission bridge cargo simulator

Photo: Bloomberg

systems, with the emerging, non-traditional areas of integrated cyber networks, which interconnect, monitor and control shipboard systems and equipment.

The people we look to hire today are those who can continually adapt and learn fast.

We look for different skill sets in these people because we require systems thinking, design thinking and a convergent mindset. By this, I mean a strategic perspective, focused on comparative risk thinking.

INTEGRATING SKILLS

Talent development programmes for these people must extend to continuous learning models and focus not just on technical disciplines, but apply an integrated path to build skills in strategic, operations and systems thinking.

But even as we rethink and raise the bar for the talent we seek, we are also dealing with a shrinking

global technical talent pool. According to recently published analyses, available technical talent will shrink anywhere from 2% to 15% by the end of 2017.

So with fewer candidates available from traditional talent sources, we will have to go outside and recruit talent from non-traditional sources with non-traditional degrees. We will have to look beyond what is required just to fit a role today.

We find ourselves at a crossroads in terms of recruiting and developing traditional skill sets from traditional sources to work in a more connected and complex shipboard environment.

As an industry, we need to supplement and complement traditional skill sets with non-traditional skill sets. And we need to do that quickly, to secure the best candidates and to drive the changes we all know are coming and shaping the future winds of shipping. ■



Jonathan
Walker

IMO should lead response to casualty cleanups with best practice guide

A marine investigation code, for example, could help address the problem of local authorities overstepping the limits of their jurisdiction, writes Captain Jonathan Walker

Why does the process of managing a marine casualty take so long? And why does the outcome not always benefit the environment, the vessel's crew or the owner's pocket? There are many examples where the recovery of grounded or damaged ships has extended over many years, where the investigative and wreck removal process was flawed, or where the master has landed in jail or been otherwise detained.

The root of this increasing problem is a lack of preparation, understanding and cooperation. It is a given that the rights of sovereign states and national laws must be recognised and complied with, but some local authorities simply do not know the limits of their jurisdiction and will assume authority of a casualty when they have no business to.

Significant delays can result from the conflict and confusion this causes. Sovereign states should clarify their jurisdictions with their governments prior to an incident. A process to achieve this, driven by the IMO, would be welcomed.

In the immediate aftermath of an incident, it is vital that first responders know who to deal with and

what the limits are of authority. Similarly, responders need to coordinate with an authority that understands the maritime sector and the implications of a shipping casualty.

In the stressful period following a ship grounding on a pleasure beach or an oil spill approaching a pristine shoreline, emotions will be charged and there will be a pressing need — politically — to “do something”. Without sector expertise, the reaction of the local authority can be both damaging and delaying.

This is where the IMO could again step in. The development of a marine investigation code to govern shipping incidents would go a long way to solving these issues. A new code would establish transparent and consistent procedures across national borders to ensure an optimum response from all parties.

The Nairobi International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks is a step forward and clearly details how wrecks should be dealt with once the initial response and investigation phases are complete.

Importantly, it promotes the idea that action should be “proportionate to the hazard” and that activities “should not go beyond what is reasonably necessary”. But the problem here is that the convention — accepted in 2007 — is yet to be ratified. If it had

been, then the requirement by some authorities to remove wrecks irrespective of cost and environmental impact would have been eliminated.

Emotions, often whipped up by the media and political agenda, have led to unfair and undue seafarer detention and criminalisation. There are many cases where mariners have been detained for many months even though immediate investigations had shown them to be completely without fault. This not only stems from a lack of maritime education but also from a lack of procedure.

The IMO, together with the International Labour Organization and International Transport Workers' Federation, should be working on early release procedures for seafarers who find themselves under investigation following an incident.

In shipping, accidents will happen. But to minimise their impact, enhanced and regular communication between all parties — governments, maritime authorities, shipowners, regulators and others — is required to ensure casualties are better managed, the environment protected and seafarers' rights secured. ■

Walker is Asia Pacific chairman for LOC Group, a marine and engineering consultancy and survey organisation. He is a master mariner with 18 years of experience on tankers.