The relationships between seafarers and shore-side personnel: Recommendations from an outline report based on research undertaken in the period 2012-2016

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Improving ship-shore interaction: what can be done?

These preliminary recommendations are closely linked to the research findings and are intended to provide a starting point for discussion relating to the future improvement of ship-shore relations across the maritime industry.

1) A code of practice relating to a permanent ban on facilitation gifts should be developed and adopted by companies, trade associations, P&I clubs and professional associations across the world.

2) International agreements should be considered in relation to the conduct of port-based officials. These could be supported by a body which could be established to receive and publicise the numbers of complaints of extortion from seafarers by port, country or region.

3) Companies should implement a 'no blame' policy on board in the event of minor deficiencies identified (or manufactured) by port-based personnel seeking to extort money or gifts from seafarers.

4) Within reason, such 'no blame' policies (recommendation 3) should be supported by the adoption of a non-interrogative approach to senior sea-staff by company personnel.

5) Agents and bunker surveyors should routinely be employed in support of vessel operations.

6) Companies should consider collaborating in operating a public 'gold standard list' with regard to agents, bunker suppliers, and bunker surveyors[1].

7) Companies should require agents to sign up to a code of practice relating to the deterrence of corrupt behaviour when representing their vessels.

8) Misconduct by agents and bunker surveyors should be reportable to a central point in relation to the operation of such 'gold-standard' lists of approved companies (see recommendation 6). Following consideration of any complaints from vessels a panel should consider removal of particular agents/bunker surveying companies from this 'gold standard' list.

9) Companies should issue clear instructions to Captains that they should never facilitate the premature departure of pilots from their vessels regardless of pilot priorities or needs.

10) Companies should make representations to ports when pressure is applied to their vessels with regard to vessel arrival or departure and they should encourage seafarers to report such practices at all times.

11) Companies should reconsider the use of temporary contracts in the employment of senior officers. In order to reduce seafarer vulnerability to inappropriate pressures exerted by port staff, senior officers should be employed in permanent positions.

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[1] Although not a focus for our research ship chandlers could also be added.

12) Companies should take steps to address the gulf between ship and shore personnel. Such steps could/should include better training of shore based personnel, consideration of the likelihood of undesirable consequences that could be produced by the introduction of particular key performance indicators (KPIs) for shore based staff, a reconsideration of the basis for ship-shore communications (which could include the design of protocols for email and phone contact), the provision of 24-hour office working to support vessels operating in different time zones, a drive to reduce overall demands on ship staff, the reconfiguration of activities to allow for the prioritisation of the protection of seafarers on board in terms of workloads, fatigue, and stress.

13) Company demands for documentation should be minimised.

14) Checklists should be vessel specific.

15) Checklists should be limited to essential coverage and should not be unduly detailed.

16) Companies should recruit and train seafarers in a manner which allows them to place greater faith in their judgement and skill.

17) Companies should take steps to minimise the degree to which shore staff seek to remove decision making from on board staff.

18) Companies should pursue practices which are likely to improve the mutual understandings of seafarers and shore staff in relation to their respective jobs and working environments (eg shipboard placements for management staff without sea-experience, rotations of seafarers between shore and shipboard jobs, company seminars and training events etc).

19) Companies should seek to provide a working environment which better promotes honest exchanges of information about shipboard operations, constraints, and activities.

20) Companies should only recruit personnel (on board and ashore) with a high degree of fluency in a single shared language.