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Elusive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the global shipping industry: the example of shipboard accommodation

Helen Sampson

Seafarers International Research Centre, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

Neil Ellis

Seafarers International Research Centre, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

Abstract

Using the example of the highly globalised shipping industry this paper seeks to shed light upon the practice of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the extent to which it might be relied upon to fill international regulatory gaps. The paper draws upon findings from a study of accommodation design undertaken just prior to new international regulations coming into force pertaining to seafarer welfare and living conditions. It interrogates the notion that regulation is 'not really required' in relation to the protection of seafarer welfare in the shipping industry because ship operators already maintain 'reasonable standards' for their workforce in line with a commitment to CSR. The paper concludes that contrary to this idea, seafarers' welfare remains neglected by many companies who nevertheless position themselves as situated amongst the 'better quality' ship operators. It suggests that regulation is consequently highly necessary and that a priority for the international community should be to develop the relatively low standards currently required by existing regulation to provide for better standards of seafarer welfare across the global fleet. This evidence from the shipping industry seems to call into question assumptions about the normative basis for Corporate Social Responsibility more generally and lends weight to those who argue that the apparent exercise of CSR by multinational companies should broadly be understood as an exercise in public relations.

Keywords Corporate Social Responsibility, Shipping, Globalisation, Seafarers, Welfare

Introduction

The notion that businesses have a social responsibility that incorporates, both, concern for the environment and for broader society is hardly new. As Watts notes 'Cicero wrote of ethical business practices two millennia ago!' (Watts 2005:376). Whilst some authors suggest that compliance with regulation equates to the exercise of CSR, this minimalist definition is not applied by most and in general there is a notion that CSR implies some voluntary activity on the part of business that goes beyond the standard business requirements to generate profits and to obey the law (Carroll 1999). In the UK, in the context of appalling nineteenth century working conditions, there are a small number of well-known examples of paternalistic employers choosing to exercise such social responsibility in relation to their employees¹. At that time the need (and opportunity) existed for the

¹ e.g. William Hesketh Lever who developed a model village named *Port Sunlight* for employees working in his soap factory, in 1888, with good facilities and better quality housing stock.

exercise of CSR because industrial regulation was significantly underdeveloped and employer-employee relationships were frequently localised. In the UK and much of Europe, later decades represented a period of stronger national workplace regulation and it is arguable that the need for the exercise of CSR was reduced as higher standards were pursued by companies in order to comply with environmental as well as health and safety requirements. Such regulation was generally enforced by inspectorates paid for by the state and charged with ensuring the maintenance of standards.

In the post-war period as national regulations in developed economies strengthened, alongside worker representation, many transnational employers who were constrained in relation to business practices 'at home' failed to exercise the requisite voluntary control that might be seen to be in line with the acceptance of social responsibility in their business practices abroad. In search of profits, companies frequently exploited resources and people overseas with little, or no, regard for the human and environmental consequences. Authors have identified the phenomenon of regulatory 'havens' where companies have been relatively free to operate with low labour and/or environmental standards or to avoid paying taxes (e.g. Kneller and Manderson 2009, Neumayer 2001, Dam and Scholtens 2012, Preuss 2012). In this context we have seen, for example, the use of child labour in the production of sports goods and apparel, tobacco products, and cocoa products (Zutshi et al 2009) and the degradation of the environment associated with a range of extractive industries (Manteaw 2008, Muradian et al 2003, Newell 2005). Over time, however, such activities have produced something of a backlash as consumers and the broader public became aware of some of the abuses that were taking place. In the latter decades of the twentieth century a revolution in communications technology allowed for the expansion of the mass media allowing reporters to provide fuller coverage of international events (including corporate abuses) and on an increasingly 'real-time' basis. This produced an unprecedented degree of exposure and resulted in some degree of public outrage when media organisations and NGOs eventually exposed practices that were deemed to be unacceptable by consumers in developed countries. To their chagrin, such exposure was found to have real consequences for the corporate 'bottom line' and companies became increasingly sensitive to the importance of their reputations (Barrientos and Dolan 2006).

In writing about the public reaction to the plans to dispose of the Brent Spar oil storage facility in deep seas, Zyglidopoulos argues that, today, 'multinational corporations face levels of environmental and social responsibility higher than their national counterparts' (Zyglidopoulos 2002:141). While this point is contentious what seems more certain is that, over recent decades, many multinational companies have exploited overseas workers and resources in ways that produce long-term harm. As such activities have been exposed to public scrutiny, corporations have become sensitive to the impact of reputational damage on their profits. Consequently, and in response to the pressure of a variety of NGOs many have developed a series of voluntary codes and practices designed to mitigate harm (see for example Watts 2005). Thus corporate social responsibility has been forced on to the agenda of many corporations keen to mitigate the impact of public mistrust².

CSR has the potential to compensate for circumstances where regulation is lacking or where, in a period of neo-liberalism, effective regulation has been cut back alongside the resources to enforce

² It has been cogently argued that there may be other drivers of CSR such as concern for employee satisfaction (e.g. Frynas 2005) however external pressures are widely regarded as the most significant influences on companies in adopting a CSR agenda.

regulation. However, a major question arises in relation to the extent to which the exercise of CSR can be relied upon to be more than a PR exercise (see also Robinson 2010). Where profits are threatened, is it realistic to imagine that companies will exercise genuine responsibility in areas which are not publically visible and are not subject to mandatory requirements? In considering the shipping industry this paper suggests that examination of CSR in relation to the work and life of seafarers, which is largely 'invisible' to the general public, does much to reveal current limits in the exercise of CSR.

The Shipping Industry and the Introduction of the Maritime Labour Convention

Shipping provides us with a remarkable example of a globalised industry. It has been argued by some to provide us with a critical case for the study of some of the outcomes of globalising processes (Sampson and Bloor 2007, Bloor and Sampson 2009, Sampson 2013). In relation to the exercise of CSR, shipping is particularly useful as it can be characterised as exemplifying some of the problems that occur as a result of the regulatory gaps created in internationalised regimes characterised by polycentric governance (Bloor et al 2013). As we have already argued it is in an environment of ineffective, and/or absent regulation that the need for effective CSR is most apparent. In the context of the development of flags of convenience³ (under which more than half of today's global fleet sail⁴), uneven port state control (Bloor et al 2006), and increased competition between states for the registration of tonnage⁵ (and the associated revenue streams), the need for the exercise of corporate social responsibility, particularly with regard to standards of seafarer health and welfare, is pressing.

Historically, the regulation of seafarer working and living conditions has been patchy and fragmented. Internationally such regulation has been developed by the ILO in an effort to protect seafarers working in the global fleet. However many ILO regulations have been ignored by flag states and some attempts to regulate standards have failed altogether as a result of inadequate international support (in the form of the ratification of conventions). In this context the introduction of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) has been something of a regulatory triumph. The Maritime Labour Convention (2006) was introduced in line with a commitment to 'principles of decent work' (MLC 2006:2). It came into force in August 2013 and Article IV of the convention, asserts that seafarers not only have a right to 'decent working and living conditions on-board ship' but that furthermore they are entitled to 'health protection, medical care, welfare measures and other forms of social protection' (MLC 2006:4). In the shipping community the introduction of MLC was not overwhelmingly welcomed and indeed a large section of the industry argues for reduced regulation of international shipping asserting that the industry is subject to effective self-regulation. In an interview for an article for the international shipping newspaper *Lloyd's List* Giles Heimann the chief executive for the International Maritime Employers' Council (IMEC) is careful to stress the positive benefits for ship owners that are associated with MLC whilst reiterating his view that this regulation is not really necessary for 'good ship operators' given their historic 'good practice'.

³ These are widely held to facilitate regulatory avoidance (Sampson et al 2014).

⁴ UNCTAD 2012.

⁵ This causes pressure to compete by relaxing regulatory standards.

By ensuring the fair and decent employment of seafarers on an international basis, it allows the responsible ship operators, who have indeed been carrying out many of the requirements of the MLC for many years, to trade without competition against the sub-standard operators who will no longer be able to minimise their costs by employing crew on cheap contracts with little or no social and welfare provision.

(Heimann quoted in McMahon 16 August 2013)

Using the findings from a study of accommodation design undertaken just prior to the MLC coming into force (but after its inception) this paper seeks to shed light upon the practices and priorities of many shipping companies in relation to CSR as it pertains to seafarer welfare. It interrogates the notion that regulation is not really required in relation to the protection of seafarer welfare in the shipping industry because ship operators already maintain reasonable standards for their workforce in line with a commitment to CSR. The paper concludes that contrary to this idea, seafarers' welfare remains neglected by many companies who nevertheless position themselves as situated amongst the 'better quality' ship operators. It suggests that the MLC is consequently highly necessary and that a priority for the international community should be to develop the relatively low standards currently required by the MLC to provide for better standards of seafarer welfare across the global fleet.

Method

The paper draws upon the findings of a study considering accommodation on-board vessels undertaken at the Seafarers International Research Centre (Ellis et al 2012). These findings (which appear in full in a research report published on line by the Seafarers International Research Centre – Ellis et al 2012) are based on the results from 1,533 questionnaires completed by active seafarers. Questionnaires were designed and then piloted. After some minor alterations the questionnaires were produced in English and then following translation, into Mandarin (Chinese) and Tagalog (the national Filipino language), some were produced in each of these languages.

The sample consisted of predominantly male seafarers (98%), representing all ranks (senior officers 24%, junior officers 42%, ratings 34%) from four main countries (Philippines 39%, China 32%, India 15%, UK 12%). The minimum age of respondents was 17 and the maximum age was 73. The average age of respondents was 33 years old and the majority of respondents (89%) were under the age of 45. This age profile is in line with expectations given what is known about the career plans of seafarers who generally do not intend to remain at sea for their whole working life.

In relation to ship-type⁶ the sample was split fairly evenly between bulk carriers (31%) and tankers (27%) with slightly fewer (23%) specialist cargo/general cargo/container vessels. There were a smaller number of passenger carrying vessels (8%) and 11% of the vessels mentioned by respondents fell outside any of these categories. While this relatively even split is helpful for our research in giving us responses from seafarers who are fairly evenly spread across the fleet it does not provide a complete match to the world fleet data compiled in the 'World Fleet Statistics' (IHS

⁶ No fishing vessels are included in this sample.

Fairplay 2010)⁷. These suggest that our sample over-represents bulk carriers and to a lesser extent tankers, and that it under-represents 'other ship types'⁸ and to a lesser extent specialist cargo/general cargo/container vessels.

In relation to other vessel characteristics it may be helpful to note that the average age of vessels in the sample was ten years old and that most vessels were constructed in three major shipbuilding nations Japan (33%), China (23%) and South Korea (17%).

In the shipping industry it is not possible to draw a random sample of the international workforce as there are no data relating to the overall population/sampling frame. Therefore our approach was to make use of researcher administered questionnaires in a variety of locations in China, Philippines, and the UK. Researchers mainly based themselves in the 'employer neutral' locations of seafarer missions (centres which provide welfare services such as cheap beer and telephone/internet access to seafarers) and training centres (where seafarers attend courses whilst ashore).

Chi squared analysis was used to test for statistical significance in making comparisons between the experiences of different groups (such as respondents of different ages or nationalities) and between selected variables (such as ship type and build). In this paper we only comment on differences which are statistically significant (using a significance level of 0.05) and which occur in relation to clear data patterns, for example where a positive correlation between age of vessel and dissatisfaction is clearly apparent across all ship-age groupings.

Defining and operationalising the concept of CSR is a major challenge for the specific analysis of the practices of any industry. If we accept the notion that CSR is about companies going beyond their statutory obligations and economic rationale in meeting wider societal expectations relating to ethics and moral citizenship (McWilliams and Siegel 2001), how then do we establish the standards against which to evaluate corporate performance? Should any small step taken by a company be regarded as evidence of the exercise of CSR regardless of the broader portfolio of company activity, or should some effort be made to evaluate broader corporate performance looking at a range of activities and evaluating these against a range of standards of ethical behaviour? This further begs the question of whose ethical standards are used to evaluate CSR? These issues become very real when attempting to consider the exercise of CSR in a company and also across an industry.

Here we attempt to break free from the standards that have come to dominate the 'acceptable face' of shipping in line with the tendency for companies to coalesce around norms for the industry (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). As outsiders with experience of observational research on merchant cargo ships (we have experience of being at sea on 12 different vessels for periods ranging from days to months) we have made use of our understanding of the context of shipping operations in shaping our assessment of what would constitute reasonable provision for seafarers in relation to accommodation and recreation. We have also drawn upon relevant literature about human welfare in relation to issues such as light, temperature and recovery from stress. More broadly we make use, in this interpretation of CSR, of the standards that companies apply to shore-based staff in

⁷ World Fleet Statistics for 2010 give the following distribution: Tankers 17%; Bulk carriers 11%; specialist cargo/general cargo/container (31%); Passenger/General cargo 9%; Other 32%.

⁸ Other ship types include a great variety of vessels which are generally of relatively small tonnage such as: off shore supply ships; research vessels; pilot boats; tug boats; Dredgers.

comparison with the provision made for sea-staff and most importantly, we make use of respondents' own understandings of the adequacy of on-board provision on-board.

Shipboard Living conditions

The Maritime Labour Convention (2006) comprises both mandatory elements and guidance for ship operators in relation to a range of non-mandatory factors. In relation to *sleeping arrangements* for seafarers the guidance provided by MLC **includes** recommendations for the following provision:⁹ air conditioning/heating; lighting (and curtains); an electric reading light; a comfortable mattress; a mirror; small cabinets for toilet requisites; a book rack; and a sufficient number of coat hooks. In relation to *messrooms* the guidance includes recommendations for the following provision¹⁰: tables and appropriate seats, fixed or moveable, to accommodate the greatest number of seafarers likely to use them at any one time. Finally, in relation to *recreation* a variety of provisions are recommended including¹¹: swimming facilities where possible; television viewing and the reception of radio broadcasts; a smoking room; a library; facilities for recreational handicrafts; electronic equipment such as radio, TV, video recorders, personal computer and software, bars.

The findings of our questionnaire study indicated that the majority of seafarers were provided with single occupancy cabins (86%) with en suite bathroom facilities (NB 24% of our respondents were required to share a bathroom). However, storage space was considered to be inadequate by just over a third of respondents (34%), 41% of seafarers could not control the temperature in their cabins, and a small proportion of seafarer respondents reported being unable to block out natural light (7%). We also found that seafarers were frequently disturbed in their cabins by noise and vibration and that it was uncommon for seafarers to 'always' get adequate rest on-board. The questionnaire study revealed that whilst most seafarers had access to messrooms and lounges these were not always well-equipped in relation to furnishings and amenities. While televisions were reported to be provided by 94% of respondents a remarkable 34% of respondents did not have access to comfortable chairs in their messrooms/lounges. We will consider these headline findings in more detail before moving on to a careful consideration of cabin amenities and general recreational provision.

Sharing a cabin

Although the majority (86%) of seafarers indicated that they did not share a cabin, of the 14% that did, 86% said they did not have a choice about sharing, and the majority of these indicated that they objected to sharing a cabin. Twenty-one percent of those that shared a cabin reported that they minded 'a great deal', and only 7% indicated that they 'did not mind sharing'. Younger seafarers (those under 30) were more likely to report sharing a cabin ($\chi^2 = 31.546$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$) as were the lowest ranking seafarers on-board who are collectively known as 'ratings' ($\chi^2 = 84.563$, $df = 2$, $p = <.001$).

The type of vessel was found to have a significant impact on whether seafarers shared a cabin or not. On passenger/ general cargo ships a high proportion of seafarers (51%) were found to be

⁹ Please note this represents just a selection of provisions.

¹⁰ See previous note.

¹¹ See note 9.

sharing cabins, with only a small proportion of seafarers sharing a cabin on the other main vessel types (6% tankers, 8% bulkers, 10% cargo vessels) ($\chi^2 = 212.779$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$). The percentage of seafarers sharing a cabin in the 'other' ship type was higher at 35%, although it is difficult to draw any conclusions about this group as it consists of a varied range of vessels. Those working on older ($\chi^2 = 9.983$, $df = 3$, $p = .019$) and smaller ships ($\chi^2 = 46.789$, $df = 2$, $p = <.001$), as well as those vessels built in China and 'other' countries ($\chi^2 = 58.946$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$) were also more likely to be sharing a cabin.

Cabin size

When seafarers were asked about the size of their cabins, almost a third (30%) indicated that they were 'unsatisfied' or 'very unsatisfied' and just over half (54%) suggested that they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'. Surprisingly, although higher ranking seafarers (i.e. officers) would generally be expected to have larger cabins, they were generally more dissatisfied with the size of their cabins than ratings, and junior officers were more dissatisfied with the size of their cabins than senior officers ($\chi^2 = 38.730$, $df = 8$, $p = <.001$). In terms of differences relating to ships, seafarers on tankers and passenger/ general cargo vessels were more frequently satisfied with the size of their cabins than those on bulk carriers ($\chi^2 = 39.231$, $df = 16$, $p = .001$). Country of build was also an important factor and seafarers on vessels built in South Korea and 'other' countries were more satisfied with the size of cabins than those working on vessels built in Japan and China ($\chi^2 = 58.910$, $df = 12$, $p = <.001$). Seafarers on larger vessels (measured by tonnage) were also significantly more satisfied with the size of their cabins ($\chi^2 = 29.416$, $df = 8$, $p = <.001$).

Storage space

The storage provided on ships is fairly limited. In cabins a single wardrobe (the top part of which is often taken up with the storage of life jackets or survival suits) is usually complemented by a small desk and very limited drawer space and hooks for hanging items. As researchers on-board we have frequently found the storage provision limited despite the relatively short durations of our stays (perhaps up to six weeks). However, seafarers' expectations are shaped by the extent to which they become accustomed to the limited provision made on all vessels and the way in which they come to accept this as simply the way things 'have to be'. In this context it is perhaps surprising that we found that 34% of seafarers felt that they did not have sufficient storage space. Again it was junior officers who were least satisfied with storage space and 39% suggested that they did not have sufficient storage space compared with 36% of senior officers, and 27% of ratings ($\chi^2 = 19.831$, $df = 2$, $p = <.001$).

As with cabin sizes vessel size, once again, impacted on satisfaction rates. Seafarers working on larger vessels were more satisfied with storage space than those on smaller vessels ($\chi^2 = 7.078$, $df = 2$, $p = .029$). Seafarers working on ships built in South Korea were also more satisfied with storage space than those working on ships built in China or Japan ($\chi^2 = 28.874$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$).

Cabin temperature

Available research indicates that temperature is a key variable in relation to the ability to sleep soundly (Okamoto-Mizuno and Mizuno, 2012; Gilbert, *et al.*, 2004; Okamoto-Mizuno, *et al.*, 1999; Muzet, *et al.*, 1984; Haskell, *et al.*, 1981). When people are either too hot or too cold they are likely to sleep fitfully or not at all. There is some disagreement about the ideal range of temperature that is conducive to good sleep quality and this is probably because there is variation between individuals i.e. what is a good temperature for one person to sleep at is a poor temperature for another. In this context, it is particularly important to be able to control temperature in bedrooms (or in this case cabins).

On merchant cargo ships the temperature is controlled by heating and air-conditioning systems that are set centrally by the ship engineers. In cabins it is usually possible for seafarers to open or close vents which expel either cold or hot air (depending on seasonal variations and the location of vessels) and thus gain some control over temperature. However, these vents are often broken or faulty and we have witnessed other remedial action being attempted (such as stuffing socks into vents for example). In responding to the questionnaire, forty-one percent of seafarers indicated that they were unable to control the temperature in their cabins. Interestingly it was senior officers and ratings that were significantly more likely to suggest that they could control the temperature within their cabins ($\chi^2 = 22.706$, $df = 2$, $p = <.001$). Although this finding may be unexpected, it could relate to the fact that senior officers have more general control over the shipboard environment (i.e. the setting of heating/air-conditioning systems on-board), whereas given the length of their contracts (generally between nine and twelve months) ratings may have a habit of bringing external electrical appliances (such as heaters/fans) on-board with them in to regulate temperature. However this remains supposition as we have insufficient information to venture a more robust explanation.

Ship-type was also an important factor influencing whether seafarers could control the temperature in their cabins. Seafarers working on passenger/ general cargo ships ($\chi^2 = 21.754$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$) and those on newer vessels ($\chi^2 = 18.164$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$) were more likely to be able to control the temperature in their cabin.

Light in cabins

Like sleeping temperature, ideal levels of light are also variable and no one level of light suits all individuals (Küller, *et al.* 2006, Caspari, *et al.*, 2006). To experience comfortable levels of light it is therefore important for individuals to have some control over light levels in their environments. In cabins this can be achieved by providing different sources of light with independent controls and/or dimmer switches. While we have seen the former on-board the vessels where we have undertaken research we have never witnessed the latter.

In our questionnaire, just over half (52%) of the respondents were unable to control light levels in their cabins. Thirteen percent of these described light levels as too bright, and 14% described them as too dim. Filipino seafarers were most likely to say that they were able to adjust light levels ($\chi^2 = 18.224$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$). There was also an influence of rank, and senior officers and ratings more frequently stated that they could adjust light levels than junior officers ($\chi^2 = 9.803$, $df = 2$, $p = .007$).

The ability to adjust lighting in cabins was not influenced by any vessel factors (i.e. vessel type, age, country of build or size) (all $p > .050$).

In terms of natural light, 10% of seafarers indicated that they did not have a window/ porthole in their cabin which allowed natural light in. Nationality and rank differences were found, and Filipino seafarers ($\chi^2 = 17.829$, $df = 3$, $p < .001$) and ratings ($\chi^2 = 32.837$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$) were less likely to have natural light in their cabins.

Noise in cabins

Nearly two thirds of seafarers reported that they were disturbed by noise in their cabin at least some of the time, and 20% suggested that they were disturbed by noise 'all of the time'. At sea noise usually results from the engines, a variety of machines, and vibration resulting from the movement of ship on the waves. In port noise usually results from cargo operations. Of those disturbed by noise in their cabin some of the time, 29% were disturbed both at sea and in port, 30% at sea only, and 33% in port only. Chinese seafarers were most likely to suggest they were disturbed by noise in their cabins, and Filipino seafarers were least likely to say they were disturbed by noise ($\chi^2 = 382.960$, $df = 9$, $p < .001$). In terms of rank, it was officers that were most likely to be disturbed by noise ($\chi^2 = 91.395$, $df = 6$, $p < .001$).

The type of ship seafarers were working on also had an impact on whether they were disturbed by noise: those on general cargo vessels were most frequently disturbed by noise (68%), compared to bulk carriers (62%), passenger/general cargo ships (53%), and tankers (51%) ($\chi^2 = 49.066$, $df = 12$, $p < .001$). Seafarers on ships 20 years of age, or older, were also slightly more likely to report being disturbed by noise ($\chi^2 = 18.277$, $df = 9$, $p = .032$), as were those working on ships built in China ($\chi^2 = 47.913$, $df = 9$, $p < .001$).

Vibration

As with noise, a high percentage (63%) of seafarers indicated that they were disturbed by vibration in their cabins. This disturbance occurred mostly at sea (66%). Eleven percent of seafarers were disturbed in port and 17% were disturbed by vibration both in port¹² and at sea. Chinese seafarers and officers (both senior and junior) were more likely to report being disturbed by vibration, and ratings ($\chi^2 = 49.630$, $df = 6$, $p < .001$) and Filipino seafarers ($\chi^2 = 216.240$, $df = 9$, $p < .001$) were least likely to report being disturbed by vibration.

Ship type again affected whether seafarers were affected by vibration. Seafarers working on cargo vessels (68%) and on bulk carriers (67%) were most likely to report being disturbed by vibration ($\chi^2 = 37.953$, $df = 12$, $p < .001$). Seafarers working on ships built in China were most likely to report being disturbed by vibration (70%), and those working on ships built in Korea were least likely to report being disturbed (52%) ($\chi^2 = 43.180$, $df = 9$, $p < .001$).

¹² Probably as a consequence of cargo operations.

Quality of rest

In light of these findings on noise, vibration, temperature, and light, it is not surprising that many seafarers struggle to get sufficient sleep while they are on-board. Fifty-nine percent of seafarers reported that they could only get adequate rest 'some of the time and a further 19% stated that they could not get adequate rest 'very often' or 'at all'. This leaves just under a quarter of the seafarers included in the study reporting adequate rest. Of those that did not get adequate rest 'very often' or 'at all', 21% said this was a problem at sea, 44% a problem in port, and 35% a problem both at sea and in port. The only vessel related factor that had an effect on rest was age of vessel. Seafarers on the youngest vessels (5 years or less) reported getting adequate rest more frequently than those on older vessels ($\chi^2 = 9.681$, $df = 3$, $p = .021$).

Standard of furnishings

The quality of the environment in terms of colours, cleanliness, and upkeep have been reported to impact upon mood and mental wellbeing in a variety of studies (e.g. Guite, *et al.*, 2006). When seafarers were asked about the standard of furnishing in their cabins, just under half described it as 'good' (42%) or 'very good' (5%), with a substantial number (36%) describing it as 'neither good nor poor', and nearly a fifth (18%) describing standards as 'poor' or 'very poor'. Officers ($\chi^2 = 64.872$, $df = 8$, $p = <.001$) and Chinese seafarers ($\chi^2 = 295.848$, $df = 12$, $p = <.001$) were more likely to suggest the standard of their furnishings was poor/ very poor.

In terms of ship-related factors, ratings of furnishing improved as ship size increased ($\chi^2 = 11.412$, $df = 4$, $p = .022$), but decreased as vessels got older ($\chi^2 = 40.321$, $df = 6$, $p = <.001$). Standards of furnishing were rated more favourably on vessels built in South Korea and in 'other' countries, compared with those built in China or Japan ($\chi^2 = 56.508$, $df = 6$, $p = <.001$). Furnishings were also seen as better on tankers or passenger/general cargo ships compared with those on bulk carriers ($\chi^2 = 45.374$, $df = 8$, $p = <.001$) where satisfaction levels were low (only 37% rated furnishings as 'good' or 'very good' aboard bulk carriers).

Cabin facilities and provisions

Seafarers were asked about a broad range of fittings and provisions in their cabin. Most seafarers reported being provided with at least basic facilities/amenities, such as bedding, drawers, wash basins, reading lights, toilet paper, towels and soap. Some amenities were less frequently provided: 30% of seafarers reported having TV in their cabin, 17% reported the provision of a radio and 19% reported the provision of a music system. Only 15% indicated that internet access was provided in cabins.

The provision of cabin amenities was seen to be influenced by a number of ship-related factors. Those on larger vessels were more likely to be provided with reading lights ($\chi^2 = 9.416$, $df = 2$, $p = .009$), tables/desks ($\chi^2 = 12.166$, $df = 2$, $p = .002$), wash basins ($\chi^2 = 53.313$, $df = 2$, $p = <.001$), towels ($\chi^2 = 12.055$, $df = 2$, $p = .002$), and comfortable chairs ($\chi^2 = 29.205$, $df = 2$, $p = <.001$). Those working on older ships were more likely to have radios in their cabins ($\chi^2 = 8.799$, $df = 3$, $p = .032$), whereas

those on newer ships were more likely to be provided with comfortable chairs ($\chi^2 = 23.759$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$), reading lights ($\chi^2 = 15.248$, $df = 3$, $p = .002$), internet access ($\chi^2 = 16.367$, $df = 3$, $p = .001$), wash basins ($\chi^2 = 8.724$, $df = 3$, $p = .033$), toilet paper ($\chi^2 = 11.041$, $df = 3$, $p = .012$), and drawers in their cabins ($\chi^2 = 9.040$, $df = 3$, $p = .029$). The type of vessel seafarers were working on also influenced the facilities provided. Those on passenger/cargo vessels and 'other' vessel types were more likely to have electronic appliances provided, such as TVs ($\chi^2 = 158.689$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$), radios ($\chi^2 = 29.440$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$), music systems ($\chi^2 = 32.555$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$), and internet access ($\chi^2 = 128.331$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$) whereas those on bulk carriers were the least likely to have internet access in their cabins ($\chi^2 = 128.331$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$). Vessels built in countries other than the three main countries of build (i.e. South Korea, China, or Japan) were much more likely to have internet access ($\chi^2 = 71.875$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$), TVs ($\chi^2 = 77.535$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$), radios ($\chi^2 = 26.393$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$) and music systems ($\chi^2 = 20.430$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$).

Messrooms/lounges

The messroom is an important space on-board most vessels as it is here that meals are taken together (although ratings and officers generally have segregated messrooms) and where occasional social events may occur. Sometimes messrooms and crew 'lounges' are combined spaces and sometimes they are individual rooms. The vast majority of ships that seafarers who completed our questionnaire were sailing upon had messrooms / lounges on-board (97%). Where common messrooms were provided (for officers and ratings together) these were significantly more likely to be on smaller ships ($\chi^2 = 161.212$, $df = 2$, $p = <.001$). In terms of what was provided within messrooms/ lounges most seafarers indicated that the following were provided: tables and chairs (98%), television (94%), films/DVDs (87%), and fridges (88%). Drinking water (83%), hot drinks facilities (76%), and radio/ CD players (70%) were less frequently provided. However, by quite a considerable margin, the least frequently provided amenity was found to be comfortable chairs. These were reported to be provided by just 66% of seafarers.

Looking at vessel characteristics, comfortable chairs ($\chi^2 = 10.469$, $df = 2$, $p = .005$) and radio/CD facilities ($\chi^2 = 12.929$, $df = 2$, $p = .002$) were most likely to be provided on larger vessels. General cargo ships least frequently had comfortable chairs for relaxing ($\chi^2 = 23.556$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$), hot drinks facilities ($\chi^2 = 34.959$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$) and drinking water ($\chi^2 = 33.203$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$) provided in messrooms/ lounges whereas tankers were more likely to have films and DVDs ($\chi^2 = 48.799$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$), and radio/CD facilities ($\chi^2 = 58.364$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$) provided. 'Other' ship types and passenger/general cargo vessels were more likely to have comfortable chairs for relaxing ($\chi^2 = 23.556$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$), hot drinks facilities ($\chi^2 = 34.959$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$), and drinking water ($\chi^2 = 33.203$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$). Refrigerators were least likely to be found in the messrooms/ lounges of passenger/general cargo vessels ($\chi^2 = 19.988$, $df = 4$, $p = .001$). Vessels aged between 5-9 years old seemed to have the best provision of messroom/ lounge facilities.

Recreational facilities

The modern shipping industry is characterised by fast vessel turnaround and heightened (post 9/11) security. These two factors alone combine to make it very difficult for seafarers to spend any time relaxing ashore (enjoying 'shore-leave'). It has therefore become increasingly important for ship

operators to provide seafarers with decent recreational spaces on-board. Yet as a result of the need to maximise competitive advantage via the maximisation of cargo carrying capacity, and perhaps as a consequence of a broader indifference to the welfare of seafarers, recreational provision aboard many ships remains poor. The findings from our questionnaire indicated that the most commonly provided recreational facilities on-board were DVD libraries which were provided in 78% of cases, followed by books (71% of cases), and less frequently music systems (65%), computer terminals (53%), karaoke machines (52%), and games (50%). The least common recreational facility was internet access/ Wi-Fi, provided in only 26% of cases (access to the internet is discussed in more detail later).

Music systems ($\chi^2 = 39.427$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$), DVD libraries ($\chi^2 = 23.692$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$), and karaoke machines ($\chi^2 = 39.500$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$) were more frequently found on tankers, and were least often found on passenger/ general cargo vessels. On these ships the most frequent recreational facilities were internet/Wi-Fi ($\chi^2 = 189.549$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$) and games ($\chi^2 = 42.001$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$). Larger vessels were more likely to have music systems ($\chi^2 = 16.541$, $df = 2$, $p = <.001$), karaoke machines ($\chi^2 = 33.920$, $df = 2$, $p = <.001$), games ($\chi^2 = 19.289$, $df = 2$, $p = <.001$), DVD libraries ($\chi^2 = 18.208$, $df = 2$, $p = <.001$) and book libraries ($\chi^2 = 9.663$, $df = 2$, $p = .008$) than smaller vessels. Ships built in South Korea were the best equipped in terms of recreational facilities with music systems ($\chi^2 = 36.068$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$), karaoke machines ($\chi^2 = 27.826$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$), games ($\chi^2 = 62.997$, $df = 3$, $p = <.001$), DVD libraries ($\chi^2 = 11.343$, $df = 3$, $p = .010$) and book libraries ($\chi^2 = 9.817$, $df = 3$, $p = .020$) more frequently found on-board.

Seafarers were also asked if there were any facilities they would like on-board that were not currently available. By far the most frequent answer, suggested by 66% of seafarers, was that they would like access to the internet/ Wi-Fi on-board. The next most frequent answer, suggested by 17% of seafarers was a gym, with the third most popular choice being telephone access (7%), or access to games (7%). Also listed were: satellite TV (5%), computer terminals (3%), and a swimming pool (2%)¹³¹⁴.

Internet access

There is now a fairly significant body of literature pointing to the difficulties that seafarers have in maintaining family and community bonds when regularly going to sea for long periods of time (Sampson 2005, Thomas et al 2003, Thomas and Bailey 2006, Sampson 2013). The ability to communicate with family members via Skype and/or private email is of huge benefit to seafarers in attempting to retain a place in the lives of their families and friends. Internet and email access are thus regarded as highly significant to seafarers and their partners.

When seafarers were asked if they had internet access on-board, nearly two thirds (61%) indicated that they had no internet access at all. Twelve percent of seafarers had free and unlimited access to

¹³ It was not unusual on better quality ships in the past to find small swimming pools available for recreational use.

¹⁴ Here it is likely that many seafarers are tailoring their responses according to their view of what they might expect companies to agree to provide. Thus it is likely that far more than 5% of seafarers would appreciate satellite TV on-board but that most seafarers think companies are unlikely to ever provide this. A similar interpretation is plausible with regard to computer terminal provision and provision of a swimming pool.

the internet, and the remaining seafarers reported access with some form of restriction, such as with the need for the captain's permission, time limitations, or having to pay. Seafarers with free and unlimited access were more likely to be from the Philippines and the UK ($\chi^2 = 147.351$, $df = 6$, $p = <.001$).

Those on 'other' vessel types most frequently ($\chi^2 = 260.707$, $df = 8$, $p = <.001$) had free and unrestricted internet access (34%), followed by those on tankers (20%). Only three percent of seafarers working on bulk carriers had free and unrestricted access to the internet. The ability to access the internet was more frequently found on modern vessels, with access declining as vessels got older ($\chi^2 = 17.775$, $df = 6$, $p = .007$). Access to the internet was also more likely on vessels built in 'other' countries ($\chi^2 = 99.448$, $df = 6$, $p = <.001$) where 22% of seafarers reported free and unlimited access to the internet. In contrast 79% of those on Japanese vessels reported no access at all to the internet at all, and only 5% reported free or unlimited access.

Email access

Access to email facilities was generally better than access to the internet. However, 41% percent of seafarers indicated that they were not able to send or receive emails on-board ship. Seafarers without access to email facilities were more likely to be Chinese ($\chi^2 = 204.798$, $df = 6$, $p = <.001$).

Just over a quarter (27%) of those that could send/ receive emails had free and unlimited access to email facilities. These seafarers were more likely to be from the Philippines India and the UK than China ($\chi^2 = 268.674$, $df = 15$, $p = <.001$). Twenty-eight percent of seafarers reported access to email facilities with some restrictions, such as the need for the captain's permission, time limitations, or having to pay. For seafarers that had to pay for access the average cost was 11.89 US dollars per hour.

Seafarers on 'other' ship types most frequently reported unlimited access to internet facilities (51%) ($\chi^2 = 195.942$, $df = 8$, $p = <.001$). Those on cargo vessels and passenger/general cargo ships had much more restricted access with only 24% and 20% respectively having unlimited access. However, for those on bulk carriers the situation was even worse and only 12% reported free and unlimited access to email. Email access was more frequent on larger vessels (66) ($\chi^2 = 21.040$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$), and on those built in South Korea and 'other' countries ($\chi^2 = 91.386$, $df = 6$, $p = <.001$). In terms of vessel age, those on 5-9 year old vessels more frequently had access to emails, compared to both older and younger vessels ($\chi^2 = 49.585$, $df = 6$, $p = <.001$).

Telephone access

Although 97% of seafarers reported that they took a mobile phone on-board with them, they were only able to get a signal on an average of 15.1 days per month. Seventy-four percent of seafarers had access to the on-board telephone, but with some limitations. Limitations included: requiring permission from the captain (15%), having to pay (53%), or limited time allowed (6%). Only three percent of seafarers had free and unlimited access to the ship's telephone and one in five seafarers

reported no access at all. Seafarers without any telephone access were more likely to be Chinese seafarers ($\chi^2 = 170.536$, $df = 6$, $p = <.001$). For those seafarers that had to pay for access to the telephone, the average cost was 43.12 US dollars per hour.

The type of ship seafarers were working on influenced access to the telephone. Twenty-six percent of seafarers on cargo vessels had no access to a telephone at all, compared to 9% of those on tankers ($\chi^2 = 59.883$, $df = 8$, $p = <.001$). Those on larger vessels were more likely to have some sort of access to a telephone, although those on smaller vessels were more likely than other groups to have free or unlimited access to the telephone ($\chi^2 = 52.606$, $df = 4$, $p = <.001$). Access to the on-board telephone also reduced with the age of the ship ($\chi^2 = 26.678$, $df = 6$, $p = <.001$). Those on ships built in South Korea more frequently had access to the telephone (95%), compared to those built in Japan (77%) and China (72%) ($\chi^2 = 58.591$, $df = 6$, $p = <.001$).

Reflections on the findings and the exercise of CSR

The findings from the questionnaire study (undertaken before MLC was being enforced but after it had been adopted) suggest that in relation to accommodation provision and recreational facilities ship operators are not living up to their corporate social responsibilities even to the limited extent envisaged in the guidance produced for operators in MLC 2006. Giles Heimann (the secretary general of the International Maritime Employers Council – IMEC -representing 170 ship operators) is quoted in an article published by the magazine *'Safety at Sea'* as stating that 'IMEC firmly believes that the soon-to be enforced MLC 2006 will assist in ensuring the provision of decent shipboard facilities for seafarers' (Gerber 2013: 30). This appears to be an acknowledgement from the representative of the employers' council that CSR has not been sufficient to protect the living conditions of seafarers on-board vessels and that regulation is essential in this industry. Whilst Heimann attempts to defend ship operators against such charges he underlines the prioritisation of profits over seafarer welfare when he is quoted as suggesting that for example 'being able to feasibly provide unlimited internet access to complete crews is, unfortunately, very challenging' (Gerber 2013: 30). To be very clear this is purely a financial 'challenge'. There is no technological challenge here and both the authors have been fortunate in undertaking sustained periods of observational research sailing on-board cargo vessels with precisely such provision for seafarers.

Seafarers sail on-board merchant cargo vessels for very many months at a time. More than half of our sample worked on 'tours' of over six months. Furthermore in the modern context seafarers get very limited access to shore leave and some may never set foot ashore in the period of their contract (most seafarers are employed on single-voyage contracts). The companies that employ seafarers are very often major global conglomerates owning or operating many vessels, each of which is worth many millions of dollars¹⁵. In visiting the shore-based offices of such companies in the course of our research we have witnessed the glitzy modern buildings in which office staff (who return home each day) are based. Unlike ships, these are not tatty, noisy, environments that vibrate, and are either too hot or too cold. For example, in one head office in Canada we found shore staff provided with

¹⁵ In March 2014 a fifteen year-old aframax (medium-sized tanker) sold for US\$11 million and a very large crude carrier (VLCC) of some 298,287 dwt built in 2003 was priced US at \$43.5 million (source O'Carroll shipbroking personal communication).

sweets on their desks and wonderful coffee lounge facilities with comfortable sofas, and proper ‘still’ machines dispensing free lattes, cappuccinos, and other forms of coffee. Whilst such provision for shore staff is very much to be applauded it is evident from voyages undertaken on-board the vessels owned by the same company that sea-staff, who are away from home without access to any social amenities, are not afforded the same consideration. On-board they have no such access to coffee, free sweets or other treats. Indeed, ships are highly institutionalised spaces where even choices over meals, when to eat, what to eat, and with whom to eat are limited.

In terms of CSR previous research undertaken at SIRC has indicated that ship operators are more concerned to prioritise environmental protection than seafarers’ health and safety. This seems to relate to company profiles and their desire to be seen as ‘green’ by charterers and the broader public (Sampson 2011). In one example (see figure1) a manager of a very large ship operator described how his company had clearly identified the areas which it wished to prioritise in terms of going beyond mandatory minimum standards (for example environmental protection) and those where it was satisfied to merely comply with existing regulations (in this case health and safety was identified as one such area).

Figure 1 Corporate Social Responsibility and regulatory compliance: an example of a ship operators’ priorities



This highlights some of the challenges associated with an over-reliance on the notion of CSR ‘filling in the gaps’ in employer regulation. This may happen in cases where companies feel that poor

practices are likely to be exposed to the public gaze and may negatively impact on their profits but it does not seem to happen where companies (or industries) remain confident that poor practice is likely to go unnoticed. In terms of the shipping industry many seafarers are living in conditions that are uncomfortable, cramped, noisy, and stressful. Yet even amongst 'high end' companies it seems that, in the absence of public scrutiny and higher regulatory standards, seafarers' welfare is not a priority.

These findings relating to the little-publicised area of shipping and the seafaring labour force complement those that consider the impact of inequalities on the capacity to encourage corporations, involved in other sectors, to act responsibly (Blowfield and Frynas 2005). In his research Peter Newell argues that

In the settings [...] characterized by marked inequalities of power and resources, notions of partnership and the equity between stakeholders they imply make little sense. Voluntarism and self-regulation suggest dangerous precedents where state regulation remains unenforced or actively subverted, where compliance needs to be established before 'beyond compliance' initiatives can sensibly be contemplated. (Newell 2005:556)

The example of the shipping industry and the living conditions that multinational companies provide for their seafarers on-board reinforces the importance of regulation as Newell (ibid) outlines. Prior to the enactment of the MLC there was little regulatory coherence with regard to accommodation design, with different flag and port states ratifying different ILO conventions covering a myriad of details concerning shipboard conditions. This led to the prevalence of some very poor shipboard conditions and wide variations in standards. The MLC which is being enforced via port state control inspections provides a 'baseline' from which the exercise of CSR in this area can be developed. Newell's work (ibid) emphasises the importance of a strong state as a prerequisite for the exercise of CSR. Strong international regulation also depends on the role of nation states and what this example overwhelmingly highlights is that despite the presence in the shipping industry of some ship operators espousing high standards of CSR, effective international regulation is essential in contexts wherein the influence of globalisation is marked.

Conclusion

The assembled evidence appears to indicate that seafarer health and welfare are not high priorities for international ship operators and are areas that are likely to be relatively neglected even by companies which espouse high standards of social responsibility. There is little suggestion here of the industry going beyond the 'call of duty' or of supererogatory actions (Mazutis 2014) although our data do not preclude the possibility that there are individual companies who may undertake such acts periodically in relation to the welfare of their employees.

This evidence from the shipping industry seems to call into question assumptions about the normative basis for Corporate Social Responsibility more generally and lends weight to those who argue that the apparent exercise of CSR by multinational companies should generally be understood as an exercise in public relations. In this context it is important to appreciate the importance of the

exercise of public pressure in relation to ethical corporate practice, and in this regard work on the pressures exerted via supply chains is also relevant (see Walters et al 2012).

These data serve to highlight the continuing need for clear and well-enforced regulation in all sectors but particularly those like shipping where the workforce may be very much 'out of sight and out of mind'. When we consider the potential for CSR to play a role in improving living and working standards for communities of different kinds across the world it remains vital that we recall that there are frequent disconnects between policy as produced in glossy corporate literature and the realities 'on the ground' (Littlewood 2014: 61). This is particularly the case given that CSR 'does little to challenge imperatives of profit maximisation' (Littlewood 2014: 61). In this context CSR cannot be regarded as an alternative to regulation. Neither can a reliance on CSR be seen as effective in filling in regulatory gaps where these exist – it is both too patchy and too idiosyncratic (as exemplified by the case of Merck outlined in Mazutis 2014). CSR nevertheless has significance in providing companies, and industries, with incentives to build on effective regulation in establishing their reputations as organisations or constellations of corporations willing to 'go the extra mile' to look after their employees, the communities in which they operate, and their consumers.

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