



Caring for seafarers
around the world

the SEA

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Short manufacturers' videos can assist a seafarer carrying out maintenance on board

Credit: Lifestylememory on Freepik

A love of learning

A tailored skills development programme for individual seafarers can maximise effectiveness **By Felicity Landon**

We are constantly told that thanks to social media, 24-hour news and an apparent collective reluctance to learn about any topic 'in depth', attention spans are shrinking, particularly among the younger generations. And yet binge-watching of Netflix series is commonplace – no problem with attention spans there – and, somehow, we still have highly trained, knowledgeable and competent people emerging from training and entering the workforce.

Is this more about being time poor rather than attention poor? Yes, partly – but that doesn't mean microlearning does away with the hard graft and in-depth training required to become a competent and safe seafarer. Microlearning is best suited for ongoing training, whether tailored to individual or fleetwide requirements, designed as

refresher or reminder type learning, or focusing on new technologies, risks or safety issues.

Hermann Ebbinghaus discovered his 'Forgetting Curve' back in 1885, so the concept of ongoing learning is hardly new. Learning and development strategist Paul Matthews, CEO of People Alchemy, says: "The trainees on your programme will steadily forget most of the information they were exposed to on the training course unless you add components into your programme designed to counter the effects of the Ebbinghaus forgetting curve. And by programme, I don't just mean the training event – I mean what is designed to happen after the training event." The only way to 'beat' Ebbinghaus is to extend your thinking beyond the classroom, Matthews insists.

Captain Pradeep Chawla, CEO of maritime learning solutions specialist MarinePALS, says human beings are better suited to learn in short bites: "We lose attention fairly quickly and with all the social media bombarding our sensibilities, tend to be very focused for a short time on one topic."

If you attended a two-hour lecture at college, how much of it would you really remember 30 days later? While MarinePALS is all about digital training, Chawla is quick to emphasise that classroom teaching and simulator teaching will remain; most of what his company does is post-STCW. "The focus of our platform is on day-to-day operations of the ship to prevent accidents, injuries and Port State Control deficiencies," he says. "We also cover topics such as sexual harassment, mental health, etc."

Captain Pradeep Chawla



Seven-minute span

MarinePALS conducted extensive testing with seafarers and concluded that up to seven minutes is about right for keeping the trainee's attention. "Some topics can't be covered in five minutes or even seven minutes. In these cases, we follow the 'Netflix model' and make it episode one and episode two and hope people will follow on immediately. We typically have two formats – seven minutes for short bite-size learning and one minute for reminders."

Look at how e-learning has evolved, notes Chawla – it started with the teacher recording what they were doing in the classroom so people could catch up later. "We don't have any formats where it is just a narrator talking about something. If you see only a narrator on the screen, it gets boring – but if you have a proper video with music and action, it is like watching a movie and you tend to remain focused. All our videos are made with seafarers, and we also aim for diversity so that people can identify themselves sub-consciously."

MarinePALS training is based on three 'pillars' – videos, gamification of learning and VR training; and three types of courses – assigned courses, learning pathways with mandatory training modules, and self-learning. A crewing department can monitor training uptake – identifying if a person is doing the required training promptly

(or needs reminders) and guiding seafarers to particular videos if there is a perceived weakness in an area. "With the availability of analytics, we can modify a programme – the idea is to change the student's behaviour to be a constant learner," says Chawla. "We can also respond quickly. If, for example, there is an incident we can make a video enabling seafarers to understand the mistakes their colleagues made and/or where they took the right steps."

Multi-channel

The Nautical Institute produces magazines, videos and other material to help people keep up with the pace of change and share ideas about best practice: "We believe in through-life learning," says head of projects Captain David Patraiko. "We don't necessarily use the term 'microlearning' – we just try to figure out what works best. However, most of our members are practitioners, both at sea and ashore; they do like brevity and, being mariners, have probably been very used to precise communication. So, if we have a message, we try to keep it short and to the point."

As a partner of the OCEAN project, last year the Nautical Institute developed seven maritime training videos covering topics such as leadership, maritime situational awareness, effective communication and

avoiding ship whale strikes. These can be downloaded free and used without any restrictions – and have been well received, says Katerina Sfaellou, senior communications officer at the Nautical Institute. "They can be used as discussion openers, in short meetings and in webinars, and as a learning tool for further discussion at sea," she says.

The Institute runs the Mariners' Alerting and Reporting Scheme (MARS), which enables the confidential reporting of accidents and near misses. "MARS is an interesting approach to microlearning because it taps into different elements," says Sfaellou. "The platform enables people to provide the information confidentially and it automatically becomes a microlearning experience, tapping into mentoring, soft skills, leadership and CPD."

Patraiko says the Institute uses the term 'blended learning': "Yes, the underpinning knowledge is very important. You need to know your maths to navigate, and your engineering to run the ship. But then there are all sorts of other topics and the need to top up people's knowledge."

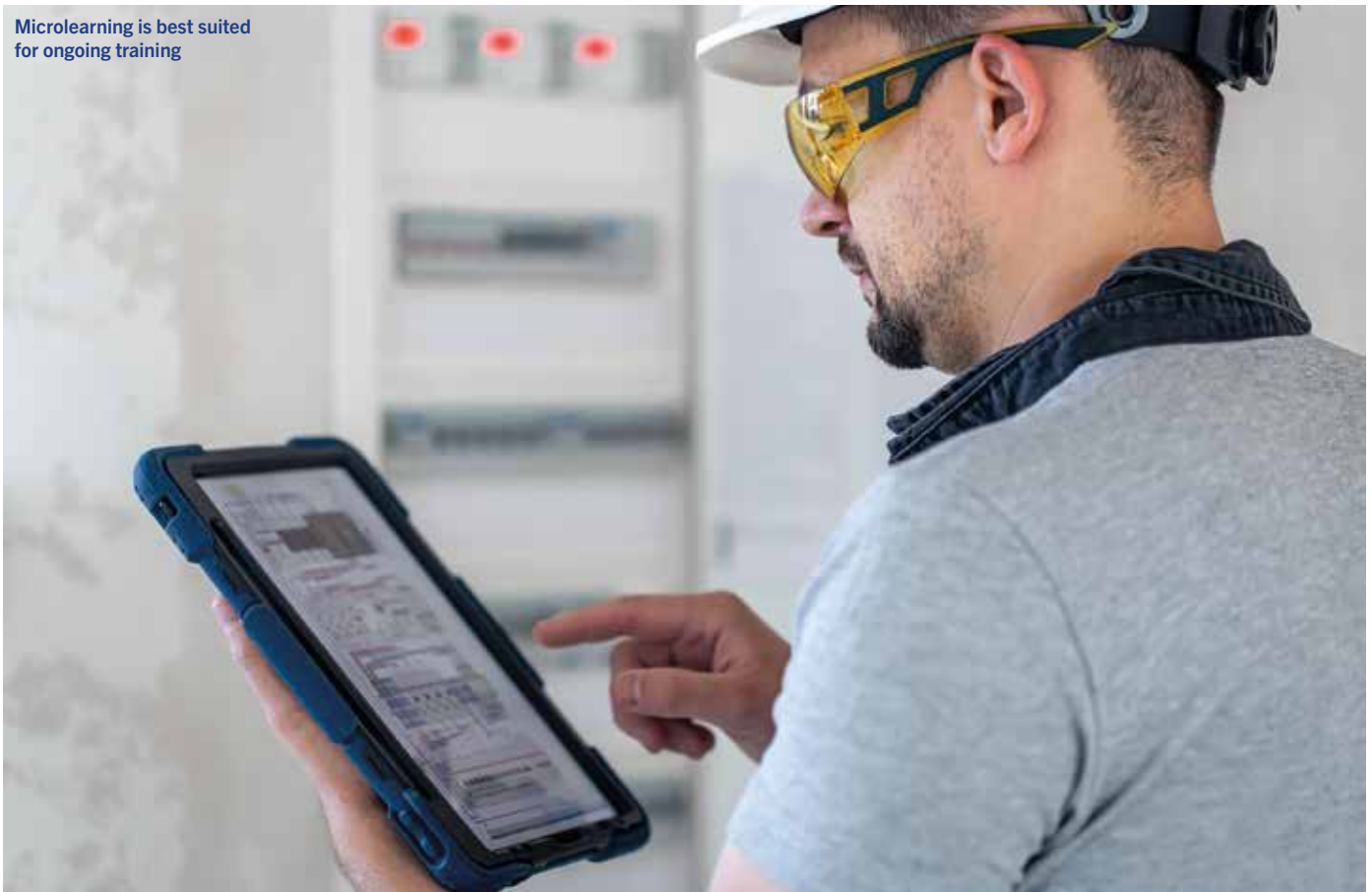
He is keen on short manufacturers' videos which can instantly assist a seafarer carrying out maintenance on board: "When you need to dismantle a pump, with just-in-time learning you know exactly what tools you need and what to do."

However, he believes digital learning has its limitations; the Institute prints *The Navigator*. "Printing 100,000 copies is not cheap and people often say – 'have you heard of digital publishing?'" However, a lot of research has shown that if information is on paper, you have a higher retention – people tend to scan digital material and are easily distracted."

A disservice to seafarers

Raal Harris, chief creative officer of Ocean Technologies Group, challenges the idea about short attention spans: "In this industry, we ask people to stand on watch for hours on end. If they can't concentrate and have no attention span, they are going to get into trouble. So we need to give our people credit that they are unique and are able to give their attention to the task."

He sees microlearning as part of a necessary shift, where people are continually learning, taking control of their own learning and understanding how to find and use the resources they need.



Credit: Pyproductions on Freepik

“Microlearning is about making use of small windows of time to create learning events – and what’s driving that is mobile adoption,” he says. “In the old days, the crew would be brought together in the mess room to watch a video together and talk about the themes and topics. Think about the logistics of that; for a five-minute video, it would take longer to get all the people together than to watch the video.”

Microlearning comes into its own thanks to platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, he says – if a seafarer comes across a specific issue, they can look for a learning resource that will help. “It’s also about repetition and reinforcement – you might do a longer piece of learning but over time that’s dropping out of your memory, but a microlearning event – a little refresher – allows you to remember what you did before and reinforce that learning. Studies show that the more you do that, the more it falls into the long-term memory.

“The idea that you can cover the thing you used to do in 45 minutes in five minutes is palpably nonsense,” he says. “There are big pieces of learning you need to understand and long curriculums, but breaking them down into the smallest, most divisible parts – a series of microlearning units – allows

you the flexibility to consume it in different ways.”

This approach also enables the creation of personalised training pathways for seafarers, taking into account areas where an individual doesn’t feel confident or needs reinforcement. “The pace of change in the industry means that everybody needs to be continually ready to learn and continually thinking about development of their skills.”

Quality counts

Harris emphasises the need to be creative to get learning to stick – sometimes that’s difficult if you are limited to three or five minutes. “We must not get seduced by the idea that short is always virtuous. If it doesn’t deliver and have impact, then it’s a waste of

two minutes. If something’s rubbish for two minutes, it’s still rubbish.

“People don’t have any problem binge-watching Netflix. Films are getting longer. People spend hours playing computer games. Maritime is a serious business and we are operating in high-risk situations. Some of what we have to impart is extremely complicated and it’s really important that people do concentrate.”

Chawla adds that building a learning culture in a company is probably the most important task that the people in the office have. “It has never been so difficult for a seafarer as it is today because there is so much change coming – new fuels, automation, digitalisation, AI. The seafarer has to be encouraged to learn continuously.”

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An eye on wellbeing

Tracking the impact of social interaction with wearable and mobile technology **By Georgia Allen**

In unique and first-of-its-kind research, the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN) is harnessing the power of wearable and mobile technology to provide insights into crew wellbeing and the impact of social interaction.

ISWAN's Social Interaction Matters (SIM) Project is a long-term initiative to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of seafarers by promoting increased quality social interaction and rest time. In this latest research, ISWAN partnered with AIDA Cruises, V.Ships, Y.CO and another yacht management company to engage seafarers from a diverse range of vessels – including, for the first time in the SIM Project's history, superyachts and cruise ships – to provide valuable insights for improving crew welfare. ISWAN will use the research findings to develop its existing guidance and recommendations to become a valuable and inclusive tool for bringing crew together across the maritime sector.

The research launched in June 2024, beginning with two superyachts, *MY Savannah* and a 74m superyacht, followed by *AIDAluna* and *AIDAbella*, then completed by V.Ships' *Excelsior* and *Liberty*. Each vessel appointed two Social Ambassadors – one on board (although some vessels had two) and one shoreside, usually a crew manager or agent. These Ambassadors facilitated social activities, encouraged engagement with the research

among crew members and acted as liaisons with ISWAN's SIM Project team.

All participating crew were equipped with Fitbit Inspire 3 devices to track key health metrics – including sleep time and quality, step count, and active time – and the impact of social activities on their overall physical health. Alongside this, participants used their phones to anonymously respond to a daily wellbeing-related question using project partner PsyFyi's data collection technology, SeaQ.


The questions, answered over a period of three months per vessel, collected unique responses from crew about their everyday life, including how important they consider certain influencers – such as time pressure, rest and fatigue, communication, teamwork and collaboration, and social environment – their satisfaction levels for each, and what improvements they would suggest.

Early indications

The data collected has provided some fascinating early insights into the different factors affecting crew wellbeing in relation to social interaction. Chronic fatigue, which has both personal and operational safety implications, was an issue on board all the participating vessels. Further, mental exhaustion, which increased over the project duration, was an issue on board the majority of the vessels. Lack of rest and lack of quality rest on board

was linked to reports of dissatisfaction across the wellbeing metrics, with women seafarers reporting lower satisfaction than their male counterparts.

Comparing the shipping, superyacht and cruise industries, there were some notable differences relating to social interaction but there were also many commonalities which applied across all. These included the importance of good connectivity to allow interaction with family and friends, and the need for adequate rest time so crew are not too tired to engage with social activities. In fact, common feedback about fatigue and mental and physical exhaustion across the board revolved around lack of time, feeling tired and not being able to relax or recover. Some of the suggestions crew made for improvements included better time management, shorter working hours and reliable WiFi.

ISWAN is analysing the wealth of collected data and plans to publish the findings in the first half of the year. Regular project updates will be posted on ISWAN's website and social media, and readers can subscribe to the SIM Project mailing list for direct updates here: <http://eepurl.com/g7gPaH>. 

Georgia Allen is projects and relationships Manager at ISWAN. ISWAN's SIM Project is funded by the Trinity House Maritime Charity Department for Transport (DfT) Fund and sponsored by Seaspan Corporation.

Seasickness is no laughing matter

A third of all seafarers suffer from the debilitating condition By David Appleton

One issue often overlooked in discussions about the challenges faced by our maritime workforce is seasickness. While it may seem trivial to some, it can significantly impact the health, morale, and performance of seafarers. That is why the findings of a 2024 study, revealing that a third of seafarers suffer from seasickness, are crucial to our ongoing efforts to improve working conditions at sea.

According to the research, one in three seafarers report experiencing seasickness during their careers — a statistic that is far from negligible. Given the vast number of women and men employed aboard ships across the world's oceans, this equates to thousands of workers regularly facing a debilitating condition that affects not only their physical health but also their mental wellbeing. For many, seasickness is an unavoidable aspect of life at sea, yet it remains an issue often brushed aside or misunderstood by those both inside and outside the maritime industry.

Seasickness is not merely an inconvenience or mild discomfort. It can lead to a range of severe consequences. The condition is characterised by nausea, dizziness, and vomiting, exacerbated by the constant motion of a vessel on the open sea. For seafarers, being sick in such a confined space is not just unpleasant — it can

David Appleton



lead to dehydration, fatigue, and reduced focus. As a result, seafarers suffering from seasickness may find it challenging to perform their duties effectively. This situation poses serious safety risks on board, especially where lean crewing models force individuals to carry out their duties while ill.


While there is a tendency to view seasickness as something all new seafarers must simply 'get over', the reality is far more complex. Factors such as vessel type, weather conditions,

and an individual's susceptibility to motion sickness all play a role in determining whether – and to what extent – someone will experience this affliction. For some, seasickness never fully resolves, resulting in years of suffering.

Taking steps

However, steps can be taken to address the issue. Seafarers are familiar with advice such as looking at the horizon or moving to the middle of the ship, where movement is reduced. Yet this advice is often impractical if working patterns or ship design do not allow for such measures. The industry must acknowledge that seasickness cannot simply be dismissed or swept under the rug; it is a condition that can be mitigated with due consideration.

Potential solutions include improved consideration of seafarer comfort during vessel design. For instance, accommodation spaces could be located near the ship's centre of gravity, where movement is less pronounced. Cabins should ideally have a view of the horizon, unobstructed by cargo or equipment, and benefit from improved vibration and noise damping. Other measures might include ensuring sufficient crew numbers and handover times to allow for adjustment, comprehensive pre-voyage training, dietary adjustments, better access to medical treatment, and the development of technology to monitor and reduce the ship's motion effects.

At Nautilus International, we continue to advocate for improving onboard living and working conditions, including creating more supportive environments for those affected by seasickness. We urge industry stakeholders to invest in research and support systems to enhance crew habitability. These improvements would not only boost performance and mental alertness but also enhance the quality of life for seafarers. 

David Appleton is head of professional and technical at Nautilus International. World-leading expert in motion sickness Dr Tom Stoffregen from the University of Minnesota spoke with Nautilus International about the causes – and cures – of seasickness in its 'Off course' podcast. Listen and subscribe here: <https://soundcloud.com/nautilusinternational/off-course-episode-3-sea-sickness>.

Seafarers should have a view of the horizon from their cabin



Credit: Pixabay

An inconvenient truth on working hours

Seafarers shouldn't need to routinely falsify records on rest to avoid shoreside repercussions

By Katie Higginbottom

The ITF Seafarers' Trust has funded an in-depth 3-year research project with World Maritime University on record keeping in relation to seafarers' hours of work/rest that concluded in December 2024. The report, *Quantifying an Inconvenient Truth*, builds on an earlier companion publication, *A Culture of Adjustment* from the same team. Together they create a formidable argument for reviewing the industry's approach to minimum safe manning and fatigue.

The prevalence of fatigue at sea and its impact on seafarers' health and wellbeing as well as on maritime safety has been the subject of many studies and academic reports. Yet to date that knowledge has not translated into practical actions to address the underlying causes. So one could ask why bother to fund more research to gather dust on a bookshelf?

There are three main answers to that question – the first is that we should not give up on addressing an issue that is fundamental to seafarers' quality of life and health and is not impossible to resolve. In a highly competitive business, the fact that it's difficult to get the industry to genuinely prioritise the wellbeing of seafarers over economic imperatives is a challenge, but one we should take on.

Seafarer recognition

The second is timing and context. Since the pandemic there has been more recognition of the importance of seafarers and more recognition of the need to attract and retain skilled, critical professionals who are now in short supply. Influences on the industry are constantly changing, so just because it seems as though some things never change, it doesn't mean they won't if the stars align.

And the third is that this research project tackles the subject from a different angle that just might provoke a reaction leading to real change in practice. By focussing on the recording of hours of work/rest, the results of this project reveal the widespread adjustment of records to give an impression of compliance with regulations. In other words, falsification of documents is rife, and

this practice is facilitated by systemic failures.

The global maritime industry is governed by international conventions, regulations and guidelines with agreed standards for implementation and enforcement. The expectation is that States ratify these conventions in good faith and in expectation of honouring their commitments. When it comes to hours of work there has been a perfect storm of increased responsibilities with more administration and more inspections, pressure on crew sizes and an unwillingness to address the matter through safe operational manning requirements. This research shows that the whole basis of maritime safety regulation is built on unreliable foundations.

One of the great advantages of working with the team at WMU is their wealth of hands-on maritime experience. Not only do they bring academic rigour to the issue, this is grounded in real life experience at sea, with the lead researchers being former captains. In addition, as an institution that falls under the International Maritime Organization's technical co-operation department, they are perfectly well placed for facilitating engagement and co-operation with industry regulators and professionals. For us this was another key aspect of the project – the outcomes must have the potential to change the status quo and the process of getting there should bring people together in co-operation not through confrontation.

Quantifying an Inconvenient Truth presents the findings of research undertaken by Capt Bikram S. Bhatia, Prof/Capt Raphael Baumler, Dr Maria Carrera-Arce, Prof/Capt Michael E. Manuel and Prof Inga Bartuseviciene from data captured between June and December 2022. A total of 6,304 valid responses were received to a global survey of seafarers, far surpassing the recommended size and with broad socio-demographic and work-related characteristics. The questions covered seafarers' perceptions of fatigue and risk factors, the characteristics of hours of work and rest and its recording, and reasons for non-compliance.

While a 40-hour working week would be considered the norm in

many countries including the UK, with 48 hours as the maximum, IMO and ILO regulation allows seafarers to work much longer hours – up to 91 or even 98 hours per week – which is a staggering difference in standards. In spite of this astonishing amount of flexibility afforded to the industry at the expense of health and safety, falsification of Hours of Work Records is endemic. The regulation is consistently gamed and not enforced. The way the industry is structured makes it much easier to adjust records than to report accurately and risk the consequences. Somehow a huge gulf has developed between what is acceptable for people ashore and what is permitted for those working at sea. Fatigue inducing conditions have become normalised.

Detailed findings

There is broad consensus among seafarers (94.9% of respondents) that fatigue is a hazard that affects the safety, health and wellbeing of seafarers; most (93.4%) agreed that it is the most common safety-related challenge.

Over 64% of respondents reported working on average more than 10 hours per day, with 8.5% working more than 14 hours per day. They reported working an average of 74.9 hours per week with 11.7% working more than 91 hours per week.

When asked about days off, 89.6% of seafarers have no weekly day off and a significant majority of 78.3% reported having no full days off during their entire period on board. Only 10.4% reported having a full day off each week.

Looking at the extent to which seafarers keep to the stipulated limits, on average, respondents reported 7.1 instances of non-compliance per month. Most (88.3%) admitted to exceeding the working time limits at least once a month, with only a minority (11.7%) reporting full compliance.

On reporting, less than a third of respondents never adjust their records, with 64.3% reporting that they do adjust their records if they exceed the hours of work/rest limit.

The primary rationale for adjustment (80.2% of respondents) is to avoid findings of non-compliance

during inspections and to avoid problems with the shipping company (75%). Around half (50.3%) did notify their company of non-compliance but responses from shore management were often ambiguous or unhelpful – with two thirds (66.7%) reporting the questioning of the management of the ship and almost half (49.1%) saying that the company instructs the ship to adjust the records for compliance.

Seafarers confirmed that the workload has increased with the multiplication of tasks creating an imbalance with the number of crewmembers.

Finding solutions

The obvious solution to the problem would be to increase the number of crewmembers on board, or to look at ways to reduce the workload. However, if it were that easy we would not still be funding research on the subject.

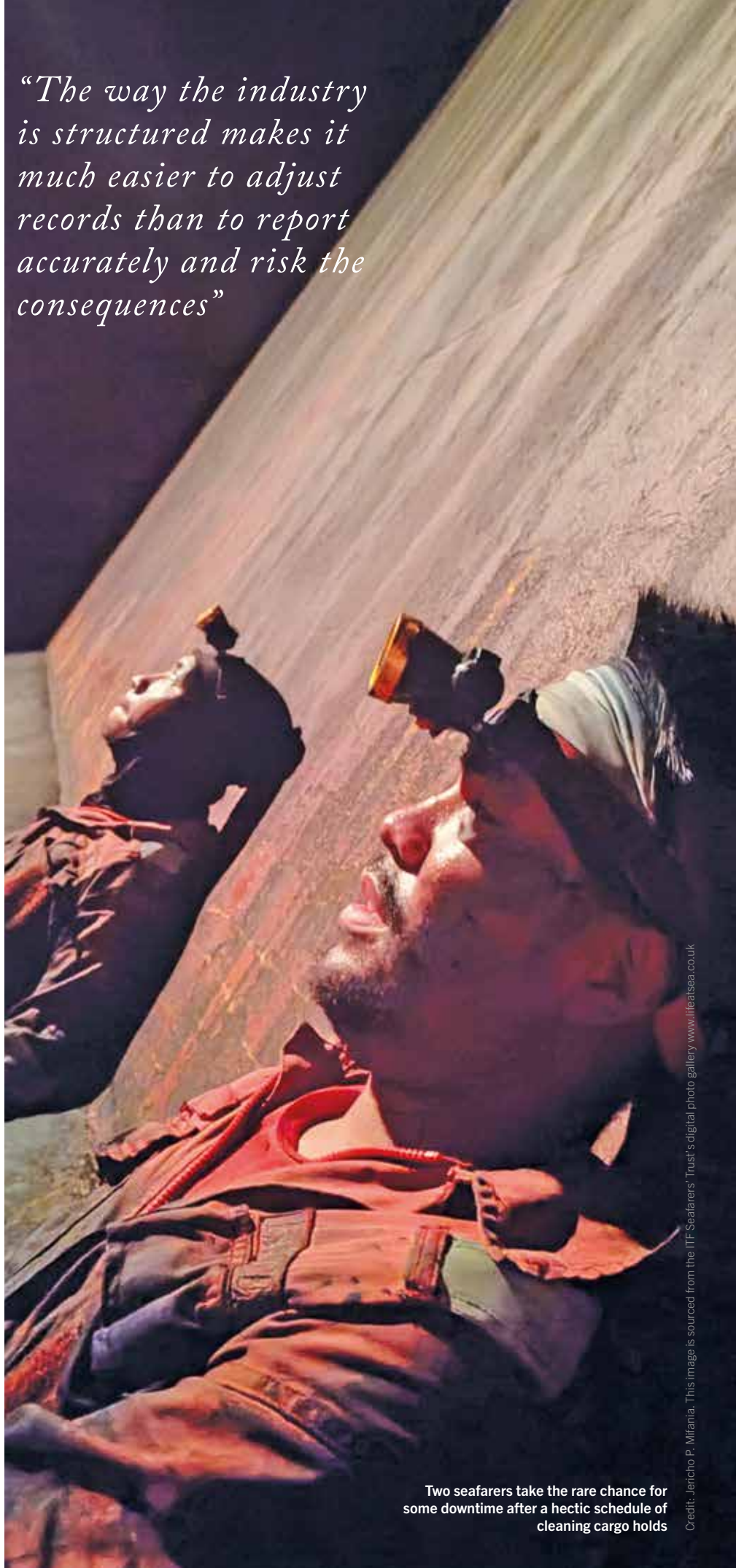
In fact, the first objective of the research is simply to achieve widespread recognition that the problem exists. We all need to recognise that it is not compatible to talk up the importance of mental health and wellbeing while accommodating the elephant in the room.

To that end, we launched the research report last September with a webinar ably chaired by Richard Meade, editor of *Lloyd's List*. The WMU authors also presented the findings at a side event during the IMO's Human Element Training and Watch-keeping sub-committee meeting in February and a paper will go to the IMO Maritime Safety Committee in June. In addition, findings have been used to substantiate proposed amendments to the Maritime Labour Convention strengthening the protections in relation to hours of work/rest that will be considered at the ILO Special Tripartite Committee in April.

We don't anticipate an easy ride, but the evidence is there. We just need to cajole the industry into making the necessary adjustments, instead of the seafarers. 📞

Katie Higginbottom is head of the ITF Seafarers' Trust. The two studies can be read for free here: <https://www.seafarerstrust.org/publications>. The Lloyd's List hosted webinar can be viewed for free here: https://youtu.be/Gr874qOGP_g?si=GLlW4NwiIR-

“The way the industry is structured makes it much easier to adjust records than to report accurately and risk the consequences”



Two seafarers take the rare chance for some downtime after a hectic schedule of cleaning cargo holds

Credit: Jericho P. Mifantia. This image is sourced from the ITF Seafarers' Trust's digital photo gallery www.ifteatsea.co.uk

A sense of belonging at sea

Positives in inclusivity reporting among seafarers to be celebrated

By Carly Fields

A recent survey conducted by DSG, experts in maritime diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), revealed a complex picture within the seafaring sector. While the majority of seafarers expressed positive feelings about their sense of belonging and confidence in DEI support structures, a significant minority reported experiencing psychological harassment, raising concerns about the industry's commitment to creating a truly inclusive environment.

Heidi Heseltine, founder and CEO of DSG, shared insights into the survey's findings with *The Sea*, emphasising the overall "positive sentiment" among the more than 5,000 seafarers who participated. "When you look at the results, they're really pretty good results. The positive sentiment was, in many areas, better than we saw for those ashore – that was really encouraging," she said.

The survey also highlighted some intriguing trends, such as the consistently positive experience reported by catering staff. "One theory is that they are subject to more regular working hours so there's a bit more consistency," she said. "Also, they're their own team on board – a team within a team – and they're physically together in the same space. So does that give them a more positive experience?" Heseltine said further investigation was needed to understand the factors contributing to these positive

experiences and how they can be replicated across other departments.

Harassment worries

However, despite the overall positive sentiment, the survey also uncovered a concerning prevalence of harassment. "Our results came back and said that one in five people across the board are experiencing some kind of psychological harassment and/or bullying," Heseltine said. Women, who made up only 2.5% of the survey respondents, were disproportionately affected, with half reporting at least one incident of psychological harassment and one in four reporting sexual harassment.

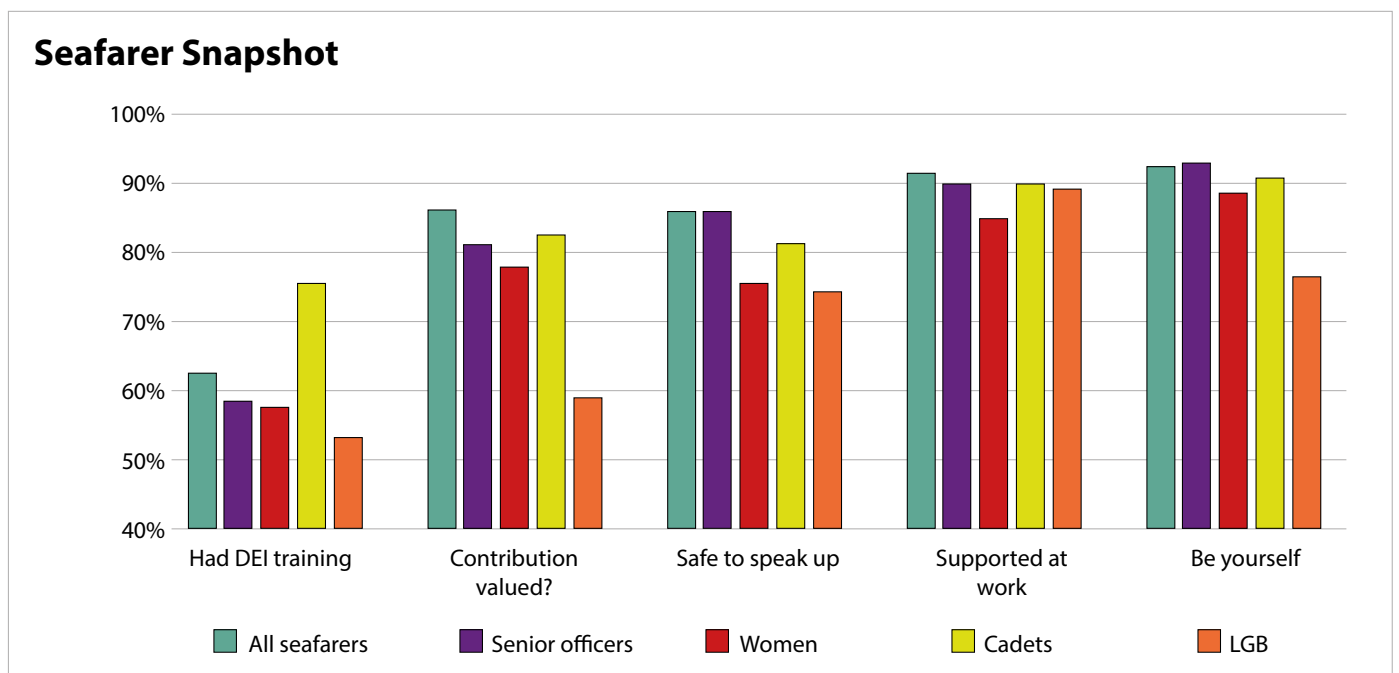
Heseltine stressed the importance of DEI training in addressing these issues. Those that had received DEI training experienced less psychological and sexual harassment. "You can't argue with that – something really good is happening when they've had that DEI training," Heseltine said. However, she cautioned that the training must be high-quality and tailored to the specific cultural context of the maritime industry. "It's not just log on here and read this. There's a correct way to do DEI training for enduring impact," she said. "Our work sees us engage with people from around the world and you have to be mindful that there are huge variations and cultural nuance when it comes to DEI. For example, what one person equates as bullying isn't going to be what someone else sees. The same with harassment. In

different cultures, different things are acceptable."

Heseltine also highlighted the trend of organisations moving towards a unified culture encompassing both sea and shore operations. "What I think is critical about that is that you've got the 'one overall culture'. Essentially what organisations are saying is that this is the working culture for any employee, ashore or at sea, and to work with us, these are the values and behaviours we expect. This has a positive impact on the level of awareness between the sea and shore touch points. Then you can have people who are better equipped looking out for each other. It doesn't matter then if you're crew, or if you're ashore, if you're working to the same standards of inclusion and wellbeing."

Looking ahead, Heseltine believes that the survey data can be a catalyst for positive change in the industry. "The industry has stepped up," she said. "The companies who have been investing in their people in this way will continue to do good. They're going to continue to strive to do better."

But she asked, "what can we do collectively to try and drive change for the ones that still need support, who aren't benefitting from best practice and often not even good practice?" Here, she noted the increasing trend of contractual arrangements including DEI and culture considerations and organisations actively engaging with crews in ports as steps in the right direction. 🌐





The special skill of pilots

These local specialists should not be undervalued

By Michael Grey

Why do you employ a pilot to get you safely in and out of port?

You might think this was self-evident, although there are people on the shore-side of shipping who sometimes resent paying for them, when there are supposedly qualified alternatives in the crew. But they are there for the local knowledge they bring, their expertise at handling ships in tight places and, let's face it, extra pairs of hands and eyes in a lean-crewed era. The pilot is a most welcome addition, whether the pilotage is mandatory or not.

Most deck officers will at one time have contemplated becoming a pilot, thinking of an alternative to a long time away from home, perhaps studying the pilot's work with more than usual attention. What special skills would one need to take up such a role? Apart from the need to know everything about the port's waters, the pilot, especially in a port where there is a mixed trade, will need an unusual degree of adaptability. In such places, they will find themselves, sometimes within a few hours, handling some of the world's largest moving objects, then smoothly moving to relative minnows. This will require an unusual degree of spatial awareness, to mentally change from the handling of a ship 400m in length to

one a tenth of the size. The pilot today may also be faced with a bridge just about anywhere on the ship's entire length.

Pilots have sophisticated training simulators and even use manned models to hone their ship-handling skills, but it really must need a lot of flexibility of thought as they begin their shifts. The pilot will hope, as the ladder or gangway is ascended, that the bridge when it is reached will reveal a scene of professionalism and efficiency.

Bridge realities

But it is a sad fact that such a sentiment will sometimes be thwarted and what is termed the 'bridge team' will be composed of one exhausted master, who is currently trying to handle the ship and catch up on the arrival or departure paperwork.

It might also be discovered that the tired master speaks no known language although is able to convey the fact that the engine is having 'fuel problems', there is no available helmsman, and the windlass is broken. Worse still is the pilot having to establish these problems through self-discovery. A pilot, it might be suggested, must be 'calm under fire' in a such a workplace of infinite variety.

A pilot these days has a lot of wonderful aids to assist in the task of ship handling that would not have

been available to past generations: for example, powerful tugs (although they all need to do what they are told and push or pull exactly when required); portable pilot units that ensure positional accuracy and relative movement as the ship swings; and bow or stern thrusters, flap rudders and other clever aids which may be available to help. Close circuit cameras might make the judgement of distances rather less problematical. But, pilots will tell you, while all this equipment is useful, when ships are packed with sophisticated equipment there are many more things to go wrong. Which is where the pilot's calm exterior might mask hidden concerns.

There is also no getting away from the fact that margins are getting tighter and with times on passage getting longer, there is sometimes pressure on the pilot to get ships in and out of port faster. Safety envelopes are shrinking as ship designers stretch dimensions to the very limit, so the pilot will find swinging basins little more than the ship's length and vessels running up and down a channel with centimetres under the keel. It is invariably far easier and quicker to build a big ship than it is to deepen the access channel or berths, so it is up to the unusual and special skills of the pilot to make the necessary adjustments. 📍

A measure of seafarers' happiness

A year of progress, setbacks, and growing divides By Steven Jones

Over 2024, the Seafarers Happiness Index revealed a rather mixed set of emotions and experiences at sea. On a positive note, the first three quarters of the year saw a steady rise in happiness levels, peaking at an impressive 7.16 in Q3. However, this upward trend did not last, with Q4 bringing a sharp decline to 6.91 – a steady ascent followed by a steep fall, heightened by challenges that included rising workloads, crew shortages, and difficult port experiences. This shift symbolises the volatility seafarers face in their working conditions and welfare – and serves as a reminder of how fragile improvements to wellbeing can be.

As we reflect on last year, 2024 brought both progress and ongoing challenges for seafarers. On the upside, seafarers spoke of a number of positive aspects which need to be built upon. The happiest seafarers enjoyed financial security, proving that it resonates well when employers pay the expected amounts on time. Conversely, when payments are missed, or when there are spurious charges made against salaries, then this is, hardly surprisingly, a cause of immense frustration.

We heard from seafarers who really do feel a strong sense of job satisfaction and who have careers that they are excited to be progressing in. The happiest seafarers were those who felt they were on a good pathway, supported by their companies in their aspirations.

Such seafarers also tended to speak in strongly positive terms about the interactions they have on board, and the value of strong, committed and calm leadership. As an aside, this issue of 'calm' came up a number of times, which suggests serving on vessels which are led with certainty, fairness and consistency fosters a sense of security and wellbeing among crew members. Indeed, seafarers repeatedly highlight the importance of leaders who remain composed under pressure, handle challenges with a steady hand, and treat their teams with respect. This calm and fair approach not only improves daily operations but also enhances morale, reduces stress, and creates a more cohesive and resilient crew. In such environments, seafarers feel more confident in their roles, trust their leaders to guide them through difficulties, and are more likely to perform at their best.

Another upside: we heard again in 2024 about connectivity improvements, although these came with certain caveats about performance, real conditions, and consistent access. Seafarers spoke of being granted generous data allowances, but in reality when they came to try and use them, often bandwidth was an issue.

More work to do

Familiar challenges persisted, and even worsened as the year progressed. Long working hours, fatigue, inadequate rest, poor living conditions, and stagnant wages remained significant sources of dissatisfaction.

In some cases, poor management and limited shore leave exacerbated the struggles, creating a tough and demoralising environment for many seafarers. Moreover, a divide between well-managed vessels and those operating with substandard conditions became more apparent, creating a two-tier industry.

On one side sit vessels with good connectivity, appropriate manning levels, fair pay, and regular shore leave, creating an environment where seafarers felt respected and supported.

Shore leave is a big factor in seafarers' happiness



Credit: ranjiahua, Freepik



Connectivity on board has improved

On the flip side, those working for ‘bad owners’ revealed a far darker reality: seafarers facing limited or expensive connectivity, skeletal crew levels, poor living conditions, and scarce training opportunities.

This divide also highlighted the underreporting of working hours – a persistent issue driven by fear of punishment and operational pressures. The lack of transparency in work-hour reporting continues to impact safety and mental health, perpetuating a dangerous cycle that must be addressed with better mechanisms that encourage honesty without fear of repercussions.

Technology and emerging risks

Technology, often seen as a solution to many industry challenges, proved a double-edged sword in the responses in 2024. The push toward remote operations raised concerns about safety, accountability, and the future of maritime careers. There were some respondents who feel increasingly concerned about the future and what changes will mean for them. This sentiment was prevalent among 25-35-year-old seafarers.

Furthermore, the elimination of certain crew positions, such as 4th Engineer and Electrician, further reduced onboard crew sizes, increasing workloads and diminishing opportunities for mentorship and knowledge transfer. There is a sense that cuts to crew sizes are being made ahead of the capabilities of technology to make up the shortfall in resources. This makes the issue of workload even harder to manage.

There was also much uncertainty in 2024 as Houthi forces targeted vessels, although there was an unexpected silver lining to this. We heard from multiple respondents that the rerouting of vessels due to Red Sea security concerns led to longer voyages, which allowed for more social activities, better crew relationships, and enhanced training opportunities. This

clearly illustrates the positive outcomes that emerge when seafarers are given the time and space they need to thrive. There was a strong sense that the extra time at sea made for a more conducive atmosphere, with some opportunities to rest and also enjoy activities such as barbecues and sports.

As hostilities ease and a return to Red Sea routing appears imminent, this brief respite seems to be coming to an end. Hopefully some lessons can be learned and applied going forward.

Port treatment and persistent problems

A significant theme throughout 2024 was the treatment of seafarers in ports, where small indignities often added up to profound frustration and demoralisation. Stories of unwelcoming environments, denial of shore access, and rude or neglectful port personnel were common.

Seafarers frequently faced bureaucratic barriers, long waits, and logistical challenges that made shore leave difficult, expensive, or even impossible. The issue was further exacerbated by poor policies and disjointed port management. In many ports, access gates remained closed,

forcing seafarers to use inconvenient and time-consuming routes, sending a powerful message about how little their wellbeing was prioritised.

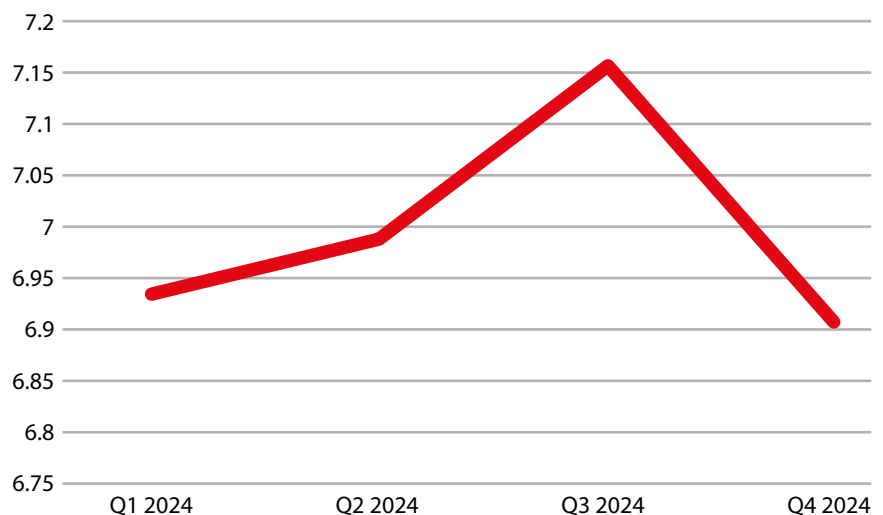
Seafarers also raised concerns about the blatant lack of respect shown by port gate personnel. There seems to be a glaring disconnect between some port managers and the needs of a key stakeholder: seafarers.

As we head into 2025, there are many opportunities to improve the life and experiences of seafarers. It is clear from the year past that improving transparency in working hours, ensuring fair treatment in ports, and addressing the growing divide between well-supported and poorly managed vessels are all pressing issues.

Additionally, automation and technological advances must be carefully balanced with the wellbeing of seafarers, and the industry must do more to address the training gap for future fuels and new technologies.

Ultimately, seafarer happiness depends on creating an environment where all seafarers feel valued and supported. [Steven Jones is the founder of the Seafarers Happiness Index.](#)

Seafarers Happiness Index 2024 averages



From cadet to training trailblazer

MNTB's Mark Bobby draws on his career experience to improve education for maritime professionals **By Carly Fields**

Mark Bobby, chair of the Merchant Navy Training Board (MNTB), has dedicated his lifelong career to the maritime industry. From his early days as a marine engineering cadet to Class 1 Chief Engineer, fleet manager at Boskalis subsidiary Gardline, and chairman of the MNTB, overseeing the training of future seafarers, Mark has played a pivotal role in shaping future training within the industry.

Speaking to *The Sea*, Mark explains that his path to the maritime industry was somewhat serendipitous. After completing his schooling with no appetite to go onto further education at the time, he worked as a technical clerk at oil rig construction yards. One day, while browsing a newspaper during a break, he stumbled upon an advert for a marine engineering cadetship at Leith Nautical College. Intrigued, he applied and was accepted.

"I had no insight into what it was about at all," Mark recalls. "I had no history of the maritime sector, no family connections. It was just that advert in that newspaper."

To his surprise, Mark soon learned that the marine engineering course required him to go to sea. "I was so naive," he admits. "I thought I was there to do an HND in marine engineering. But then they told me I had to go to sea."

Despite his initial surprise, Mark embraced the opportunity to gain practical experience at sea. He secured a position for sea time on North Sea supply boats with Stirling Shipping, a company that would later offer him a permanent role upon completion of his studies.

Mark's career progressed steadily. He obtained his Officer of the Watch ticket, Second Engineer's ticket, and eventually his Chief Engineer's ticket through the support of both Leith and Glasgow Nautical colleges and those at sea who mentored and guided him. He then transitioned to a shore-based role as a trainee superintendent with Gardline and was promoted after a year to fleet manager, a position that suited his family life and that he still holds today. He commends the "fantastic and unquestionable support" that Gardline and the large Boskalis group have given to his MNTB work.

Throughout his career, Mark has been driven by a desire to give back to the maritime industry. He serves on the boards of various maritime organisations, including the Safe Ship Training Group, the Chamber of Shipping Supervisory Board and the MNTB. His dedication and expertise led to his appointment as the chair of the MNTB, the position he holds today. He is "notably and proudly" the first marine engineer to hold this position, he says.

Great diversity

Looking back on his career, Mark highlights the dynamic nature of the maritime industry and the camaraderie among seafarers as the most enjoyable aspects. "No two days are the same," he says. "The people, the lifelong friendships you make – that's what the sea getting into your blood means."

He also finds immense satisfaction in mentoring and supporting the career progression of young seafarers. "Getting the best out of people, in their career progression, in their training – that's what I get a lot of pleasure in," he says.

Of course, there have been challenges along the way. Mark acknowledges the stressful nature of exams and career building, as well as the challenges associated with being away from home. In his role with Gardline he keeps ships at sea in a safe, maintained and operational manner.

Having witnessed significant changes in the maritime industry throughout his career - particularly with technology – Mark notes the vast improvements in communication for seafarers. "Gen Z is entering the industry for the first time with expectations of being connected and being able to connect with loved ones and access specialist expertise remotely," he says, acknowledging the importance of connectivity on seafarers' mental health and wellbeing.

He also stresses the importance of embracing new technologies, such as digital tools and artificial intelligence, in maritime training. "You can't deny that it's there," he says. "You can't deny that its role is bringing advantages to everybody."

He is actively involved in a major project to update the UK seafarer training syllabus in conjunction with the UK's Maritime and Coastguard Agency, going through it "line by line". The last major review was done over 20 years ago and much has changed in the sector since then. What was new then isn't now; what was a necessity then can now be done in other ways now, for example, interactions of machinery and the need to act more independently, pushing the boundaries of regulation and training.

The MNTB is actively incorporating digital technologies into training programmes in partnership with the



Mark Bobby

"No two days are the same... the people, the lifelong friendships you make – that's what the sea getting into your blood means."

MCA, training institutions, unions and most importantly employers, including the future introduction of electronic training record books and the use of simulators to provide seafarers with realistic training experiences. The MNTB also rolled out a national awareness campaign last year, sharing the benefits of a career at sea and the maritime sector, which has recorded 6 million hits to date.

Time at sea

Despite the advancements in technology, Mark acknowledges the ongoing challenges faced by seafarer cadets, such as securing sufficient sea time, adapting to the changing landscape of the industry, and dealing with alternative fuels. “Multifuel shipping is a reality, and autonomous/rarely supervised machinery options should be in everyone’s passage planning.”

The MNTB is working to address these challenges by collaborating with industry stakeholders to increase the availability of bunk space for cadets and by incorporating training to meet the demands of the worldwide shipping industry and the demands of the diverse talent.

“We need to make sure that seafarers are knowledgeable and trained to meet the various challenges ahead, including alternative fuels and rapidly changing technologies,” Mark says. “It’s an essential part of their education and the industry demands it.”

In addition to technical training, the MNTB is committed to supporting the wellbeing of seafarers. The organisation established and worked with the MCA and unions to roll out a welfare committee to provide support and guidance to cadets facing challenges.

“We actually recognise that seafarers are not just part of a ship, they are individual people who work on ships, supporting a worldwide economy,” Mark says. “They have families and lives outside of work. We need to keep them safe and to look after them.”

Mark’s contributions to the maritime industry have not gone unnoticed. In recognition of his meritorious service, he was awarded the Merchant Navy Medal for Meritorious Service, a prestigious honour recognising outstanding service in the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets.

“I was very proud,” Mark says of receiving the award. “It was unexpected and emotional. It was a wonderful experience.”



Mark proudly receives his Merchant Navy Medal for Meritorious Service

As the maritime industry continues to evolve, Mark remains committed to ensuring that seafarers receive the training and support they need to thrive. He envisions a future where the industry embraces new technologies, promotes

diversity and inclusion, and prioritises the wellbeing of its workforce.

“We need to work together to attract and retain the best talent,” Mark says. “The future of the maritime industry depends on it.”

“We need to make sure that seafarers are knowledgeable and trained to meet the various challenges ahead, including alternative fuels and rapidly changing technologies”



Maritime education and training needs are evolving

theSea Leisure Page

There are many health benefits to spending down-time solving puzzles. Lower stress levels, better memory, uplifted mood, improved problem-solving abilities, and better work performance are just some of them.

Sudoku

The aim of Sudoku is to fill in the empty cells so that each column, row and 3x3 region contain the numbers 1 to 9 exactly once. Find the answers to both puzzles in the next issue.

MEDIUM LEVEL

9			1					2
		1			8			7
2				6				
1		8	3	4				
	7		9		6			1
				7	1	8		4
					3			5
7			8			6		
	4				2			1

TRICKY LEVEL

	6	7		3				
4	1						7	5
3						8		9
			7	9	8			
	7			2			1	
			3	1	6			
7		5						4
2	3						9	7
				7		5	3	

Credit: www.sudokuoftheday.com

EASY LEVEL

solution (Issue 4 2024)

8	6	1	4	9	7	3	5	2
3	7	2	8	1	5	9	4	6
4	5	9	6	2	3	1	7	8
2	4	3	9	6	1	5	8	7
6	1	8	5	7	4	2	3	9
7	9	5	3	8	2	6	1	4
5	3	7	2	4	9	8	6	1
1	2	6	7	3	8	4	9	5
9	8	4	1	5	6	7	2	3

MEDIUM LEVEL

solution (Issue 4 2024)

4	6	1	7	2	3	8	9	5
8	9	2	1	6	5	3	7	4
3	5	7	9	8	4	2	1	6
6	4	8	2	5	9	1	3	7
2	3	5	8	7	1	4	6	9
7	1	9	3	4	6	5	8	2
1	2	6	5	3	7	9	4	8
5	7	3	4	9	8	6	2	1
9	8	4	6	1	2	7	5	3

Jumble

Can you correctly unscramble these anagrams to form four words? If so, send your answers by email to thesea@missiontoseafarers.org by April 28, 2025. All correct answers will be entered into a draw for a chance to win a Mission to Seafarers' Goodie Bag, containing a mug and handmade woolly hat. Please include your answers, name, the vessel you are working on, your nationality and finish this sentence: "I like The Mission to Seafarers because..."

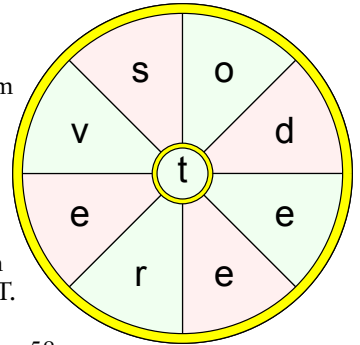
- 1) Clergyinc 2) Abche 3) Elset 4) Angilroute

Issue 4, 2024 solutions:

- 1) Gangway 2) Reefer 3) Shipment 4) Demand

Word wheel

This word wheel is made from a nine-letter word. Try and find that word, then make as many words of three letters or more as you can from these letters. You can only use each letter once, and each word must include the letter T.



Answer for Issue 4, 2024 issue: 58 possible words, nine-letter word was Multimodal

Flag code

Can you tell us what words these flags are communicating? Answer in the next issue.

Answer for Issue 4, 2024: Binnacle



Help for seafarers around the world

Are you one of the 1.89 million people around the world working at sea, or a loved one of someone who is?

The Mission to Seafarers is a great source of support for anyone working in the industry, and we've been helping people like you since the 19th century.

We work in over 200 ports in 50 countries and are available 365 days a year. We can provide help and support, no matter your nationality, gender or faith. Our network of chaplains, staff and volunteers can help with any problem – whether it's emotional, practical or spiritual help that you need.



Our services include:

- **Ship visits** – we carry out approximately 43,000 ship visits a year, welcoming crews to ports, providing access to communication facilities and offering assistance and advice on mental health and wellbeing.
- **Transport** – Our teams can arrange free transportation to the local town, shopping mall, doctor, dentist or a place of worship.
- **Seafarers' Centres** – We operate over 120 Flying Angel centres around the world, offering visiting seafarers a safe space to relax between voyages, purchase supplies, seek support for any problems they might have and stay in touch with their families.
- **Emergency support** – Our teams are trained in pastoral support, mental health first aid and critical incident stress counselling. We can also provide advocacy support.
- **Family networks** – We operate these networks in the Philippines and India where seafarers' families can meet, share information and access support.

Our mission is to care for the shipping industry's most important asset: its people.

To find out where we work, visit www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports. Here you can find information about all our centres, including contact details, facilities and opening times or download our free Happy at Sea app.



CREW HELP CONTACTS

SeafarerHelp

Free, confidential, multilingual helpline for seafarers and their families available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, provided by ISWAN.

Direct dial: +44 20 7323 2737

Email: help@seafarerhelp.org

WeCare

Our WeCare e-learning programme gives seafarers access to mental health advice and wellbeing resources on board and on shore.

For more information contact your local Seafarer Centre, www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports.

CrewHelp

The Mission to Seafarers can provide help and support if you have a welfare or justice issue.

Please get in touch with us at crewhelp@mtsmail.org

Get in touch!

Have you got news or views that you'd like to share with *The Sea*? Please get in touch with the Editor,

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Trust and faith

Dealing with life at sea

By Peter Rouch

“None of us knows what might happen even the next minute, yet still we go forward. Because we trust. Because we have Faith.” This is a quote from Brazilian lyricist and novelist Paulo Coelho. Perhaps you’ve picked up one of Paulo Coelho’s books. I’m fond of them, although they’re strange at times.

With profound relief, the crew of the *Galaxy Leader*, captive in Yemen for over a year, have been released. It has been a long and painful road. Their story has left me thinking about the unpredictability of life, and most especially of a life at sea – “None of us knows what might happen even the next minute”. Seafarers accept that unpredictability and learn to navigate it as surely as they navigate the waves, but it can be hard.

Each month, staff reports from around the world tell us about the difficult and sometimes dangerous situations in which seafarers find themselves. The dreadful situation of the crew of the *Galaxy Leader* is a particular example of this.

You may have learned from our social media that during this



The *Galaxy Leader* crew have been released after a year in captivity

Credit: Houthi Military Media

captivity, staff at the Mission have been actively engaged in supporting the families of the crew. Somehow, they have found the strength and courage to take the next step forward each day, even when things have seemed hopeless. Paulo Coelho tells us that we keep going in life, even when things are tough, “Because we trust. Because we have Faith.”

It’s an interesting idea, but I wonder if it’s true in your own experience. Sure, if you have trust that finally everything will turn out okay it may give you strength to keep going. Yet, there are times when far from trusting that it will be okay, we find ourselves losing hope and faith even that it might be okay. Where then does trust turn? To what does it cling, when the circumstances around give little cause for hope?

Perhaps this is a question everyone must answer for themselves. But for many the answer lies in God and in people – people we can trust even when things seem hopeless.

I very much hope that you have found that Mission people around the world have been people you can trust. Whether in matters like SIM cards, buying essential items when you can’t leave the ship, or at a time of personal difficulty or loss, every day of the year, somewhere in the world, seafarers are trusting The Mission and its people. It has been this way for nearly 170 years. The Mission has been trusted to share the challenges and the confidences of countless seafarers and their families. You have spoken to us of things not shared with anyone else and we have been honoured by that trust.

Trust was at the heart of our work with the *Galaxy Leader* families, the industry, and the IMO. Each has trusted us, knowing that we will not speak or act carelessly and without consent.

This is important to the support The Mission offers to seafarers worldwide. We are not seafarers ourselves for the most part, but neither are we business owners, regulators or politicians. We exist between and in the middle, in a place where the most important thing is trust. We thank you for honouring us with your trust. ☺

Peter Rouch is the secretary general of The Mission to Seafarers.

PRAYER FOR SEAFARERS

*Dear Lord God,
Whether in the storms of life or its moments of quiet
you draw close to us.
You listen to the concerns that burden us,
to the joys that stir us,
the hopes that awaken in us.
Grant to each of us the goodness of companions
on our life’s journey
whom we can trust to care
and to work only for our wellbeing.
In Jesus’ name.
Amen*

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The Mission to Seafarers

Please visit missiontoseafarers.org/donate or scan the QR code opposite.

