

Finding a Balance: Companies and New Seafarers Generation Needs and Expectations

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ABSTRACT: MET institution's mission is not only preparing young people for maritime career at sea, forming their professional competences, but also providing help in their career management. For this reason, it is important to know new seafarers' generation needs and career ambitions, as well as expectations from employers' point of view. Mutual understanding would help to find a balance between expectations of both and adequately manage changes. Results of research, conducted by surveying 4th year full-time students studying at the Lithuanian Maritime Academy and experts from shipping and crewing companies in Lithuania and Latvia regarding desirable contract conditions and seafarers' personal and/or professional characteristics, important for successful career, are presented in the article.

1 INTRODUCTION

Generally, a labour market is understood as a place where two sides, workers and employees, interact with each other. In case of maritime labour market ship owners/managers and seafarers have changeable characteristics and expectations. MET institution's mission is not only preparing young people for maritime career at sea, forming their professional competences, but and providing help in their career management. For this reason, it is important to know new seafarers' generation needs and career ambitions, as well as expectations from side of maritime labour market. Mutual understanding would help to find a balance between expectations of both and adequately manage changes.

Shipping is, obviously, an extremely old industry and one that has established and maintained a strict hierarchical occupation system in which seafarers' career development follows a common route from ratings, to junior officers to senior officers, depending

on the accumulation of knowledge, experience and skills (Wu & Morris, 2006).

The shipping industry is highly cyclical in nature and is characterised by extended periods of bust and boom (Sampson & Tang, 2016).

The maritime labour market currently became extremely global. Over 90 per cent of the seafarers from the advanced economies work on board their home fleets, while 80 per cent of seafarers from the developing economies and over 60 per cent of the seafarers from transitional economies work on board the fleets of advanced economies. World shipping industry has offered opportunities for seafarers from developing countries and, increasingly, from transitional economies to develop careers outside their home country (Wu & Morris, 2006).

Work on board a merchant ship can be stressful (Agterberg & Passchier, 1998). Today the seafarer often works alone, comrades have finished eating when he or she enters the mess, and the fun and

excitement of port visits has disappeared (Ljung & Widell, 2014). Seafaring careers entail long-term separation between seafaring couples, which make seafarer-partners feel that they live different lifestyles and that nonseafaring people could not fully appreciate their experiences (Tang, 2010; Thomas et al., 2003).

The motives to become a seafarer have in recent decades changed. The myth of the exciting and free life at sea has largely been cracked. Research on how the major changes that permeated the work content and the organisation have influenced young people's motivation to choose a career in seafaring profession is hard to find (Ljung & Widell, 2014).

The hiring practices of shipping industry employers should be targeted at meeting the career expectations of recruits (Caesar & Cahoon, 2015): what future career ambitions do they have, including where do they hope to be employed in ten and twenty years' time, and what do they know about the working career of seafarers?

Lately MET institutions and shipping industry admit new young seafarers' generation, called generation Z, those who were born during the middle 1990s and late 2000s.

The main categories describing differences between generations are: social environment, technological environment and historical environment. Characteristics of the generation Z vary by cultural and regional environment but are most impacted by technological development and generation Z can be defined as "instant online" (Levickaite, 2010).

They are always online on any technical device virtually, with no stop. To solve problems, they try to find the solutions on the internet. Arising from their habit, they have different expectations in their workplaces. We can speak about a careerist, professionally ambitious generation, but their technical and language knowledge are on a high level (Bencsik et al., 2016).

Authors indicate different features of Z generation. Analysis that is more thorough allows determining some other featuring characteristics of this generation: growing hyperactivity, infantilism, multimedia literacy, loop reading, social autism, consumerism, lack of analytical evaluation of communication and a text as well as its critical evaluation and etc. (Targamadze, 2014).

Because of increasing the retirement age, often 3 or 4 generations are forced to cooperate and to work together. Based on the data, it is mainly the communication and the difference in the way of thinking that can cause difficulties in the process of working together. The research justified that the cooperation of different age groups could provide not only conflicts, but also positive results as well for the organisation (Bencsik et al., 2016).

Generation Z can bring us an additional advantage to the huge problem that we face in the industry: the overload of information. For example, think of the navigator; he has too much information through the many layers of ECDIS that simply cannot handle it. This generation can be trained at early stage sorting a

lot of information quickly. Therefore, they will be much more able to process navigational information (Recruitment..., 2017).

Because of the global shortage of ship officers and the dynamic nature of the seafarer labour markets, shipping industry employers need to adopt appropriate measures to improve the future supply of maritime labour (Caesar & Cahoon, 2015). However, the new generation also should be ready to look for the balance of interests and be able for adaptation to the working environment and changing circumstances.

2 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 *The sample of the research*

The research was conducted by surveying 4th year full-time students studying at the Lithuanian Maritime Academy, shipping and seafarer crewing companies in Lithuania and Latvia. The sampling was based on the principle of free will, i.e. all the final year students, who attended the Academy on the days of the survey, were included into the sample. Such survey sampling method is considered to be reliable.

In January 2017, 67 final year bachelor degree students were surveyed: out of which 38 percent were Marine Navigation study programme students, 62 percent were Marine Electrical and Marine Power Plant Operation study programmes students. Other respondents were the experts from five shipping and crewing companies in Lithuania and three shipping and crewing companies in Latvia, where students have had seagoing practice.

2.2 *Research instrument*

The data of the qualitative research was collected by using a written survey method. Original questionnaires made by authors were used for the survey.

The students of the Maritime Academy were asked about the planned duration of work at sea and what reasons would lead to the termination of a seafarer's career? The questions were aimed at identifying students' expectations and needs related to the work at sea: regarding the term of voyage and working conditions and their opinion about the personal and/or professional characteristics that determine successful employment of a seafarer and his career in a company. Two questions were aimed at identifying, what impact communication with older seafarers had during practice on board a ship and what means facilitated the adaptation, coping with the routine and other emotional issues relevant to the final year students.

Respondents of the qualitative research as experts include five shipping and crewing companies in Lithuania, Klaipeda, and three companies in Latvia. Meanwhile, a qualitative survey consists of four questions. These questions reveal main things that are important for settling the balance between the expectations and needs of shipping and crewing companies and young maritime sector specialists:

- 1 What general skills (foreign languages, teamwork, etc.) and personal characteristics (reliability, communication skills, etc.) are important for seafarer's career?
- 2 What most significant changes took place during the recent decade: regarding requirements for seafarers and regarding seafarers' expectations and needs?
- 3 What work/contract conditions (in addition to salary and term of voyage) are important for young seafarers?
- 4 What means are decisive for seafarers' self-determination to work in the company for a long term?

Only survey question regarding the term of students' future seagoing career was closed-ended, required a short single-word answer. All other questions were open-ended, designed to encourage respondents' full, meaningful answers. The obtained data was processed using the content analysis technique, interpreting and coding textual material.

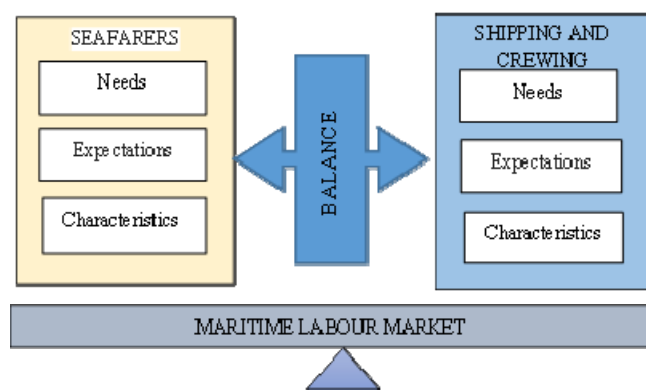


Figure 1. Model of investigation of balance between companies and seafarers needs and expectations

3 RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION

3.1 Maritime students opinion regarding the term of seagoing career

The research was aimed at identifying how long the final year students are planning to work at sea.

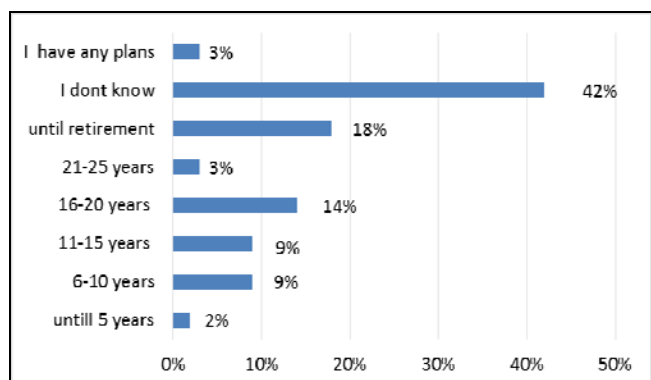


Figure 2. Percentage distribution of the respondents' opinions on the term of maritime career after the completion of the studies

A large part of the total number of respondents (42 percent) was uncertain about the term of marine

career after the completion of the studies (Fig.2). 18 percent of respondents are planning to work at sea until retirement, 9 percent are planning to work at sea for 6-10 years, 9 percent – for 11-15 years, 2 percent of respondents are planning to work at sea up to 5 years.

From 67 final year maritime students, who participated in the survey, most would terminate their career because of the following reasons:

- health problems, disease (N=44);
- family, small children (N=36);
- occupational injuries (N=28);
- low salary (N=27);
- long term of voyage (N=26);
- poor working conditions on board a ship (N=25);
- psychological issues (N=5);
- establishment of own business or another adequate alternative (N=1).

Three respondents did not identify a reason that would lead them to the termination of the seafarer's career.

3.2 Maritime students' needs and expectations regarding desirable contract conditions

Maritime students (67 respondents) were asked to define, in their opinion, the best job offer.

The most important factors defining a job offer as the best one were named *salary* (bigger, payable on time and adequate to the position held) (N=59) and *shorter employment contracts* (N=53). Most students, 41 percent expressed the opinion, that optimal voyage term would be 1-2 month, 33 percent named 2-3 month and 26 percent named 3-4 month voyage duration.

Maritime students were asked about other working/contract conditions (beside salary and term of voyage), which are important to them personally and would motivate them to work at sea.

Besides salary and term of voyage, the most important working/contract conditions named by maritime students were (Fig.3) the following:

- good relations between the members of the crew (N=48),
- good employment contract and accommodation conditions on board a ship (N=31);
- ship condition and type (N=27);
- navigation area (N=25);
- quality food (N=23);
- proper conditions for rest and sports (N=21);
- good reputation of the company and taking good care of employees (N=21).

Students named *good work tools and good supply* (N=18) as important working/contract conditions. *Internet connection* (N=17) and *career opportunities* (N=13) were indicated as important as well.

Only six students determined the opportunity to travel, *opportunity to see the world* as important working/contract condition to them personally and would motivate them to work at sea.



Figure 3. Maritime students' opinion about desirable working/employment contract conditions (beside salary and term of voyage)

3.3 Shipping and crewing companies experts opinion about working/employment contract conditions, most important for seafarers

The content analysis of the experts' opinions revealed that the following working/employment contract conditions are important to the seafarers and determine their decision to work in a company for a long period:

- salary;
- social security guarantees;
- good reputation and reliability of the company;
- policy of the company;
- term of employment contract;
- compliance of employment contract to the laws;
- career opportunities;
- composition of crew (national);
- navigation area;
- good microclimate on board a ship and professional assistance of the crew.

3.4 Maritime students and experts opinions about seafarers' desired personal and/or professional characteristics

Maritime students (67 respondents) and experts (8 respondents) were asked open-ended question about seafarers personal and/or professional characteristics, which determine their successful employment and career in a company.

Shipping and crewing companies' experts gave very similar responses, indicating their common approach (Fig. 4). Content analysis discovered that all eight experts described professional and personal features: *professional skills, good training, responsibility, communication skills, teamwork skills*, as most important for successful employment and career. Seven of them also named *foreign languages, reliability and tolerance*. Two of them also noted as important *the ability to adapt to the marine shipboard living and working monotony and physical health*.

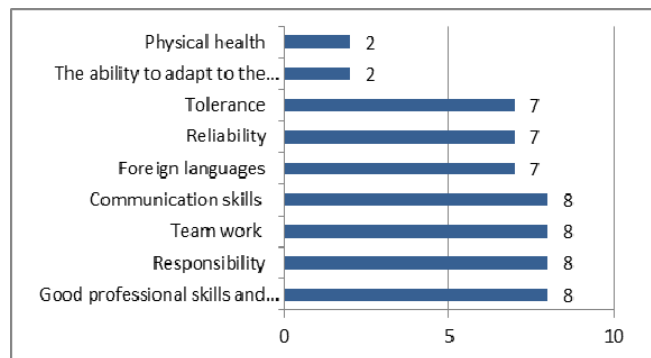


Figure 4. Experts' opinions about seafarers' desired characteristics

Students named as most important features for successful employment and career *assertiveness and diligence* (N=26) and *good professional skills and knowledge* (N=20). After that in descending order they identified *flexibility* (N=17) and *communicability* (N=13), *responsibility* (N=11), *leadership* (N=8), *professional experience* (N=6), *foreign languages and motivation* (N=5).



Figure 5. Students' opinions about seafarers' desired characteristics

Some overlaps and differences in opinions of maritime students and shipping and crewing companies' experts were identified. Both groups, students and companies' experts, highly rated professional skills, attitude (assertiveness, diligence, responsibility) and communicability (teamwork, flexibility). Thus, in general, the younger generation of seafarers demonstrated good adaptability for labour market needs, taking over the main companies' attitudes and approach to work. Here it is worth keeping in mind that students, who

participated in the survey, were final fourth year maritime students, already having about one year practical experience.

On the other hand, students evaluated as less important foreign languages and did not name at all, as important, reliability and tolerance, which were highly rated by the companies' experts.

3.5 The impact of communication with older seafarers on the students' professional knowledge, skills and attitude

Maritime students were asked about the impact of communication with older seafarers during seagoing practice on board a ship on the students' professional knowledge, skills and attitude to towards seafarer's career (Tabl.1).

Table 1. Maritime students answers about the impact of communication with older seafarers during seagoing practice on board a ship on their professional knowledge, skills and attitude to a seafarer's career

Given the professional knowledge	<i>Understood the specifics of the job (R7) Learnt things that helped to perform my assignments safer (R46) ...how something functions and how to do something better (R53) ...need Russian language skills (R57)</i>
Given the motivation to seek a seafarer's career	<i>Promising career opportunities (R17) Made a good impression, motivated to strive for career heights (R20) Motivated to study and go to work at sea, not to abandon seafarer's career (R9)</i>
Given help, forming attitude on seafarer's career	<i>Changed my attitude to performed work (R34) They changed my attitude to... (R43) I was advised to try to grasp a bigger picture (R27) Enabled to understand the real life of a seafarer (R23) I always tried to communicate with them not only about work, but also about life, they gave me good pieces of advice (R58) Helped me to make up my mind on future career (R19)</i>
Revealed negative aspects of seafarer's career	<i>Hard and disadvantageous work, not worth doing due to low salaries (R67) There are no friends, everybody wants to harm each other (R53) If I find a job on shore, work at sea is not worth choosing it (R5) Most seafarers advised to continue studies and to work on shore (R40) To look for as short employment contracts as possible....(R37) Dangerous work (R55)</i>

Maritime students noted positive impact of communication with older seafarers' generations on their professional knowledge, on the motivation to seek a seafarer's career and help forming attitude towards seafarer's career. Besides, students during the communication revealed negative aspects of seafarer's career, a phenomenon known as "learned helplessness" (Ljung & Widell, 2014).

3.6 Conclusions

Maritime labour market, ship owners/managers and seafarers, have changeable characteristics and it is important to know new seafarers' generation needs and career ambitions, as well as expectations from the employers' point of view.

Presented in the article qualitative research was conducted attracting experts from five shipping and crewing companies in Lithuania and three shipping and crewing companies in Latvia and 67 final year maritime students. The qualitative survey revealed main things that are important for settling the balance between the expectations and needs of shipping and crewing companies and young maritime sector specialists' generation.

Answering about the best job offer most maritime students identified salary and short-term (1-2 month) voyages, which offer on the market is not so big. Besides salary and term of voyage, students and companies' experts, as the most important working/contract conditions, named good relations between the members of the crew, good reputation and reliability of the company, navigation area. But only students named as important ship's type and condition, good accommodation conditions on board a ship, quality food and proper conditions for rest and sports, internet connection. As important working/contract conditions students also named good work tools and good supply, but did not mention social security guarantees, named by companies' experts.

Analysing seafarers' personal and/or professional characteristics, which determine their successful employment and career in a company, some overlaps and differences in opinions of maritime students and shipping and crewing companies' experts were identified. Both groups, students and companies' experts, highly rated professional skills, attitude (assertiveness, diligence, responsibility) and communicability (teamwork, flexibility). On the other hand, students evaluated as less important foreign languages and did not name at all, reliability and tolerance, which were highly rated by the companies' experts.

Maritime students noted positive impact of communication with older seafarers' generations on their professional knowledge, on the motivation to seek a seafarer's career and assistance in forming positive attitude towards seafarer's career. However, during the communication older seafarers conveyed to the students negative aspects of seafarer's career as well.

In general, the younger generation of seafarers demonstrated good adaptability for labour market needs, taking over the main companies' attitudes and approach to work.

Accordingly, shipping industry employers need to be ready to adopt appropriate measures to keep the balance between the needs and expectations of both, seeking to improve the future supply of maritime labour.

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