

## 2. Communication and information

A manager communicates just by being there. People aboard identify with the manager whether he speaks out or is silent, acts or does not act. If the manager follows up on something, the crew will see this as important, and if he /she does not, they will reach the opposite conclusion.

So it is important for managers to be aware of their role and to be aware of the consequences of communication.



### Worth knowing about communication

#### The importance of body language

It is not just the spoken word that counts. Non-verbal language often means more than we might be aware of.

However, it is important that you do not begin to be over-conscious of your body language. It is more that you should be aware that your body language also sends messages, such as when you do not mean or believe in what you are standing there saying; or if you are unsure of whether it is right. So the art is to be sure of what you think and what you are going to say and then to communicate that. This will then be reflected in your body language.

#### "We view, sense and interpret the world differently"

When communicating, it is important to be aware of the fact that "we view, sense and interpret the world differently". When difficult situations arise aboard the fact is that those involved take a different view of what the situation really is and who is at fault in what. The illustration here shows this.

None of the people in the circle around the pig see it in quite the same way. For example, the vet sees it as just an animal to be treated. The little girl on holiday sees a sweet little piggy. And she would be sad if she knew that the butcher sees roast pork before his eyes.



In the same way, we as people may have completely different perceptions of the same situation. This makes for misunderstandings and conflict if we are not prepared to understand the way other people see things.



*Good communication is a precondition for well-being.*

An important part of leadership is being able to see our own and others' roles from the outside and try to see what is involved for individuals. As in the illustration of how different people view the pig.

As a manager, you should:

- Avoid secrets and double messages. You may naturally have certain information which you would not share with everybody but be aware of not keeping more secrets than is absolutely necessary.
- Focus on direct, face-to-face communication as often as possible. The interest you show in direct communication can help motivate your employees.

### **Communication aboard**

Communication can be done formally by way of meetings and briefings or informally in ordinary conversation. As we say, direct informal communication can be highly motivating. And informal communication is the most widespread on many vessels. But informal personal communication is not always enough. You risk creating rumours and misunderstandings if everything is done in personal conversations where in the final count, only you know what has been said to whom.

Formal communication can be made via:

- Meetings
- E-mail
- Notice boards

Or consider some other way aimed at generally informing employees and ensuring, in a purely formal sense, that everybody gets the same message. However, the challenge here is to meet the needs of many people at the same time.



*Said does not mean heard; heard does not mean understood; understood does not mean accepted; accepted does not mean done.*

You also need to follow up on things and ensure that the message has been understood. Even though you might feel that things have been said clearly, people can fail to understand the message in the way you had intended. The four communication challenges below illustrate this:

- Said does not mean heard
- Heard does not mean understood
- Understood does not mean accepted
- Accepted does not mean done

### **Worth knowing about meeting leadership**

Meetings aboard are an important tool for ensuring good communication and that people feel they have been listened to and kept informed. So calling general meetings can help promote a sense of good well-being.

At general meetings, it is possible to:

- Inform everybody at the same time
- Get an impression of what is happening aboard
- Get a common view of things
- Discuss and get input for matters relating to life aboard
- Clarify management's feelings and values

Meetings aboard are typically:

- Ship management meetings
- Safety committee meetings
- Operational meetings
- General meetings with the whole crew

### **What are you trying to achieve from the meeting?**

A meeting does not need to be especially long to be effective and give good results. The most important thing is that it is absolutely clear what you are trying to achieve from the meeting. Consider these important questions for having productive meetings:

- What do you want to achieve from meetings?
- What needs to be discussed/decided at the meeting and what could be done at another time or via other channels of communication?
- What options are there for making meetings more lively, varied and motivational?



*A meeting can be about many things. The most important thing is for everyone to clearly understand what the meeting is about.*

### **What kind of meeting is it?**

Is the meeting primarily for information, a consultation in which crew can give their viewpoints, or a decision-making meeting where general agreement has to be reached? It is important to be clear about this before the meeting.

Agenda items are often very different. For example, one item might be for information purposes, another might be for discussion and yet another about making a decision.

It can be a good idea for individual items to state what should be happening. If the intention is clear from the start, it makes the meeting more effective and can make it shorter.

## How can you hold effective meetings?

Effective meetings can be achieved by:

- Ensuring that there is an agenda for the meeting
- Ensuring that agenda items have been prepared and that the people involved know who should be preparing which items
- Introducing the meeting with a "contract" – an explanation of what the meeting is intended to achieve, how much time is available and any priority for agenda items.
- Keeping an eye on the time
- Restricting discussions to agenda items
- Ensuring that all points of view are heard
- Ensuring that decisions are made
- Ending the meeting with a summary of what has been achieved and who is to do what and when
- Following up on decisions made at the meeting

## New crew aboard

A good start with information and a good introduction to life aboard is essential for the well-being of new cadets and crew.

Management is responsible for ensuring that new crew receive a proper introduction.

The aim of an introductory meeting is to get the new people aboard to:

- Feel welcome
- Get to know the vessel
- Get an overview of their duties
- Get a basic understanding of the work, objectives, vision and values of the vessel and the company
- To retain crew in the business

In their first time aboard, new crew members will need:

- To be shown around the vessel and to be introduced to its systems
- To hear of the company's history, development, values, culture, business and assignments, goals and visions. In brief: why are we working here, what is important for us, what kind of work are we doing and where are we going.
- To be told of their duties now and in the future, how work is prioritized, what the deadlines are, what competencies/authority they have. Also who they will be working with internally and externally, quality requirements, when they will be attending meetings, training courses, etc. and the details of their induction.
- To be presented with the vessel's routines, traditions, rules, business processes and deadlines. In brief: what do we do, what don't we do, how do we do it?



*An introduction to life aboard is a good start for new workmates.*

When new aboard, it is difficult to remember everything. So it can be helpful to have a list with notes on the crew and their professional skills. It can also be a good idea to give new people a list of crew with specific knowledge whom they can contact.

So that other crew can quickly get an idea of new people's abilities, the people concerned could send an e-mail or post a brief description of themselves on a common notice board describing their background, professional and personal skills and their forthcoming duties.

### **Professional introduction**

It can be difficult to remember everything that you get told during your first days aboard. So it may be a good idea to extend the induction process by switching between induction and specific jobs. If new crew members need to be trained, find mentors to be responsible for training them up. It is nice to have a technically competent person to consult; you can be 'new' for many months.

### **Social introduction**

The social introduction is important and it is a good idea if an experienced crew member guides the new member. In her / his action the guides can show how the company's values and attitudes work in practice and they can also provide an introduction to social activities aboard.

### **Suitable introduction**

We all learn differently so it is important than the induction process can be modified to meet new colleagues' needs for information. Ask new employees how they find it easiest to learn and organize the process on that basis. Training means being aware of how to do this.

### **Sparring develops new ideas**

Sparring is a good idea when new members of crew are to be instructed in their duties and how they are prioritized. This means that new crew should try to find out for themselves how to do their duties in practice. At the same time, you follow the process so that you can give good advice. It may also possibly give you and those aboard some new ideas as to how work can be done.

### **Appraisal meetings**

It is a good idea to have an appraisal meeting after a few weeks. The aim is to assess new people's first weeks aboard and to identify their needs for development and training in the short term.

It is important that new arrivals get clear, unambiguous feedback on their immediate superior's view of their first months aboard from a work as well as a social point of view.

This also makes it possible to have a mutual dialogue on the requirements and expectations that those concerned have for their future duties.

This process can really help to ensure that the people concerned thrive aboard and want to remain in the sector. Cadets or inexperienced seamen may need to have special attention paid to how things are going for them and that they get to use their skills and ideas aboard.

### **Ground rules for communication**

Another part of communication aboard involves using the right tone and speaking in the right way.

Reaching mutual agreement on "Good communication aboard" helps establish a common starting point for good communication. If the tone aboard is tough and inappropriate, the tool on next page can provide the basis for discussion and agreements so that you can rely on each other.

### **Tool 1: Developing the Ground Rules**

The ground rules can be worked out in several short meetings with the whole crew present. Each meeting need not take more than 30 minutes if those present know about what is involved and that the meeting has also been otherwise well-prepared.

#### **1. Mapping – 1st meeting**

Ask people to consider the question: "What do you consider is a good way of speaking to each other?"

Take turns to make a suggestion each.

Write suggestions up on the flipover. Ask whether there are others who have a similar suggestion. For example if the answer is "Tell the person concerned that you are dissatisfied", find out whether there are others who have a similar suggestion.

Gather the suggestions into some common agreed themes – preferably no more than five or six in all – and post them somewhere where everybody passes by.

#### **2. Prioritising – 2nd meeting**

If there are lots of different suggestions, prioritize the 5-10 most important agreements on "Good communication aboard" (read more about how to work on priorities on p. 86 in the "Focusing on well-being" tool).

#### **3. How to follow the rules – 3rd meeting**

Agree on how to ensure compliance with the ground rules. Should there be quarterly meetings to review the situation? What should be done if people do not comply? Who is to be responsible for monitoring compliance?

**Tool 2: Developing the Ground Rules**

Another slightly more amusing game can be based on:

"10 ground rules for ensuring that communication aboard creates conflicts and poor well-being."

- If you disagree with a colleague or manager, do not go to see them but tell everybody else what your disagreement is about
- Stick to what you believe - instead of asking
- Call out and criticise when there is something you think is not how it should be, instead of asking and checking
- Make up and repeat rumours – rather than further investigating things
- Only arrange meetings for those that already agree with each other
- In any event, have as few meetings as possible
- Stick to the workmates you already agree with and avoid everybody else – in the mess and elsewhere.
- As captain and manager, show yourself as little as possible in areas where crew are present.
- As captain and manager, ensure that the crew know as little about your plans and each other's jobs and duties as possible
- And give brief, unclear messages when assigning duties

Discuss the ten ground rules and then make your own and talk about how you would really like things to be aboard, which can also help prevent bullying.

**If you want to know more**

"The mental working environment in practice", Jørgen Møller Christansen et. al., Personnel Management. September 2005. (Only available in Danish)

Available on the Danish State Employer's Authority website at [www.perst.dk](http://www.perst.dk)

"Håndbog om psykisk arbejdsmiljø" (Mental Working Environment Handbook), Danish Working Environment Service. Ver. 3. Published December 2004. (Only available in Danish)

Available from the Working Environment Service website at [www.at.dk](http://www.at.dk)