

7. Multicultural crew management

In addition to the different nationalities, multiculturalism can also involve different cultures for the different groups aboard, meaning that the different groups may have different ways of seeing things and different ideas about who is the most important aboard. They might for example be the people on the bridge rather than those in the engine room, or the young rather than the older people aboard. Here, the watchword for good well-being aboard is to know each other well.



Taking a structured approach to each other

You can hold an introductory 'getting-to-know-you' meeting aboard at the start of a tour at which people introduce themselves.

Everyone can be asked to say something about their background, about what they have done in the past and where they have sailed. Then people know who they are working with.

There could also be a discussion on such questions as:

- What is good seamanship?
- What makes a good workmate?
- How can we have a good tour together, one that can meet our expectations?

You can also discuss well-being in a mixed crew by talking about:

- What are the advantages of our having different cultural backgrounds?
- What are the disadvantages of our having different cultural backgrounds?
- How can we ensure that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?

Those attending the meeting should get the questions in advance but they should not be answered in writing.

This could help towards more common understanding and perhaps also some understanding as to why people take a different view of some essential things.

Clear expectations from management

Such meetings also give management the chance to report a little on the expectations they have for the tour and about well-being aboard.

There may be other things that are significant for multiculturalism. For example, it would probably be important for it to be emphasized that people should ask or go to their supervisor if there is something they are in doubt about.

Consider making it clear when a common ship's language should be used so that everybody can join in.

(See also more on Developing the ground rules for communication p. 76)



Make a special effort to get to know each other.

Prejudice exercise

A slightly different, amusing exercise that you might consider arranging on a more festive occasion is to divide the crew in two different groups such as engine room versus bridge, young versus old or the different nationalities aboard.

Each group should talk about what prejudices they think the other groups have about themselves. The other groups then take their turns.

This means that if it was about nationalities, the Danes should say what prejudices they believe the Filipinos have about the Danes, and then what prejudices the Poles have about Danes.

Then switch so that the Filipinos say what prejudices they think the other groups have about them in general.

Or perhaps the people from the bridge should say what prejudices they believe the other groups aboard have about people on the bridge.



What must the fish be thinking about us?

This exercise makes it possible to laugh at each other's prejudices but it also enables people to talk about what cultural differences there really are and what as a member of the team one should be aware of for good social relations aboard.

If you want to know more

"If you are a good leader I am a good follower", Fabienne Knudsen, Report on "Working and leisure relations between Danes and Filipinos aboard Danish vessels", 2003
Downloadable at: www.seahealth.dk

