

FORUM

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The Paradigm and the Paradox of Perfect Pilotage

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It is an unpalatable truth but by and large the success or failure of navigating a merchant ship in confined pilotage waters rests largely with a single individual – the pilot. Should the pilot make an error of judgement (to err is human) then his/her position as a single but vital weak link can be rapidly and cruelly exposed. Bridge teams and pilots need to improve their mutual understanding and expectations. Passage planning needs more consideration and more timely communication. The Master Pilot Exchange (MPX) needs to change from a tick-box exercise to something more meaningful, more substantive and above all, to represent a plan that can be executed and monitored.

KEY WORDS

1. Bridge Team Functions.
2. Communication.
3. Electronic MPX.

1. INTRODUCTION. Even bridge teams who have undergone bridge resource management training often do not work with the pilot, apart from what could be summed up as administrative functions such as instructing the crew at the various outstations on the ship. There are exceptions to this, particularly when the bridge team has collectively trained as a team. Although individuals should be interchangeable within the team as crew join and leave the vessel, a well-drilled team work better together if they stay together. A good example of this is a cruise ship. On boarding such a vessel, the pilot is often welcomed into the bridge team, is given a full brief and individual responsibilities are clarified. However, this is the exception rather than the rule.

The challenge is therefore not to just install more technology onto a ship, or to simply train officers on how to use this equipment. The solution lies between the two. Maritime Resource Management (MRM) is a training program that has been developed by The Swedish Club Academy. It is a continuation of bridge team or Bridge Resource Management (BRM) training and it goes a long way to addressing the problem. The main assumption is that all the skills required to navigate the ship safely already exist. This type of training should be near the top of any Continuous Professional Development (CPD) schedule undertaken by pilots and Masters. The advantage of the Master undertaking MRM is that he can ‘spread the gospel’ when he returns to his ship and lead his team, which includes the pilot. Unlike BRM, much of the emphasis of MRM is directed towards two individuals; the Master and the pilot (or conning officer). The course is thought provoking and delivers a subtle but very powerful message.

The key is to be able to slot the pilot into the bridge team, or for the ship’s own conning-officer to assume that position and for the remainder of the team to support him by actively monitoring the conning orders. This means more than checking that the helmsman puts the rudder the correct way when an order is given. It means that for example, set/leeway is applied in the right direction by the pilot ; it means that if the pilot states that he intends entering the harbour or a major turn at 8 knots, the ship is not doing 12 knots because the pilot has been distracted and has not slowed down in time. In the first instance, the scene must be set correctly to encourage challenge and reply responses to conning orders. And communication and orders must follow a closed-loop pattern.

All that is now required is an agreed passage plan.