Deck Cadet Training Reality and Challenges

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1. Introduction

The consensus among companies and policy makers is that the STCW guided training programs for deck cadets are satisfactory and will lead the industry to competency if properly implemented.

In this short article, the authors are going to highlight some shadow areas and pointing out some issues to improve the present training system, and hopefully, shift the focus from making guidelines and training books to the real monitoring of the onboard training.

2. Onboard Training

The role of onboard training in achieving the competency can be clearly seen in the Onboard Knowledge Transfer Flow chart, Fig. 1.

![Onboard Knowledge Transfer Flow Chart](image)

Fig. 1: Onboard Knowledge Transfer Flow Chart

The key parameters for a successful training are as follows:

- Education Institutions
- Company
- Training Officer
- Cadet

Most of companies are complying with the requirements of the STCW as far as the training policies and guidance are concerned. However, training cadets is not limited to fulfilling the requirements of STCW.

3. Education and Training System as Conceived

The minimum required knowledge to be transferred to cadets is already decided by the STCW; therefore, the onboard training period as conceived is a simple guidance program to complete the required tasks under tight supervision of the training officer.

In general, cadets join onboard training programs, and then will be assigned a mentor/coach to familiarize them with the ship and teach them all what is related to onboard safety. Through their training period, cadets develop their skills and acquire organizational knowledge that will lead them to competency.

4. Actual Education and Training System

In reality the training programs never work as described above. It is due to many reasons that can be summarized in the following:

- Absorptive capacity of the cadets
- Availability of the training officer
- Poor incentives from the company (the famous "not invented here" syndrome)
- Inadequate structures (ex: rigid operating procedures)
- Culture background that impedes the transfer of organizational knowledge.
5. The Role of Training Officer

The role of the training officer, as far the training is concerned, can vary from one rank to another. Therefore it is important to recognize the tasks that individuals in these roles are typically responsible for. The role of the training officer is mapped in Tab.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description of the Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>Over-all Training Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Officer</td>
<td>Over-all Training Officer as designated by the company, or delegated by Captain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Officer (if applicable)</td>
<td>Training Officer as delegated by Captain or Chief Officer, on matters related to cargo, safety, and security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Officer</td>
<td>Training Officer as delegated by Captain or Chief Officer on matters related to nautical charts, passage planning, and navigational equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Officer</td>
<td>Training Officer with the supervision of Captain or Chief Officer in matters related safety and routine maintenance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boatswain (Petty Officer)</td>
<td>Coaching regarding deck maintenance work and all seamanship related items under the direct supervision of the Chief Officer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: The Boatswain is not entitled to be a Training Officer. However, due to his role in the seamanship knowledge transfer, he can be considered as a coach.

6. The Effect of Training Policies

The training policy can affect onboard training in many ways, such as the length of onboard training and the incentives given through the program. In many situations, cadets are enrolled through programs designed by a country other than theirs. The subject matter is out of the reach of this article, a further research is needed to draw conclusions. Tab.3 illustrates the big differences between the training policies.

If we compare Aviation to Maritime industry, it is clear that the next big challenge to IMO is to unify and standardize the training programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>College Education</th>
<th>Onboard Training</th>
<th>Simulator (Optional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria (Old System)</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria (New System)</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>4.5 years</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India (Old System)</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>36 months</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India (New System 1)*</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>24 months</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India (New System 2)*</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: The graduation diploma is a certificate of eligibility to onboard training as cadet for option 1, and a Bachelor Degree in Nautical Science for the option 2.

7. Competent Officers vs. Affordable Officers

Could the solution to the deck cadet training issue be easily fixed by the ship owners and main industry actors asking the question, 'what is needed the most, competent officers or affordable officers?' Under this background we have launched a discussion panel through "The Nautical Institute" and "Maritime Education and Training – MET" social networks and the feedback was as expected; everyone is worried of the present
decline trend of competency. It was also found that it is becoming more common to look for the most affordable officers, rather than the best officers. It shocking to know that the competency issue is a worldwide issue, but also good to know that everyone is trying his best to solve it.

8. Conclusions and Future Research

The competitiveness and effectiveness of a shipping company will ultimately depend on the competency of its manpower and the knowledge assets they possess. This short paper argues that the present training programs, as conceived by STCW, are enough to raise the competency of the deck cadets. However, a more effective and sustainable approach should be adopted to tackle all the challenges, because focusing on some stages of the training but not others is less effective than moving along with all stages with an integrated fashion.

A deeper research on the matter is undergoing by the authors; the results will be published in the near future.

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