

Best Practice – Is It Worth It?

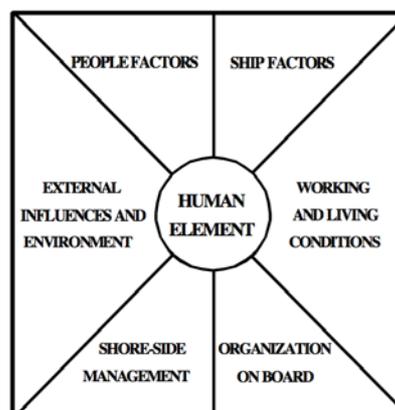
The reports **CHIRP** receives relating to hazardous occurrences or near misses reveal a large variability in the quality of safety management, not within a fleet's safety management system but rather in the application of procedures onboard each vessel. To address this, CHIRP advocates the sharing and more importantly implementing of best practice. This should be carefully considered, and the common drive must be focused on people - not the written text. Operational best practices should not only consider quality, safety and protection of the environment but also health.

Best practice should be an attitude that is visibly encouraged, on board and in shore offices, with procedures clearly describing the experiences of successful companies and the solutions they have adopted. Ship managers and seafarers should then adopt or adapt such procedures for their everyday tasks. A collection of best practices should not be seen as a recipe for success, they should be used to trigger discussions about areas to look at and where to implement sensible change.

The Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF) created the Tanker Management and Self Assessment (TMSA) programme in 2004 as a tool to help companies assess, measure and improve their management systems. It is an essential complement to IMO Conventions, Codes and Circulars and is intended to encourage self-regulation and promote continuous improvement to enhance the safety of merchant shipping and achieve incident free operations. Encouragingly, this sector of the shipping industry did not stop looking for improvement in best practice and TMSA it is now in its third edition.

OCIMF provides guidance that is accessible to everyone, and yet we have not seen other sections of the shipping industry venturing to support, complement or offer improvements in best practice. It is time for dry bulk, containership, cruise ship and general cargo companies to make a belated contribution to the sharing and adoption of best practice.

Improvement can create best practices, but there are still too many incidents resulting in fatalities and serious injuries, with the causal factors being routinely attributed to human error. It is sad to see some sectors of our shipping industry stop their investigations at this stage. There is a very different culture in aviation, when an investigation only really starts once they have identified the Human Element. Despite the November 1999 IMO Assembly resolution A.884(21) "Amendments to the Code for the Investigation of Marine Casualties and Incidents", where the Human Element is clearly described as having a number of factors that have a direct or indirect impact on human behaviour and the potential to perform tasks, maritime investigations, (both company and national), remain unwilling to truly address root cause and human factors. These factors are illustrated in the following diagram:



Do you see these factors taken into consideration when incidents and hazardous occurrences are investigated on your ship? Try using this diagram and then consider the Human

Element's Deadly Dozen (see Chapter 10 of the **CHIRP** 2017 Annual Digest) - the findings may surprise you and start you along the road to best practice.

Good communication is very essential when managing changes in attitude, particularly with respect to the safety culture onboard. The days when the ship's crews would use their spare time for making music, playing games and socialising together appear to be from a bygone era. Today people stay in their cabins with their computers, thereby creating a challenge for leaders who seek to foster a feeling of teamwork and being part of a company culture; especially if that company offers only single voyage contracts. Each ship manager should, as a minimum, appoint the same senior officers back to the same vessel. This must be the ultimate goal of crew planning in order to encourage a stronger commitment from senior officers for 'their' vessel.

Multi-cultural crews may be cheaper, but they pose an even greater challenge to successful human interaction. The quality of the work depends on the whole team, not just an individual, so investing time and encouraging a team culture is highly recommended. Shore-side personnel should not be automatically excluded from this team.

Making sure guidelines and manuals are applied in the work place will only work well if there is two-way communication between the ship and the shore staff. Over ten years ago **CHIRP** raised concern over the quality and content of ships' operations and maintenance manuals, but there has been little improvement since then. All too often the shore-based staff that procure equipment do not ensure appropriate manuals accompany the product they have purchased, even though it would obviously contribute to best practice procedures.

Above all, the quality and safety of operations depends on crew awareness, which is kept on a high level by continuous training and a free flow of information. Nurturing a "no blame" or a "just" culture is to be encouraged, especially when pinpointing a near miss or hazardous occurrence then discussing how to avoid it the next time. Whilst it is mandatory in the ISM Code, there is often uncertainty about how best to conduct and then document risk assessments onboard, so clear direction by shore managers on this subject is very important. Protection of the environment and occupational health are subjects equally important, and the role of **CHIRP** has been widened to include reports on these matters. The benefit lies not only in improving performance in these areas by raising awareness, but also because they can provide an indication of the level of compliance with the safety management system onboard.

Equipment and ship designers, need to adopt best practice by simply working as a team, and asking users of their equipment for their input, experience and their wisdom at the design stage. Ergonomics must be considered in the design of the work stations that seafarers are expected to use, especially in safety-critical operations. The design of equipment on the navigation bridge and in the engine control room all too often fall below users' expectations when they start to operate the equipment. This should be disappointing for any ship owner, given the level of investment in crews and ships and the high value of the cargoes they transport around the globe. Best practice not only improves the quality of operations, safety, and protection of the environment, but also the financial health of a company.