

TRAINEE SEAFARERS/MARINERS PERCEPTION TOWARDS A CAREER IN SAILING

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Abstract

The global shipping industry is increasingly relying on India as a favored source of its current and future seafarer demand. Currently, in some parts of the world, particularly the traditional maritime countries, there is an apparent reluctance on the part of young people to choose seafaring as a profession. And even for those young people who do make that choice, their careers at sea are often short as they are either unwilling or unable to take on higher duties or, even more importantly, they actively chose not to remain at sea. This paper explores the trainee seafarers/mariners perception towards sailing career, the reasons for choosing sailing career, their preference to continue sailing etc. The study has been conducted among one batch of trainee mariners at CIFNET, Chennai. The study findings reveal that interest towards adopting sailing as a career is very less among the trainee seafarers and the primary reason for choosing sailing is good salary and tax break. Moreover only 5% of the trainee seafarers stated that they will continue sailing and will not quit the profession even after few years of sailing. However the demand for seafarers is increasing globally. In short, a career at sea has to be more attractive proposition for youngsters than the available alternatives ashore. The industry has, to do much more to improve the way it is perceived and the sociological and financial factors, which explain the limited attraction to a seafaring career.

Keywords: Trainee, Seafarers / Mariners, Perception, Sailing, CIFNET, Career

INTRODUCTION

Seafarers/mariners are defined in this research as those who work or have worked in any role within the maritime industries. Demand for seafarers is rising. The burden of maintaining a sustainable supply of seafarers to the world is squarely on Asia, where Asian markets accounted for 42% share of mariners in 2005. The global shipping industry is increasingly relying on India as a favored source of its current and future seafarer demand, because it acknowledges that India has the means to satisfy the numbers shortage and the Indian academic system provides the strongest foundation for building high standards of skills, initiatives, professionalism and leadership required of the modern seafarers. It is estimated that 36,000 new seafarers are required every year. Out of its total population of 1.1 billion, India's current pool of seafarers amasses a mere 110,000. Whilst estimates of demand varies, there is a general agreement that the world is short of qualified and experienced seafarers and the

situation is predicted to get much worse. Estimates of demand for new seafarers varied, ranging from a further 167,000 by 2012 to 250,000 by 2015 (Forsyth CJ and Gramling R, (1990)^[1] .

Currently, in some parts of the world, particularly the traditional maritime countries, there is an apparent reluctance on the part of young people to choose seafaring as a profession. And even for those young people who do make that choice, their careers at sea are often short as they are either unwilling or unable to take on higher duties or, even more importantly, they actively chose not to remain at sea (Forsyth CJ and Gramling R, 1987) ^[2]. One primary reason for low levels of recruitment is the perception towards the industry. Amongst potential recruits it is seen as low achieving, hard, dangerous and dirty, poor quality and balance of work and family, poor career prospects and increased criminalization and other external issues related to pirates and hostages.

Seafaring as a career option is facing stiff competition from other streams and lucrative options opening up to the youth. The much criticized criminalization of seafarers for pollution incidents, and victimization of seafarers in the fight against international terrorism, has further diminished the worth of a seafaring career in the youth's perception. This task needs to be addressed by improving the image of shipping. Bringing a social dimension onboard ship, so potential youth can still consider the sea as their long-term career, is crucial. Shipping industry in its entirety has been very short sighted in its policies towards tackling Human Resource issues. Owing to the importance and demand and the importance of this industry it is the time to move away from this short-termism and look at the broader picture by the Government.

Importance of Seafarers

Seafarers provide a vital service to an industry that contributes significantly to global and sustainable development and prosperity by carrying the world's commerce safely, securely, efficiently and at a fraction of the environmental impact and cost of other modes of transport. Indeed, shipping carries more than 90% of world trade – and, given that the bulk of this trade consists of commodities such as grain and oil, the data leads to the inescapable conclusion that, without shipping, half the world would starve and the other half would freeze. This immense job is done by close to 100,000 merchant ships, manned by over 1¼ million seafarers from all over the world. Against an estimated total world population of 6.7 billion, these figures draw a stunning conclusion: that the feeding and heating needs of the entire world are dependent on just over 1 million seafarers.

Shipping Industry

The shipping industry itself is both at the heart of the problem and holds most of the cards in reaching a solution to the shortage of seafarers. International shipping is characterized by the mariners/seafarers' absence from home for many months to years at a time. Such a life style can be a problem both for the seafarer and his family. Today they mostly work schedules like 4 months on ship

and 2 months off at home or 3 months on ship and 3 months off the ship for officer ranks. For crew they work 8 months on ship and 2 months off at home or 6 months on and 2 months off the ship. In short, a career at sea has to be more attractive a proposition for youngsters than the available alternatives ashore (Hutchison, 2008)^[3].

The shipping industry has, therefore, to do much more to improve the way it is perceived and the sociological (work-life balance) and financial factors, which explain the limited attraction to a seafaring career. The shipping industry should take a closer look at today's lifestyles and do more to make life away from home more akin to the life enjoyed by others ashore. The aim of this paper is to introduce the topic of work-life balance, to explain why it is of contemporary interest, to identify some of the key conceptual and empirical issues and to open up the topic for the social need and requirement. This study also explains the basic concepts associated with the Mariners work life balance in relation to the work and family, parents, social role by carrying out successive way of the sea marine job and balancing of the family in real sense (Parker AW and Briggs L et. al.,)^[5].

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Seafaring can be an interesting and rewarding occupation. About 92.5% of the world trade is still conducted through sea. Many seafarers choose the profession for its lucrative returns within a short period of time; they also have the advantage of travelling ports around the world, without worrying about travel expenses and hotel accommodation. Some people also like the challenge and the adventure behind their work. Ever decreasing crew sizes are making the problem worse for many. If there are no sea farers half of the world will starve and freeze, but seafarers are considered as terrorists in many countries and are treated very badly and are not given due respect. Loneliness, homesickness and "burn out" syndrome have been identified as the three main psychological problems among seafarers. These are caused by long periods away from home, the reduced number of seafarers per ship, and increased automation. These trends have also reduced opportunities

to develop a social life and for recreational activities at sea. Also the biggest cause of stress is the relationship between home and work. Marital and family problems are known to contribute to suicides at sea (Parker AW, Clavarino A et. al., 1998) ^[6].

Today the most important problem faced by the sea farer is piracy the victimization of seafarers. Piracy has become a common phenomenon and many ships and vessels have been hijacked by pirates in Somalia (Roberts S, 2000) ^[7]. The latest figures say that more than 732 cases of abduction are reported till date and the average ransom demanded by the pirates is 3.5 to 5 million US dollars. Another problem faced is the criminalization of seafarers in other countries (Thomas M. et al., 2003) ^[8]. In some small ports in a few countries, the crews are not allowed to go ashore and even if they are allowed, they are not allowed to buy or bring anything from ashore. All the above discussed challenges make the youth develop a degrading image on the profession. Hence this study was undertaken to analyze the trainee mariners' perception towards choosing sailing as their career.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the seafarers perception towards sailing as their career.
2. To study the trainee seafarers opinion towards work life balance and family life balance while sailing.
3. To find out the support rendered by the seafarers family for their career.
4. To analyze the seafarers preference to leaving sailing after few years of service.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Seafarers face a range of specific problems that other workers do not, such as separation from home and family, inability to maintain shore-based routines, intense proximity to work colleagues, limited opportunities to have time away from work, and a hazardous working environment in which accidents and mortality rates are high (Roberts, 2000) ^[7].

As (Papathanassis, A & Gibson, P. ,2009) ^[4] found out that research specific on seafarers in terms of relationship between Human Resource and leadership towards the most valuable source of the industry, its people is very scarce. The invisibility of the real ships life might be the main reason for the lack of academic studies on that field. One of the most significant reports, which have never been published, was written in the late 1990's by a former captain, who was asked to take a closer look at seafarers' conditions on cruise ships.

Research Gap

The previous research studies focused on the HR aspects of shipping industry and seafarers such as work life balance, working conditions, motion sickness and technological aspects. A focus group was conducted with 20 mariners at London during April 2008 revealed the seafarers reasons for choosing sailing as their career, concern areas, reasons for quitting etc. This study mainly throws light on the trainee seafarers' opinion towards sailing as their career and their preference towards quitting sailing. This study also explains the role and support of family offered to the seafarers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

This study followed descriptive research design. Both primary data and secondary data were collected for the study. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaire and secondary data were collected from previous studies and websites.

Participants

Trainee seafarers undergoing training at CIFNET Chennai were the respondents of this study. The CIFNET – Central Institute of Fisheries, Nautical and Engineering Training Institute is a training institute established by the Government of India for providing Marine training, teaching and imparting practical knowledge in Marine field.

The institute conducts three regular degree and ancillary courses. The programs are run by the Government of India and highly useful

in the national level for the Marine cadets' career growth progress. These Trainee Mariners undergo training in this Institute for the period of two years and obtain theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of the Marine and finally become Seafarers.

Questionnaire distribution

A Structured Questionnaire was constructed to obtain data for the study and the questionnaires were distributed to the trainee mariners studying in their last year of the course. The data were collected soon after the trainee seafarers returned from on sea training to get a better response.

Response rates

The class comprised of 40 trainee mariners and the responses were collected from all the seafarers.

Ethics

The study was conducted with approval from CIFNET.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Interest towards sailing

The trainee mariners were asked to state their interest towards sailing and choosing sailing as their career as presented in table 1 and table

Table 1 - Mariners Interest towards Sailing

Interpretation: Three fourth of the respondents stated that they are interested in sailing.

Table 2 - Mariners Interest towards Sailing as their Career

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Interesting	12	30
Neither / nor	27	67.5
Boring	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Interpretation: Around two third of the mariners stated that they are neither interested nor uninterested in a sailing career and only around one third of the mariners stated that they are interested in a sailing career. Generally mariners are better paid than those working on shore, which may be a reason for a neutral opinion.

Reasons for choosing sailing as their career

According to a focus group conducted among young seafarers conducted at London during April 2010, the following reasons were cited by the young seafarers for going to sea – viz. • Salary & tax break, • Family tradition, •

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very good and Adventurous	22	55
Okay	13	32.5
Very poor and Stressful	05	12.5
Response Total	Frequency 40	Percentage 100
Very much interested	30	75
Neither / Nor	7	17.5
Not at all	3	7.5
Total	40	100

Opportunity to see the world, • Lifestyle – hard work but long breaks – balance – shorter contracts, paid vacation, • Job opportunities – absence of other options and • Challenge – interesting work – deck & engine. The trainees' reason for choosing sailing as their career is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 – Reasons for Choosing Sailing Career

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Good salary & tax break	29	72.5
Lifestyle	3	7.5
Opportunity to see the world	5	12.5
Family tradition	2	5
Job opportunities	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Interpretation: Around three fourth of the respondents stated that they chose sailing career because of the lucrative returns – Good Salary and tax break.

Sailing experience

Physiological conditions (such as seasickness, motion sickness etc. arising from oscillatory movements or whole body vibration while onboard sea vessels), psychosocial (Stress, loneliness etc.) and environmental conditions (different weather conditions, different type of people) may crucially affect the operational performance of mariners at sea.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very good, family likes	21	52.5
Neither / Nor	12	30
Family does not like	07	17.5
Total	40	100

The respondents reported their sea training experience and quality of work life during their training at sea. The results are presented in table 4 and table 5.

Table 4 – Trainee Mariners opinion extent their Experience during Sea Training

Interpretation: Only around half of the

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	27	67.5
Normal	11	27.5
Very poor	02	05
Total	40	100

respondents stated that their sailing was very good and adventurous. Sailing for a holiday is perceived as joyful and memorable. However sailing deep sea is not always enjoyable as a profession. Depending on the water tides the sailors may experience seasickness which leaves a terrible sea experience.

Table 5 – Mariner’s Opinion towards their Quality of Work Life while Sailing

Interpretation: Around two third of the seamen stated that they their quality of work life was very good while sailing.

Mariners and their Family

Thomas et al (2003) [8] argue that separation from family is the main cause of stress for a seafarer. Similarly the family of seafarer has to face the separation and the absence of seafarer frequently and adapt their lifestyle. According to the focus group outcomes, one of the reasons cited by the young seafarers to quit sailing is conflict with family life. Hence the trainees were asked to state their family opinion, support and preference towards the seafarers sailing. The results are presented in table 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Table 6 - Family opinion and Support towards Mariners Sailing

Interpretation: Around half of the respondents stated that their family prefers and supports them for sailing and around 17% stated that their family does not like or support them sailing.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very good Objective	18	45
Neutral It is fine	14	35
Very poor Neither / Nor	8	20
Total	40	100

Table 7 - Mariners Opinion towards Family Work Life Balance while Sailing

Interpretation: Around half of the respondents stated that their family and work life balance is fine and around 8% stated that their family work life balance is poor.

Table 8 - Family's preference towards a Marine Career

Interpretation: Around two third of the respondents prefer and support marine career and 5% of the respondents stated that their family do not prefer their marine career.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	27	67.5
To a certain extent	13	32.5
Total	40	100

Table 9 - Mariners Ability to Fulfill Family Requirements while Sailing

Interpretation: Around two third of the respondents stated that they are able to fulfill their family demands while sailing.

Work life balance

Work-life balance is a broad concept that encompasses prioritizing between *work* (career and ambition), and *life* (such as health, leisure, family, pleasure and spiritual development). The respondents' opinion towards their work life balance is presented in table 10.

Table 10 - Mariners Overall Opinion towards their Work Life Balance

Interpretation: One fifth of the respondents opined that their work life balance is poor.

Seafaring Career

Due to their high levels of education and training there is a huge demand for Indian seafarers. However many mariners are dropping out of seafaring and few remain in that profession. The reasons cited are bad experience onboard, family conflict, loss of a member of their family, homesick, no family support, other job/business prospects etc. Hence the respondents were asked to state their preference towards a career in seafaring and whether they would recommend the career to their friends and relatives. The

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Family prefers me choosing marine career	27	67.5
Family suggests other career options	11	27.5
Family does not prefer marine career	02	05
Total	40	100

trainee seafarers were also asked to state their preference towards leaving sailing. The results are presented in table 11, 12 and 13.

Table 11 - Mariners' Preference towards a Marine Career

Interpretation: Around two third of the respondents stated that they prefer to continue the marine career and around one third stated that they are considering other career options.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Prefer to continue	27	67.5
Considering other options	11	27.5
Total	40	100

Table 12 - Mariners Recommendation of Marine Career to Friend and Relatives

Interpretation: Around two third of the respondents stated that they will definitely recommend marine as a career to their friends and relatives.

people to choose seafaring as a profession. And even for those young people who do make that choice, their careers at sea are

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Will definitely recommend	26	65
Will explain pros and cons	10	25
Never recommend	04	10
Total	40	100

Table13 – Trainee Mariners opinion for quitting sailing after few years

Interpretation: Due to the various problems –

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Will definitely quit sailing after few years	26	65
Depending on family requirements	12	30
No will continue	02	05
Total	40	100

often short as they are either unwilling or unable to take on higher duties or, even more importantly, they actively chose not to remain at sea. Previously conducted studies reveal that the Mariners are working out at sea for some year and then due to many reasons they are leaving ships and move to shore jobs. With a global shortage of seafarers from the shipping companies' perspective it is more important to retain good quality seafarers.

like family, health and others, few mariners quit sailing after few years. Around two third of the trainee mariners stated that they will definitely quit sailing after few years of sea experience.

The study findings reveal that interest towards adopting sailing as a career is very less among the trainee seafarers and the primary reason behind choosing sailing is its good salary and tax break. Moreover the findings indicate that only around half of the respondents' family supports the trainees for a career in seafaring. It is also found that even though around two third of the trainee seafarers prefer to continue sailing and recommend to their friends and relatives, only 5% of the trainee seafarers have stated that they will continue sailing and will quit even after few years of sailing.

Conclusions

The global shipping industry is increasingly relying on India as a preferred source of its current and future seafarer demand, because it acknowledges that India has the means to satisfy the numbers shortage and the Indian academic system provides the strongest foundation for building high standards of skills, initiatives, professionalism and leadership required of the modern seafarers. Currently, in some parts of the world, particularly the traditional maritime countries, there is an apparent reluctance on the part of young

The shipping industry has, therefore, to do much more to improve the way it is perceived and the sociological (work/life balance) and financial factors, which explain the limited attraction to a seafaring career. Existing seafarers should be urged to promote the shipping industry as a career. Senior masters and chief engineers might be invited to speak to youngsters on their experiences and thoughts of serving at sea. And the industry itself might also initiate discussions with local communities to honor seafarers for services rendered towards the betterment of human

life. This could probably be achieved through shorter duty period on board, long-term contracts, more frequent paid leave, social security, improved communications including internet access and more humane treatment.

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