

ADVANTAGES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT PRIOR TO EMPLOYMENT AND PROMOTION

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The shipping industry stands to gain many benefits by taking advantage of modern scientific psychology. Like a handful of other areas - the aviation industry, the nuclear industry, the space industry and the military - the shipping industry is putting extremely expensive and potentially dangerous equipment in other people's hands.

These other areas have long used psychological assessment methods for selecting personnel mostly for safety reasons, realising that they have to put somewhat stricter demands on personnel that manage such powerful forces. Moreover, they also realise that investing in good quality people pays off.

One example of increased safety and cost saving comes from the Swedish Air Force, which managed to reduce its casualties by 75% by using assessment and careful selection of pilots. Furthermore they only got 10% dropouts from the pilots' academy in comparison to the 70% they suffered before implementing psychological assessment. This gave the academy the opportunity to reduce the overall number of students.

Norman F. Dixon, Professor of psychology at University College, London, a world leading authority on the Human Factor, referred to this extraordinary outcome in the following way:

"Over the years, Sweden, like most other countries which boast an air force, suffered a loss of lives and aircrafts, with modern aeroplanes costing upwards of eleven million pounds each and the price of training replacement pilots over two million pounds a time, the country could ill afford.

On the assumption that some young men entering the airforce were more accident-prone than others, it was decided to try and weed out these susceptible individuals before they killed themselves. To this end Professor Kragh at the University of Lund developed what has turned out to be one of the greatest benefits that experimental psychology has ever conferred upon suffering humanity - the Defense Mechanism Test (DMT)."

*From: Dixon, Norman F, **Our Own Worst Enemy** (London, Jonathan Cape 1987, p. 79).*

Since 1989 we have been using DMT as one of our main tools when assessing officers and engineers and other senior positions and we have found that it has an unparalleled capacity to unfold all important character traits and capacities of an individual.

As a supplement, because DMT has to be administered by a trained psychologist, we have developed a separate psychological assessment system for the maritime industry. Stena

Line, the largest ferry operator in the world, uses this assessment method, called Masterline Marine, in their recruitment of all other seagoing personnel. Their personnel department was previously forced to evaluate - by interview only - more than one thousand applicants for their catering departments every summer season.

Today they bring together applicants in groups of about fifty at a time for between one and two hours and administer the test. After individual completion and computerised evaluation, the test results show which applicants will meet their company standards and the Stena personnel staff can thus limit their efforts to proceed only with the applicants they are interested in. They thus use the test both for screening and assessment.

Besides saving time and a considerable amount of money, they also have been successful in improving the overall standard and performance of the catering staff as well as the standard of reception and onboard service for their rather demanding passengers.

The personnel staff at Stena is trained by our maritime psychologists in how to administer, computer-process and interpret the test results. The aim of the training is that a subscribing shipping or manning company should be able to utilise Masterline Marine independently as their in-house personnel assessment method for employment as well as a guidance tool for promotions.

This method is, to my knowledge, the only specially developed personnel assessment system for the maritime industry. One major advantage is that it is culturally independent which means that it can work in all languages and cultures. Today it is being used by shipowners in both East and West in the English, Chinese and Swedish languages while versions in Russian and Spanish are currently under development.

All psychological testing aims at finding out the main characteristics of an individual but this is, however, not sufficient as a base for employment. An individual's psychological makeup must also match the requirements for a particular position. Since these requirements are not universal, we also help shipowners to define and put into words their special company requirements which, of course, may vary due to company culture, trade, traditions, company preferences and national culture. There is no general standard for a master or, for example, a supervisor, engineer, purser or member of the catering staff. Personal qualities which are perceived as important in one company might not be considered equally significant in another.

With the help of a well formulated company requirement, a psychological assessment method is able to determine to what extent an assessed individual meets a particular company's requirements.

As examples of company requirements I have chosen two from both ends, one for masters and one for catering personnel. These should, however, not be regarded as absolute

standards but goals. Very few people will meet all requirements but most people meet most of them. Finally, it is the company that will decide themselves, based on the assessment, whether a particular person is sufficiently close to their requirements or not.

Example of requirements for Masters from a Scandinavian tanker company

Safety aspects

Good reality testing and a fair perception of one's own capacity as well as situational demands. Good balance between subjectivity and objectivity. Good judgement and foresight together with a good balance between caution and risk exposure. High maturity which means an adult personality with few irrational or childish traits, personal stability, capacity for self-monitoring and stability. Reasonably high stress limit and benign stress behaviour with the ability to maintaining professional capacity even under stress.

Leadership skills

Verbally clear and with both capacity and willingness to communicate. Educational skills and willingness to share experience with others. Ability to assess others and to treat them in a flexible way. A clear identity, interest in others and a good perception of personal development. The capacity to be enthusiastic and to invest energy in tasks as well as people. Social, with ability for rapport together with a feeling for tact and discretion. Loyalty and willingness to accept responsibility. Ability to plan and to work in a methodical manner.

Other important personal traits

Good intellectual capacity, willingness to reflect and capacity to profit from experience. Readiness for own development, creativity and flexibility. The capacity to endure hard work.

Examples of company requirements for Scandinavian catering personnel

Service-mindedness

Positive, friendly, extroverted and active personality with a good capacity for initiative. Easily motivated and with a sense of well-being fed by others' satisfaction. Good sense for tact and diplomacy and for assessing others. Social and with a good understanding of children. Good stress tolerance with unaffected friendliness.

Other desired personality traits

Endurance of hard work, calm, nimble and flexible. Orderly and good appearance. The capacity to withstand stress in a crisis, to remain calm and reasonably unaffected. A responsible person with good education and an alert intellect.

Besides psychological assessment and assessment methods, the maritime industry is today also served by specially developed programmes for training in team-work and leadership, Shipboard Resource Management, Onboard Bridge Team Training and training of Mentor Masters. A Mentor Master is a trained and experienced Master with twofold duties: to undertake all responsibilities as a master of a ship and also to personally develop selected subordinate officers towards promotion and eventually to such a standard that they might replace himself. A Mentor Master is trained in assessment, team-work and educational skills and works closely together with us and the company during the pre-set training time.