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Inclusion and exclusion in safety culture at sea

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The acceleration of the globalization faces us as a nation with the challenge of adjusting our procedures and policies to accommodate foreign citizens working in Danish workplaces. In this paper I analyse data from field work voyages at sea. The data is presented in categories of bonding, bridging and linking acts inspired from research in social capital, and supplemented with acts of exclusion, all to describe the power conflicts which includes and excludes members in the unitary, divided or fragmented safety cultures that I met on board. The data shows that foreign seafarers are treated equally as long as the basic structures are not addressed. They are however treated equally on the majority's terms, which still lead to a minority position even in the safety culture. A shared safety culture is therefore difficult to achieve.

Introduction

Seafaring is one of the most globalised businesses. The seafarers' workplace has never been confined to their homeland, but today seafaring is even more globalized, and the worldwide structure of seafaring allows any seaman to be instantly replaced by another. In Denmark two changes are particularly significant for this development. In 1989, the Danish International Ships Register (DIS) was launched in order to optimize Denmark's competitive position on the world market. DIS allows shipping firms under Danish flag to employ seafarers on foreign contracts and consequently the wages, the duration of the contract, and the employment form differ in between seafarers of various nationalities even if they perform the same job. Recently the globalization process has taken a step further since the Danish Maritime Authorities has removed the previous requirement of the presence of a Danish officer in all crews. Now a European officer is sufficient, and there can also be exceptions, so that full crews of for instance Indian or Filipino seafarers may be accepted.

The acceleration of the globalization faces us as a nation with the challenge of adjusting our procedures and policies to accommodate foreign citizens working in Danish workplaces. In the Centre of Maritime Health and Safety, we suspect that there are inequalities in between the employees of different nationalities, and that these inequalities may affect health and safety. A previous study (Hansen et al 2008) has shown that seafarers from Western European countries have a higher rate of reported work accidents than those of South East Asians.

We have launched the project *Safety Culture and Reporting Practice on Board Ships in the Danish International Ships Register* (SADIS) in order to dissect these findings. We do know that some of the difference in accident reporting is due to underreporting, and consequently we have described the reporting practice in DIS shipping in a report (Grøn & Knudsen 2011) and in two forthcoming

articles. We also need, however, to learn more about the safety culture at ship level. In this paper I will look deeper into the question of whether the employees of a multinational crew are equally contributing to the safety culture on board? My colleague collaborator on the project has contributed to the data collection and provided me with permission to report our common findings.

Theoretical standpoints and definitions

For the purpose of this paper I define safety culture following the simple definition from organisational culture research “*The way we do things around here*” which according to Hopkins (Hopkins 2006) can be traced back to Deal, T & Kenney, A (1982) *Corporate Culture: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*. Addison-Wesley, Reading (Originally ‘*the way things get done around here*’). The advantage of this definition is that is dynamic and practice oriented. It does not, however, describe what the actual unit of analysis is. In the safety culture literature there has been a long debate about to the extent to which a safety culture must be shared in order to exist. Several scholars have described a distinction between the perspectives of safety culture in term of accounting for a single unitary culture (integration), many subcultures (differentiation), or no culture at all (fragmentation) (Richter & Koch 2004; Haukelid 2008). Haukelid argues that the question is not theoretical, but empirical, meaning, I assume, that all forms are likely to appear in field work and he reminds us that

“The lesson learned from anthropology is that change and conflict, paradoxes and fragments are more often the order of the day than harmony or common values and norms” (Haukelid 2008)

Haukelid continues to suggest Alvesson’s term “*bounded ambiguity*” for the broadly shared rules and meanings which we need to account for if we are to talk about culture at all.

Agreeing with these statements, I aim to describe safety culture as something, which might be shared, divided or fragmented, but should encompass all.

In order to describe the relations in between crew-members I need more specific concepts though. Research in social capital provides some useful concepts. Social capital is broadly defined as the value of social relations. It has a long epistemological history with the works of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam as important contributors (Kristensen et al 2008). In Bourdieu’s perspective social capital is an individual feature, which mainly serves to reproduce inequalities, while Coleman twisted the concept into a positive resource. Putman has a macro perspective of social capital and distinguishes between bonding and bridging acts where bonding refers to social networks in a homogenous group, whereas bridging describes social networks in heterogeneous groups or across groups (Svendsen 2001). Kristensen et al. use the concept to describe the social capital of a workplace in order to see the psychosocial work environment as an asset of the workplace, not the individual employee (Kristensen et al 2008). Kristensen et al. base their perspective on Putnam with the addition of a linking relation, which refers to networks between management and subordinates, formulated by Appelbaum according to Kristensen and co-authors.

In this paper, I follow Kristensen et al. to analyse my data and sort it into acts of bonding, bridging and linking as part of social networking, within the framework of the workplace, not of the

individual mind. I also describe acts of exclusion as a way of grasping the power conflicts which includes and excludes members in the unitary, divided or fragmented safety cultures that I have been part of during my voyages.

Material and methods

During our studies my colleague and I have participated in seven voyages at sea on ships of different size and type and with crews represented by various mixtures of nationalities. In our voyages, we have performed participant observation and conducted interviews with a total of 43 seafarers. I have chosen to present data from the three voyages in which I took part including a voyage on a Ro/Ro ship, which we did together. Below is an overview of all voyages with an indication of the ones selected. I report the selected findings within a framework of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, which means that I have selected the most significant passages regarding exclusion and inclusion from our field diaries and interview transcripts. The names of persons or companies are changed or omitted to ensure their anonymity.

Type	Crew size	Crew nationality	Shipping Company	Duration	Included?
Coaster	6	Mixed	A	7 days	X
Oil tanker		Mixed	B		
Oil tanker	24	ⁱ Full (Indians)	B	15 days	X
Dry cargo ship	13	ⁱⁱ Full (Danish)	C	11 days	
Reefer	15	Mixed	D	21 days	
ⁱⁱⁱ Ro/Ro ship	180	Mixed	E	10 days	X

Mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion

The members of a multinational crew are faced with the difficult task of balancing between mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the organisational culture. This act of balance is performed very differently depending on the national origin of the seafarer because for various reasons seafarers from underprivileged economies that are working for Danish principals are more vulnerable than their western colleagues.

The shipping companies also balance between the two mechanisms. The very reason why it makes sense for shipping companies to hire foreign seafarers is precisely because of their underprivileged position in the world market – which influences their wages but also their attitudes. In addition, there is often a manning agency involved in the recruitment of foreign seafarers, meaning that part of the responsibility for the seafarer is also outsourced. On the other hand, many Danish shipping companies make an effort to include the foreign seafarers in the corporate culture, and to ensure that the entire crew can work as a unit during the period of the contract.

The mechanisms of inclusion are the easiest to grasp as they are legitimate, first some examples of bonding.

Bonding

Bonding refers to acts that bind together people, which already belong to the same group of nationals or represent an equivalent community. The Ro/Ro ship with 180 crewmembers provided many examples of bonding in between the various groupings that a crew of that size allows; in the following example from my colleague's field diary it seems to be a question of sticking together in the national group as a reaction to a negative attitude from the outside:

“There are many new Danish heads to be seen. For instance a blond woman whom I tried to greet wearing my crew T-shirt, she barely answered. Later Layla^{iv} who normally refers to everyone as ‘nice’, told me that she was this kind of person (sign of raising the tip of her nose high with her second finger) and that the woman once covered her nose when she entered the mess where the Filipinos were having a fish dish (probably the strong shrimp sauce) and repeated: it’s disgusting, it’s disgusting’. Then all the Filipinos left to the little dishing room to finish their meal.”

The coaster with its small crew of only five plus the captain, showed how the bonding of one of the national groups caused isolation to others:

“In the evening they disappeared into a cabin to drink beer again. I went to the bridge to talk to Rolf (the captain and owner of the ship). He told me that it is not possible to have a social relation with the Filipinos, or rather; it is possible, but difficult. When Toby (a Filipino) was on board they used to invite Mikkel too (The Danish Captain/Owner's son as well as OS^v on board), but now that he is at home, Mikkel is left out in the cold.”

There are more stories in our data of how especially the Filipinos stick together and how they form an informal community with the leadership based on age and experience that runs parallel to the formal hierarchy of the ship. For the following reasons this is something often complained about by the Danish principal or authority agent:

- It makes it more difficult to form a social community that includes everybody on board
- The seafarers might seek advice from their peers rather than from their western officers, which can cause them to use their own medication rather than the supplies from the ship's medicine chest or to conceal a conflict or an injury in order to maintain a good record and consequently secure their future contracts in international shipping.

Here it is important to keep in mind that whether the seafarer is Filipino, Polish or of a third nationality, if he is a contract seafarer (as opposed to a company hired seafarer, such as seafarers that are Danish citizens), he will base his decisions on his past experiences in his home country and his previous contracts as well as on his expectations for the future, as much as on the requirements

and advice from the current flag state, principal and master, and with good reason since his job security is always at threat.

On the small coaster a regular power play took place, and the master struggled to maintain his authority. This is illustrated by this argument about how to conduct a fire drill that took place following a safety meeting:

"The other Filipinos supported the chief mate. The masters argument was that if the coast guard comes they might ask the chief mate to conduct a drill and if he then advices the crew before the fire drill before sounding the alarm, then the coast guard will not accept the drill, since the crew must be ready to muster at any hour. "If that is the way you want to do it..."the chief mate said. "It is not what I want to do; it is how it is done. It has been done that way on all ships I have sailed on" the master replied. The chief mate yielded and said that if the master wants it that way, we will do it that way from now on."

The foreign seafarers sometimes have specific reasons for supporting each other, as the following quote from my colleague's interview with a polish cabin steward on the Ro/Ro ship illustrates:

"At the very beginning , years back when there were more Polish crews on board than Filipinos, Polish crew was -... maybe racist is the wrong word, but they were really mean to Philippine crew but now it's more equal and I think the standard .. The Polish crew is a bit more open than some years back. There is still of course... Not here, I have not noticed that here, but I still can hear somewhere around, I know people from different ships who are really nasty to Philippine crew, but if we see something like this in here, we are reacting immediately to not let them make huge, huge, conflicts, just finish it on the smallest level as possible."

In the social capital literature, bonding is sometimes described as *'the dark side of social capital'* in Putnam's phrase (Svendsen 2001). This is due to the fact that it enforces the existing boundaries instead of transcending them. Considering that the ship serve as the living quarters as well as the working environment of the employees bonding is absolutely necessary. But bonding acts must be supplemented with bridging acts if there is to be a certain degree of community among all crewmembers.

The bonding in groups of nationals was problematic in the small coaster with few crewmembers, but less problematic in the bigger crews.

Bridging

Bridging refers to acts that cross boundaries of rank, nationality or department. The tanker presented examples of bridging acts as in the following note from my field diary:

"It doesn't seem as if anyone are being harassed either. It is of course difficult for me to know since they talk in Hindi most of the time, but I haven't seen anything resembling harassment, and no one has spoken badly about a colleague. But someone has spoken well: when I said to the chief officer that he changes his clothes all the time (from boiler

suit to uniform to civil) and then explained 'like a rock star'. 'Oh but he also sings like a rock star, you should hear him sing', a colleague from the machine department who overheard the conversation added."

Of course there might be concealed conflicts that I was unable to detect due to my short time on board and the fact that I do not speak Hindi. But I do not speak Tagalog^{vi} either and I was on board the small coaster for an even shorter period. Still I witnessed several conflicts and heard many examples of crewmembers that spoke badly about each other. So I think that my impression is valid.

The coaster with its crew of six did not provide many bridging acts, while the Ro/Ro ship provided some examples as the following from my colleague's field diary:

"On the bridge when a young girl brought some fruits and clean cups, Alexander (officer) greeted her politely by her first name. This morning I also noticed that the chief cook said 'Good morning Wendy' to one of the crew mess women we meet smiling and cleaning up in the mess. It seems as if there is a good atmosphere across rank and nationality here."

Manners and good behavior on the part of superiors are important, but still on the superficial level. When it comes to conflicts between departments, we detected some lack of bridging on the same ship. For instance a Danish motorman and safety representative did not dare to confront a deck officer whom he suspect having made a mistake relating to the ships risk assessment document. His reason was that he would rather not interfere with the deck department, being from the machine department himself.

If everybody is to be included in the safety culture, even if the culture consists of subcultures, the bridging acts are important. But when the focus is on safety culture and the objective for the analysis is the workplace, the linking acts are perhaps of most importance due to the crucial role of management in promoting a positive safety culture (Zohar and Luria 2003; Mearns and Yule 2009). In seafaring, management might refer to the master and the officers, to the top management in the land office or sometimes even to the manning agency which is also an employer for the foreign employees.

Linking

The small coaster had so many conflicts that linking was not an issue. In addition there was no shore management as owner of the shipping company was also the master. The Ro/Ro ship provided several examples of linking acts as when the entire crew of 180 crewmembers was assembled after a drill and shown a movie about how to enjoy your daily work and have a positive attitude. The master had seen the documentary as part of a management course and liked it, and all the other officers followed his lead by mentioning head points from the movie in the subsequent safety meetings in the departments. The crewmembers we talked to about the movie in the days that followed liked it, as quoted in the following interview:

“I wish.. but it is already done, that we have this FISH, you know the film that we watched about being happy. I think... that’s my dream that someday the boss will think like.. they will make a seminar about behavior, about attitude.

So you liked it?

Yea! I liked, because it opens the eyes of all people that you must not discriminate other races. Because how you treat yourself is how you treat others.”

The master of the Indian full crew tanker ship gave me the impression that he missed linking acts from his principals a shore:

“I asked about all those signing off who will come home later than expected and exclaimed ‘All these unknowns!!’, my exclamation led him (the master) to say that they are not unknowns: ‘Someone knows, they just don’t bother to tell us’. Either that or it is the coordination that does not work according to him. Then he told me that even after his 30 years as a seafarer he still resents the unpredictability and lack of information.”

He often described a feeling of being left out of the loop, as in the following example:

“When I described Jan (The SQE manager from the office a shore) as “harsh” he was surprised to learn that he had also been harsh towards me. He thought it was only towards them (Indians). He has never met him face to face, but they had a telephone conversation, before the ship entered piracy waters. Some of his crewmembers felt insecure and would rather not proceed. But Jan said that ‘we have decided that it is safe for you’ and that was the end of the conversation. So he had to pass that on to his insecure crewmembers.”

It is not really acts of linking that, I have described here, it is rather opportunities for linking that were not taken. The master is also the manager and may therefore still influence the safety culture of the ship. The culture was rich in social capital due to the ability on that ship to bond and bridge, but there were certainly some lost opportunities too.

Exclusion

The mechanisms of exclusion are less accessible as they are subtle. One example is the way that two nice and compassionate representatives from a shipping company’s HSQ department assured us that they do not deal differently between their employees of various ranks and nationalities and that they treated everyone equally. Still, asked about the psychosocial work environment later during the same conversation, they said that they did not have to worry about well-being problems of their employees, because of the short period of time they are signed on. What was not said was that they obviously only thought of the proportion of the crew that is permanently employed and on board for periods of two weeks duration followed by two weeks free. Roughly, this corresponds to the Danish

share of the crew (15%). However, the remaining 85% consisting of East Europeans and Filipinos are hired on 6-9 months contracts.

The first example from the Ro/Ro ship is on the same note of everyone being treated well. Only someone seems to occupy a more central spot in the universe of obligation (Fein 2000):

'He repeated what he had said the first day about how they (the Filipinos) are not used to being treated well, in other ships they are being yelled at and the reason why he knows this, is because they have told him. I did not raise the fact that their quarters are on second deck (the worst location) nor that their contracts are much longer...but it is true that the atmosphere is pleasant and everyone treated respectfully – otherwise.'

Sometimes the Danes who treat everyone equally seem to think that the foreign seafarers cannot tell the difference between being treated well and being full members of a culture. But, as this steward demonstrates in the interview quoted below they actually can do so:

"...The discrimination is not so strong here, not very obvious, not very strong. They are still professional, but if you only do some mistake, that's the only thing where I can see discrimination, they will blame you too much. Sometimes if they are not in the mood, they will insult you in front of who knows. But if Europeans make mistakes, it's ok! It's ok, it's normal."

It might also be a very practical safety problem to be the ones slightly out of the loop:

"Almost everything is bought in Denmark. In fact he complained about the fact that the writing on the products is Danish. They do have all data sheets in English, but as he says, when something happens the first thing you do is to look at the bottle directly."

Again, it is not much, but it is there: the exclusion.

On the full Indian crew ship the feeling of exclusion appears on comparison with the ships with Danish officers:

"The master feels very vulnerable to pirate attacks due to the fact that they are a third world nationality crew on board a Danish ship. Several times he has said " I think it is because we are from the third world, so we don't matter". He neither thinks that the Indian nor that the Danish government will liberate them in case something happens, like the Americans liberated their citizens with snipers. 'So I am alone', he said."

A rating expressed a similar feeling of slight marginalization in the following interview quote:

*"Yeah, but I am happy with this company – I can understand the reputation of the company. Now when it comes to like these people –like those who are in Denmark, they don't come and visit us.
(Interviewer:) No*

We are just directly put through to the Indian staff, so whatever we want to speak with them about, like when, what we have of insight, when, if we tell them, it is no use.”

Concluding remarks

The challenge is how to make everyone on board equally important members of the work community? Our data shows that foreign seafarers are treated equally as long as the basic structures are not addressed, and that they are treated equally on the majority's terms, which still gives them a minority position even with respect to the safety culture. It does not necessarily mean that this or that group is more exposed to risks (other factors have greater significance, such as management commitment (Mearns and Yule 2009), but it does mean that a shared safety culture has poor conditions.

This reminds me of the point made by Antonsen in a recent article where he compares theories of power with safety culture theories. Antonsen states that the development of a safety culture must not be a quest for consensus and common vision of safety throughout the organization. On the contrary, the development of safety culture must be a search for multiple positions. A culture which positively affects safety is not necessarily a conflict-free and homogeneous culture, but rather a culture which can hold conflicting views in a constructive way, he points out (Antonsen 2009).

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ⁱ Crew consisting of seafarers of the same nationality

ⁱⁱ Danish and Greenlandic actually, but as Greenland is in the process of becoming independent and the legal framework is the same, I consider it one nationality

ⁱⁱⁱ Roll on /roll off. Here a ship transporting passengers, trucks, cars and cargo.

^{iv} Who is Filipino

^v Ordinary Seaman

^{vi} The official common language of the Phillipines, an archipelago with about one thousand different languages.