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**The Development of leadership at sea and ashore**

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This is a version of a presentation made to the NI's AGM, see above. The actual talk was *ad lib* and supported by both PowerPoint slides and delegate interaction: thus some of the text may not seem immediately conjoined.

Mr Chairman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I'm extremely grateful to the conference organisers for extending their invitation for me to speak at this AGM and especially indebted to my sponsors, Mercantile Marine, who've made this possible. Thank you one and all.

I have been here before...that's if you count one day alongside on the QE2 in 1982!...I see things have changed just a bit. This time around I've got a little more time to explore, your hospitality is amazing and it's great to be back surrounded by so many esteemed and experienced professionals.

The world is currently obsessed with leadership. If you bought every book from Amazon that has leadership in its title, and read one every day, it'd take you nearly 200 years to get through them...and if you put them all end to end they'd give you a wonderful great circle stretching between here and New York. I'm not immune to the contagion myself so my own modest research into the leadership of institutions of maritime education and training in the United Kingdom, I'm afraid, adds just a tiny, tiny fraction to that pile.

After coming ashore 25 years ago, and entering the world of education, in particular, that of Maritime Education and Training, I've now been doing this far longer than I was at sea. Experience, first in a UK college and then working in institutions and companies around the world, has given me a privileged insight into the way we go about developing our young (and sometime not-so-young people) in the maritime sector. There is much to applaud and every place I visit seems alive with enthusiasm, energy and vigour. There is a clear and observable eagerness to imbue the students and young officers with the knowledge they need in order to keep this industry functioning.

Notice the word 'skill' wasn't included there – because it's got to be said that somewhere along the line, something's not working quite how the flag state administrations, the owners, the ship managers, the charterers, the P&I Clubs, the colleges, the classification societies, the insurers and, above all, the seafarers, would have liked.

Where's the evidence for this? Well, you've only got to look at the enormous investments made during the past ten to twenty years by the large multi-national companies and agencies in training systems, policies, matrices, audits and vetting – surely they wouldn't be spending this money if things were satisfactory? We see accidents repeating themselves over and over again; seafarers entering enclosed spaces and being killed; officers falling asleep; ships running aground through incompetence or perhaps complacency and all this against a litany of near misses (??) recoded faithfully in our very own Seaways each month.

One of the things we have decided may improve the situation, is leadership. The maritime sector is not alone in this quest – leadership, as we've seen, is a hot topic and likely to remain so in the foreseeable future.

So it's against this background of global concern that we voyage this morning. Allow me to explain the voyage plan before we let go and set sail: our waypoints'll include exploring what some of the theorists say about leadership. It's remarkable that in many textbooks it's actually quite hard to find a definition of 'leadership'. People skirt round it; instead they say what people should do and why it's important - without actually saying what 'it' is. That's understandable I suppose. Leadership, like teamwork, or followership, or attitude, is an *abstract* concept. You can't buy a kilo of leadership when you walk through Pettah Market. So people avoid definitions and go straight for the behaviours. Even these two excellent publications from the UK's MCA manage to avoid a definition by and large.

Then we'll pick up speed and take a brief journey through time, looking at how the whole concept of leadership has developed over the last century or so – and what the future may bring. If we miss a few wheel-over points along the route I hope someone's keen enough to challenge the watchkeeper. On arrival, we'll look to see if any of this will help us in our quest for leadership. I'd like to share some of my research findings which may shed some light on the differences and similarities between leadership at sea and leadership ashore. Is there a difference? How do we know? Does it matter? If so, what can be done about it?

One final point, please remember the voyage doesn't end at the pilot station: to some extent it's just the start since there's so much more to do - but I'll have to leave that for you and another day!

To summarise, we'll start by asking what is leadership, whether it's always been like this, whether it's the same ashore and, finally, where we might go from here.

So the voyage this morning starts by offering one such definition – you may wish to add your own twist but at least it'll give us a starting point. Leadership is 'arbitrary and very subjective...some definitions are more useful than others, but there is no 'correct' definition<sup>1</sup>...'. Perhaps therefore a pragmatic approach is to adopt a definition that is adaptable. This one may fit the bill:

'Leadership is a process of transformative change where the ethics of individuals are integrated into the mores of a

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<sup>1</sup> Yukl,2002:4

community as a means of evolutionary social development?  
 (Barker, 1997: 491).

OK – some of the language may be a bit academic but basically, what Barker is saying is that leadership is intrinsically linked with effecting change and that it involves transforming the very culture of followers. (After all, you don't need leaders if you haven't got followers - we'll come back to this point). This transformation is evidenced by incremental, probably iterative, and continuous movement in the way the community thinks and behaves. Forgive me for belabouring this point – but I think it's important. And the main reason I think it's important is because these points seem to be missing when so often we discuss issues around leadership. If we omit to lay the very keel of the ship we shouldn't be too surprised if the vessel falls apart when we encounter the first storm.

There are some forward-thinking companies who have introduced behavioural safety training which reflects this idea but there are still many, many senior personnel who are still to encounter these ideas, far less embrace and employ them.

Of course, not much of this is new. Kotter had made the same point in 1990 when he drew up his table of the differences between leadership and management.

<b>Leaders</b>	<b>Managers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- address change;</li> <li>- set direction;</li> <li>- align people;</li> <li>- motivate and inspire.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- address complexity;</li> <li>- plan and budget;</li> <li>- organise resources and staff;</li> <li>- control and solve problems.</li> </ul>

Source: Kotter (1990)

### **Delegate activity**

So, we're getting some idea of what leadership is, what it entails and where we as individuals may be doing it – or having it done to us! But of course, we might be looking at this from the narrow perspectives of our own individual experiences, what we do ourselves and what we have seen others around us do – here and now in 2013.

Was it always thus? Has leadership and our perception of what it means changed over the years? The short answer is yes...leadership has been the subject of academic research and debate for decades and a myriad of theories or beliefs have been researched, hypothesised, tested and formulated. Some become popular and find their way into college curricula, management development courses, and IMO Model Courses. It is a shifting ground that reflects the seismic shifts taken in society over the past hundred years. Political and social systems that were once taken for granted and appeared the norm, are cast aside, modified, re-shaped and re-built to conform

with the socio-political requirements of the day. So, the command and control style of leadership that, say in the 1940s, was arguably needed, welcomed, embraced and tolerated would not resonate quite so harmoniously in a modern democratic state. These wider socio-political perspectives of leadership are important since we tend to see the same leadership paradigms reflected in our corporations and other organisations.

If we look back over the years just of the twentieth century (there's plenty more evidence from before that of course) we can see that there have been several dominant belief systems that have been reflected by the theory and, perhaps even more importantly, in the practice of leaders in industry and commerce.

One of the fundamental debates in this field is the extent to which you believe leaders are born rather than made. In other words, is there some inherent, genetic, influence that makes it more likely for some to excel at leadership than others – or do we all start out the same and *learn* how to become leaders.

### **Delegate activity**

It will come as no surprise that for many years there was a sustained belief that leadership was an inherited quality, that men (and it was usually men of course) had particular innate traits and intelligence that pre-selected them for a leadership role. By and large this has been largely superseded by the belief that people learn and can become effective leaders through diligent application of knowledge, reflection and experience.

At around the time of the first world war scientific theories of leadership were popular: it was thought that if only we measured the input and output of the workforce to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree we could organise labour to maximise productivity. This methodology spawned a generation of Time and Motion studies. Its fundamental flaw was of course that men and women simply aren't machines and we don't function in predictable patterns.

Style theory concentrated on *behaviours* and argued that if we learned new ways of working we could become effective leaders. Moving on from that it was recognised that *contingency-based* or *situational* factors also contributed to the leadership behaviours we would expect to see. After all, I think most people would agree that a different *style* would be appropriate in an emergency as opposed to, say, chairing a Safety Committee meeting. Although some of the Masters I sailed with didn't actually get this.

At this level leadership is seen very much as transactional. In other words I will pay you/provide accommodation/offer bonuses and a car et cetera and, in return, you will do as I say. I can expect to receive your followership in return for what I give to you. This is concrete and measureable. I can increase reward or withdraw it. We have a contract and my leadership is therefore dependant on this transaction.

Charismatic leadership also has a following. Echoing trait theory, it argues that leaders must be visionary and emancipatory. This belief became common practice in the UK a few years ago in the world of education where so-called 'super heads' were

drafted into failing schools to turn them around. It seems to be declining in popularity and isn't heard about quite so much recently.

### Delegate activity

Gradually we can see leadership beliefs moving away from what the *leader* wants or portrays towards the needs and wants of the *follower*. This is a crucially important point and one that we must return to when we consider those making the move ashore, perhaps into administration.

Transactional leadership seems to be OK – but only up to a point. Transactional stimuli alone, it is argued, will only ever achieve *expected* outcomes. If leaders want to go further they must introduce values and beliefs; consider the moral and ethical consequences of decisions; champion exciting new possibilities and talk about the importance of trusting each other.

They should inspire others; talk optimistically about the future; talk enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished; articulate a compelling vision of the future; express confidence that goals will be achieved; provide an exciting image of what is essential to consider and be prepared to take a stand on controversial issues.

These leaders will be comfortable with more abstract concepts such as respect, trust and faith. They will instill pride in others for being associated with them and encourage them to go beyond their self-interests for the good of the group. Altruism becomes part of the mix.

Leaders moving beyond transaction will stimulate others; re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate; seek differing perspectives when solving problems; get others to look at problems from many different angles; encourage non-traditional thinking to deal with traditional problems and encourage a re-thinking of those ideas which have never been questioned before.

And finally, post-transactional leaders will spend time mentoring and coaching; treat others as individuals rather than just as members of the group; consider individuals as having different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others; help others to develop their strengths; listen attentively to others' concerns and promote their self development.

This is beginning to look very different indeed from a simple transactional model. It requires a different order of magnitude of effort on the part of the leader but the rewards, if you subscribe to this belief, are in substantially greater performance. The transformational leader will have followers who follow because they want to, rather than because they've been ordered. The leadership is becoming more *distributed* and *dispersed*.

By now you may have started to discern the root of perhaps some of the leadership challenges faced by those who have come ashore. Before we start to draw those threads together, let us look at what seems to be beckoning in the future.

Simon Western in his perceptive critique on Leadership has identified and theorised the huge groundswell movement towards eco-leadership, a term he coined. It is present all around us and the astute companies have been quick to realise its importance in establishing their credentials.

### **Video clip (if time)**

As you might expect, old theories don't necessarily die. Most are still there and you don't have to go far before finding someone who will continue to use and practice a theory that most others have consigned to that great heap of outmoded thinking. Some of it may, of course, still be applicable – but usually in the mind of the leader rather than the minds of her followers.

So, to summarise so far: having made an attempt at a definition for leadership we've navigated at high speed through some of the beliefs and theories that inform our thinking on leadership to this day.

How might help those coming ashore and those already in post. To start answering this we must look to the environment most seagoing officers work in. For some very important and rational reasons, organisation at sea adopts a pyramidal, hierarchical leadership structure.

The system dictates much of what we do. What I mean is that the rank structure actually protects us from having to think too much about leadership. Leadership – whether it's conning the ship through the Malacca Straits, overseeing a major engine repair, lowering a lifeboat or training the crew in safe operations – is largely a function of rank and, to that extent, automatic. An officer may issue a lawful order secure in the knowledge that the recipient will follow it. Deviation from that would constitute a disciplinary offence and be dealt with quickly.

This is the leadership structure which we are brought up in. Many of us have fathers who went to sea so it's likely that even before we went away, this system would have been familiar to us (albeit in a watered down form). Certainly it's the system that many of my generation remember from our early days at sea and in the training schools. I remember Nick Senanayaka (who was my Senior Cadet on my first trip) telling me tales of the training ship Dufferin in the 1960s. In his autobiography, Khwaja Sayedd Shahabuddin writes about his years there at the start of the Second World War.

All senior cadets who showed aptitude for leadership were given an opportunity to be appointed Senior Cadet Captains and Cadet Captains which helped to cultivate a sense of leadership. Cadets in the third and final year were known as 'Nauticals', second-year cadets as 'Removes' and the new comers as 'Juniors', for whom the first year was very tough, indeed. For most of them it was quite difficult to get used to strict military discipline, doing everything on the double and the physical labour of scrubbing the deck and performing various duties.



Soon after waking up and making up his bed, it was not unusual for a Nautical to tell him to make his bed also. At other times to clean shoes, shine brass buttons or wash cap-covers of senior cadets. He could also be punished by a Remove or a Nautical for various offences, however minor, like, for example, a button on the shirt not in its place. This was normally done by those who wished to throw their weights around and bully the Juniors. Even a 'Remove' could be punished by a 'Nautical'. The punishment mainly was "Capstan Bar Drill" when a cadet was made to carry a wooden capstan bar weighing 7 lbs and run on the spot for several minutes according to the wish of the senior concerned. Senior Cadet Captains were authorized to cane a culprit with a rope wasp.<sup>2</sup>

And I suspect this account would be much the same regardless of which institution, and which country or culture you came from. Leadership was certainly different in those days.

But it's only two to three generations ago and our industry is in many respects a conservative one, so these stories continue to reverberate down the years. Now fast forward to 2013 and consider the world in which our young officers are now growing up. And before anyone starts to blame the young people themselves – remember it is the preceding generations (not theirs) who set the scene.

Generation Y would run a mile if any of these policies were even to be thought of never mind enacted. In any case, most of what was considered 'leadership training' is probably illegal in most jurisdictions today. But the imprint is still there as much as we try to eradicate it. There will even be seafarers who regret the passing of such times.

Our very leadership fibre is informed by this history, strengthened by these stories, supported by the tyranny of rank, by the hierarchy that rescues us from making any real decisions about what leadership *is* – we just do it like we've been trained to do it.

It's become for many of us part and parcel of our very identity. It is who we are and the longer we have spent at sea, in this rather anachronistic quasi-military environment, the stronger the bond, the stronger the attachment and the more difficult it is for us to appreciate that others may not share this bond, this attachment and have absolutely no knowledge whatsoever about this environment.

To be teleported onto this new planet can be confusing, stressful, bewildering, puzzling, frightening, threatening and very, very unpleasant. Gone are our stripes, our structures, our rank – to be replaced by office politics, bosses who are often not even there, by people who go home when you want them to do something, by people who take days off when there's work to do, and – horror of horrors – by people who don't always do what you tell them!

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<sup>2</sup> <http://sayeedjournal.wordpress.com/chapter-6-the-three-dufferin-years1939-41/> [Accessed 27/5/13]

This sounds comic but is potentially and actually rather serious. Apart from the inefficiency it may cause, it can lead to as serious undermining of the manager's confidence. Suddenly all the systems he or she took for granted no longer exist; performance can suffer and people may even feel it (sometimes subconsciously) to be an attack on their very identity.

### **Delegate activity**

Most of the managers in maritime education in the UK I interviewed for my research indicated a degree of emotional stress particularly when they took on managerial status. Astonishingly, there was little or no support for newly-arrived sea staff when they came ashore. My subsequent conversations in other sectors seem to reinforce this finding (though more research is planned).

After all, they've been wearing four stripes for ages, they've been in charge of the engine room or in command and they know all about leadership don't they? Of course they may not – how could they? Their leadership styles have been limited to the ones they've always used and people have appeared largely happy with them.

And where or who do they turn to for support or help? Their pride, their background, their upbringing, their identity makes this a very painful ride indeed.

So, what's to be done. Well the first step in any situation is to gauge the size of the problem. Only then should you even begin to think of generating solutions. Often, the simple exposure of the issues is enough to get people thinking about them and what they can do.

With the MET managers in the UK it was apparent that managers wanted a combination of practical, operational training and the more reflective approach that personal development usually involves. This model tries to encapsulate that by superimposing a well tried model of learning on a task- and process-focussed framework. The propeller indicates how the process is cyclical and involves motion.

If induction and preliminary training when people come ashore is restricted to technical issues only, it shouldn't come as a surprise if those same people underperform. They need time to assimilate the new culture, to come to terms with new leadership paradigms and, above all, to reappraise their identity and their new roles. They need to be introduced to the idea that it's OK to feel not OK, that the loss of rank doesn't mean emasculation and that there is life worth living ashore!

Ladies and gentlemen, my time is up and it's time to draw the threads together. Firstly I've tried to show that there are many, many different theories to support your leadership practice. Some of them will be outdated but some will nevertheless hang on to them. Secondly, younger generations find some of our dearly held truths inexplicable. Thirdly, the rank structure at sea promotes leadership in a sense but not so that we have to think very much about how to do it. Fourthly, when we move ashore, the changes required in our leadership and management behaviours can be hard to understand and there may be no-one to turn to for help. Lastly, the situation is not all gloom and doom: forward thinking organisations will give this matter the



attention it deserves and individuals can be encouraged to source the support they may need.

Thank you so much for being so attentive and I look forward to continuing the discussion with you off-line and outside the conference hall.

Good morning!