

Women in shipping – it's time for a 21st century workforce

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In an industry facing significant skill shortages many organizations are ready to take a fresh approach to recruiting and retaining women in the shipping workplace. According to Lee Clarke at Dynama, the first place to start is establishing an accurate gender profile of your organization using workforce management technology.

Of the estimated 1.25 million seafarers in the world, fewer than 2% of them are thought to be women(i). For example, in the UK the maritime minister Nusrat Ghani MP – who herself is only the second woman to hold the UK Department for Transport portfolio for the country's maritime sector – has praised the establishment of the 'Women in Maritime Taskforce'. Set up by Maritime UK, the organization aims to identify practical steps to recruit and retain more women, particularly those in mid or senior positions across maritime's shipping, ports, marine and business services industries. It also seeks to address critical areas such as career progression paths for women in the sector and any gender pay gap.

Dynama's parent company Allocate Software has pledged to have 50% of women on their payroll by 2022 and Dynama is following their lead. But where to start? How do you know how many women you already employ? How do you recruit more and how do you support and retain women in the any industry?

Using workforce management to create change

The flexibility of today's workforce management (WFM) solutions can help to nurture talent in the shipping industry regardless of gender. This is where the advanced data management and superior reporting capabilities of modern technology come into their own. Let's take a closer look!

- Establish a benchmark – the first step to creating change is to understand the current state of diversity across your organization and this comes down to the quality of data held. The beauty of modern integrated WFM systems is, that unlike manual spreadsheets, they link seamlessly with critical HR databases to provide a realistic perspective of employees across an organization. They capture a real-time view of maritime staff, including personal details such as gender, age, career and pay history, past roles and activities including projects worked on and where. This makes it easy to analyse the gender profile of an organization and to continually track any gaps in specific jobs or at different management levels and match skills to jobs available.
- Use data to support recruitment drives – organizations want the best people for the job, whether they are male or female. But maybe they are missing out on good quality candidates from 50% of the population? Recruitment campaigns should emphasise the benefits that will appeal to all candidates but focus on those of particular interest to women, for example, flexible working practices, transparent pay structures, opportunities for sabbaticals, maternity leave and excellent career paths.

Once you have attracted the best talent regardless of gender, then data can help to keep them in post and stop them from straying to the competition. For example, by focussing on relevant and tailored e-training programmes and allowing people to learn at a time and place that best suits them it will help with balancing the demands of work and family life.

- Reviewing working conditions

Maritime contracts and working conditions can be very restrictive, with shared accommodation affecting the quality of rest and long periods away that need to be balanced with time spent at home. Phasing out shared facilities and being more flexible over periods of time at sea can ease this, improving crew wellbeing and family life. Long hours expected of seafarers should also be balanced and managed sufficiently so that the crew receive the necessary rest, helping to reduce worker fatigue and stress.

- The power of mentoring – one of the common challenges for women in many sectors is building confidence to be assertive in a male-dominated work environment. Why not use data held in your WFM system to identify experienced female staff who can become mentors to new female joiners? Or set up an online support and networking forum and invite all staff, male and female to participate? That way, they can share their experiences and exchange hints and tips to build confidence and maximise their skills. Involving all colleagues in sessions will foster a greater understanding and better collaboration between the sexes.

- Future-proof your workforce - the latest automated solutions are powerful workforce planning tools. They are innovative, highly scalable and future-proof. They are sophisticated enough to analyse current staff availability and competencies and plan for future requirements quickly and efficiently. When deploying a WFM framework, organizations should consider including important parameters into their 'what if' scenarios such as time for maternity and paternity leave and the flexibility to accommodate career breaks or role changes for working parents.

For those organizations looking to attract, recruit, develop, support and retain a more diversified workforce a WFM framework is a good place to start. It can help to build a diversity profile with the hard evidence to drive effective recruitment campaigns and support talent management and succession planning to build a modern 21st century workforce.

Lee Clarke is Regional Director – Northern Hemisphere at Dynama (<http://www.dynama.global>)

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About Dynama

Dynama, an Allocate Software company, builds on 25 years' heritage and is a leading provider of maritime and defence workforce deployment software. Headquartered in London, Dynama has a fully fledged new office in Canberra (Australia) with sales and support in the USA.

Its flagship product, Dynama OneView, is designed to underpin complex workforce management in safety critical and high skill level environments, delivering both safe staffing and productivity savings.

Dynama does not offer legal advice or GDPR consultancy

For more information, visit Dynama Global (<http://www.dynama.global>)

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(i)Maritime UK (<https://www.maritimeuk.org/media-centre/blog-posts/redressing-gender-balance/>)