

Analysing and Understanding Work-Life Balance of Sea Farers in Sip Management: A Study Based On Internship Experience at Star Sea Management.

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ABSTRACT

Because seafaring is so demanding, work-life balance has become a major concern in the maritime industry. Seafarers work in remote locations with little communication, endure erratic work schedules, and spend long stretches of time apart from their families. Through an analysis of observations made during a four-week internship at the maritime recruitment firm Star Sea Management, this study investigates the work-life balance issues faced by seafarers. The study identifies long contracts, physical exhaustion, emotional isolation, and stress related to documentation as the main causes of work-life imbalance using qualitative techniques like observation, documentation review, and informal interviews. The study highlights the crucial role recruitment agencies and shipping companies play in shaping seafarer welfare and provides targeted recommendations to improve the overall well-being of maritime professionals.

Overview

One of the oldest occupations in the world, seafaring is still essential to contemporary international trade. Seafarers are essential to the global supply chain because over 90% of goods are transported by sea. The profession has distinct challenges that distinguish it from land-based occupations, despite their indispensable role.

Seafaring, in contrast to traditional jobs, entails:

- Months of nonstop work away from home
- Living on a vessel with restricted social environments
- High-risk and physically demanding activities

- Isolation from family and community life
- Strict regulatory requirements for documentation and training

Such conditions make achieving work–life balance extremely difficult.

This paper explores how these challenges manifest through real interactions with seafarers and maritime recruiters.

Literature Review

3.1 Work-Life Balance for Seafarers

The literature that is currently available highlights the fact that seafarers frequently endure extended periods of isolation, mental exhaustion, and emotional stress while traveling. The BIMCO/ICS Seafarer Survey (2024) lists irregular sleep cycles, disconnection from shore life, and family separation as the main problems faced by seafarers.

3.2 Isolation and Mental Health

According to studies published in the International Maritime Health Journal, seafarers are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and burnout as a result of their confinement, limited entertainment options, and heavy workload, particularly during port operations or emergencies.

3.3 The Effect of Extended Contracts

Typically, contracts last between three and nine months. Longer contracts have been linked to higher work-life imbalance and lower job satisfaction, according to research. The increasing efficiency of vessel turnaround also limits shore leave.

3.4 Stress on Documentation and Compliance

Certificates like STCW, COC, medical fitness, flag endorsements, and others must be regularly renewed by seafarers. Documentation pressure is a special stressor for seafaring that is not present in most other professions, according to literature.

3.5 Technology's Contribution to Better Balance

Recent studies show that improved internet access and digital systems help reduce emotional distress by enabling communication with families. However, accessibility varies significantly across fleets and companies

Research Goals

1. To investigate the main elements influencing seafarers hired by Star Sea Management's work-life balance.
2. To comprehend the psychological and emotional difficulties associated with loneliness and extended travel.
3. To examine the effects of hiring and paperwork processes on individual stress levels.
4. To evaluate industry-level practices that influence seafarer welfare.
5. To recommend feasible strategies for improving overall work–life balance.

Methods of Research

The qualitative case study approach used in this study is based on actual internship experience.

5.1 Techniques for Gathering Data

a) Observation

Daily involvement in crew recruitment and documentation provided firsthand insights into:

- Seafarer concerns during joining
- Documentation gaps and related stress
- Reactions to vessel assignments
- Communication issues

b) Informal Interviews

Unstructured conversations were held with:

- New applicants
- Returning seafarers
- Documentation executives
- Senior recruiters

Sample topics included contract length, communication at sea, family concerns, and certification pressures.

c) Examining Documents

To comprehend administrative difficulties, candidate trackers, client requirement sheets, email correspondence logs, and document verification lists were analyzed.

d) Additional Sources

IMO, MLC, DG Shipping, BIMCO/ICS, Marine Insight, and Safety4Sea reports were examined.

Results and Evaluation

6.1 Extended Employment Agreements

Seafarers typically stay on board for six to nine months at a time. Multiple candidates expressed difficulty balancing family responsibilities, especially those with young children or aging parents. Long contracts led to:

- Reduced family participation
- Emotional disconnect
- Difficulty adjusting during leave

6.2 Fatigue and Irregular Work Hours

Irregular watchkeeping schedules often disrupt sleep patterns. Port operations require long working hours, causing:

- Physical exhaustion
- Cognitive fatigue
- Higher risk of accidents

6.3 Limited Communication Facilities

Although some vessels provide Wi-Fi, many seafarers reported:

- Slow internet
- Limited data packages
- Restricted informal communication

This impacts mental well-being and creates frustration among family members.

6.4 Pressure for Documentation and Certification

Typical problems noted: • STCW certificates that have expired Last-minute medical examinations; the cost of required training; and concerns about missing vessel joining

6.5 Isolation and Its Effect on Mental Health

Extended separation leads to:

- Loneliness
- Anxiety
- Difficulty maintaining personal relationships
- Reduced morale

General Evaluation

According to the overall assessment, work-life imbalance results from a combination of:

7.1 Physical Challenges

Long hours, lack of rest, and limited recreation onboard.

7.2 Emotional Challenges

Homesickness, limited contact with family, difficulty maintaining social ties.

7.3 Administrative Challenges

Certification renewals, visa procedures, document verification all increase stress during leave.

7.4 Organizational Challenges

Not all companies provide welfare programs, modern onboard amenities, or proper internet connectivity.

7.5 Structural Challenges

The nature of maritime trade demands crew to work long contracts and return only after scheduled rotations. This limits personal autonomy.

Conversation

The observations demonstrate the ongoing challenge of seafarers to strike a balance between their personal and professional lives and are unmistakably consistent with research findings from around the world. Although the maritime sector is changing, welfare disparities still exist because of:

- Shipping companies are under cost pressure.

- Uneven enforcement of international labor standards
- Limited awareness of mental health issues
- Traditional attitudes in maritime workplaces

However, positive developments were also noted:

- Increasing focus on seafarer well-being after COVID-19
- More companies investing in crew internet facilities
- Better reporting of fatigue and psychological concerns
- Growing digitalization reducing paperwork burdens

The case shows that recruitment agencies have a direct impact on seafarer stress levels through efficient communication, accurate guidance, and timely documentation.

Conclusion

In conclusion

Work-life balance is directly impacted by the many difficulties that come with seafaring. Long contracts, stress related to paperwork, exhaustion, loneliness, and poor communication are the most detrimental factors, according to the study. Regulations do exist, but how they are actually implemented varies depending on the company and the vessel. To improve the lives of seafarers, better recruitment procedures, communication systems, and welfare practices are crucial.

Suggestions

- Offer reliable Wi-Fi and reasonably priced data plans to shipping companies.
- Shorten contract durations where operationally feasible.
- Improve recreational facilities onboard.
- Ensure compliance with MLC rest-hour standards.

For Recruitment Agencies

- Offer early reminders for certificate renewal.
- Provide accurate briefing on vessel conditions.
- Introduce pre-joining counseling or wellness check-ins.
- Maintain transparent communication between candidates and clients.

For Seafarers

- Plan training courses immediately after signing off.
- Engage in onboard social/recreational activities.
- Maintain physical exercise routines.
- Schedule regular communication with family.

References

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