



Senior DPO's Column

A 'space ship' career move

It might sound ridiculous to be a Belorussian seafarer, as Belarus is a country without a shoreline, but that is exactly what I am. I started as a deck cadet on tankers initially, and working offshore seemed to me about as likely as a job on a space ship. However, I never gave up; I kept looking for opportunities, and working towards my DP certificate. Today, I am Senior Dynamic Positioning Officer on board the modern seismic survey vessel, *Polarcus Amani* – and one of the largest moving structures in the world. On board the *Polarcus Amani* I have travelled from Europe to America, from America to Africa, from Africa to Australia, and then on to Sakhalin. The vessel is currently working in Asia.

Seismic surveying is a very specific type of operation, with very specific challenges. Once the seismic vessel is engaged in operation, she should never stop her way through the water. All operations, including bunkering, supply, crew change, helicopter and small boat ops, even emergency Fast Rescue Boat (FRB) launch, have to be carried out while the vessel is under way and making 4-5 knots through the water.

As a deputy of the Master, the OOW is not only in charge of safety of the crew and vessel, but also of supply/guard fleet and seismic gear (seismic streamers/cables), which are deployed as much as eleven kilometres behind. In order to maintain safety of navigation, the vessel should be deemed as 11-12 kilometres in length and 6 kilometres in width. It goes without saying that a seismic vessel in operation is always restricted in ability to manoeuvre!

The size of the seismic spread towed by *Polarcus Amani* in recent operations off Myanmar set a record – she was towing the largest seismic spread in the world, and thus, officially, the largest moving man-made object in the world. This was an achievement by the crew as a whole. From the point of view of the bridge team, it was challenging to monitor the power on the generators, to control maximum efficient speed, monitor weather condition to reduce impacts on propulsion, generators and seismic gear. The vessel was working almost on her limits, just on the edge – a real challenge. In fact, nobody knew what would happen until the last unit was deployed and all the streamers and separators were adjusted.

One of the hardest aspects to master as

OOW is simultaneous operations (SIMOPS), when you should control not only the position of the vessel on DP (the vessel usually works in 'seismic track mode'), her steering, power distribution and stability, but also control the traffic, position and actions of the support fleet, and other operations such as small boat operations. In that particular time, the DP operator can easily become distracted. The DPO is under continuous stress and it can lead to serious consequences. However, usually almost the whole bridge team is taking part in such operations. Nobody stands aside, everybody knows their duties and how to act. Each operation is properly planned, with all risks assessed and mitigated.

Coordination and communication is another major challenge, as there are sometimes more than 15 nationalities on board. On top of this, the bridge is the coordination centre also for the whole fleet (mother vessel and supply/guard fleet).

When the vessel and seismic gear pass very close to platforms or offshore installations, *Polarcus* has a well developed Safety Management System to assist crew in such operations. In addition, the whole bridge team usually overcomes these challenges via constant training onboard. I believe I work onboard one of the best vessels in the world,

with one of the best crews.

Over the course of my career, I gained not only the DP certificate, but also a wealth of knowledge about oil and gas industry and valuable experience. Among the things I have learned:

- Never be scared to ask. There are no stupid questions. Asking the right questions is one way to learn.
- Never stop learning. There is always room to learn something new.
- Pay attention to relationships with people, be open and sincere.
- A positive attitude is always appreciated, as well as a sense of humor.
- KIS – 'Keep It Simple'. I learned that lesson from my first English Chief Officer Derek 'Spike' Sharp, when I worked in Teekay. I hope it will be useful for others.

I am very fortunate to have worked for companies who support the personal development of their employees, but in today's tough market, this happens more seldom. The industry should give young seafarers an opportunity to gain experience both on board and ashore. This would have the added benefit of helping bridge the gap between shore management and seafarers, which is one of the most charged conflicts in the industry today. 🌊



Polarcus Amani towing a seismic array