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## OFFSHORE SUPPORT JOURNAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

### Training & Crewing Forum, London – 17 to 18 Feb 2015

The key note address, given by Paul Aamaas, VP of Kongsberg Simulation, opened with a look at the effects of the downturn in the oil and gas industry – a theme which was frequently discussed throughout the day. It was acknowledged that training budgets are usually the first to be cut in such circumstances, but there was consensus that this is both short sighted and dangerous for an industry so reliant on safety.

Aamas also looked at current developments in technology, admitting that more technology tends to lead to less engagement by the crew. As a result, more training in handling emergency situations is essential. He questioned the wisdom of blaming human factors for accidents instead of thoroughly investigating the full chain of causal factors including design.

The opening panel discussion with Bibby Shipmanagement, Maersk Training, OSM Crew Management, Kongsberg and the Institute recognised that the cost profile of operations in a falling market is a challenge for owners, but also represents an opportunity for efficiency changes. It was clear that the cost of manning was the main issue rather than the cost of training. Employing quality people was seen as cost effective, with increased competency leading to improved efficiency.

It was clear that the key competency concern was not DP skills but manual shiphandling abilities. That shortfall stems from STCW training and the need for greater experience at sea. In this context, the continuing shortage of training berths is a problem that needs to be addressed. Too many people complete the basic training, but fail to get the necessary sea time, leading to a lack of the necessary experience. This is only likely to get worse in the current downturn with less vessel employment.

The discussion covered many related subjects including the dangers of shifting to low cost base supply countries for crew without putting in place additional training, the extensive leave ratios that are commonplace in the sector, and the need to ensure learning outcomes. Company training centres are seen as beneficial in closing the training loop and commercial competition is seen as good for innovation and enhancing competency. Finally, soft skills training is important both ashore and afloat, but needs to go beyond the levels now built into STCW – not least because there is said to be four times more communications in the

offshore sector than deep sea. Throughout the discussions, support was expressed for consistent industry initial training standards: the underpinning principle of the Institute's Dynamic Positioning Scheme.

### Specialist skill areas

Many of the aspects raised in the opening discussion were further explored in the presentations concerning specialist skills areas that followed. The International Marine Contractors Association (IMCA) set the scene, stating that there is a lack of medium to long-term planning of manning, so poaching of qualified people is prevalent. Investment in recruitment and training is essential in a downturn, to be ready for the upturn in the market and fleet expansion. It should also be recognised that each ship type requires specialist skills and owners should ensure

The Institute took the opportunity to provide an update on the Dynamic Positioning (DP) Operator training scheme that it manages on behalf of industry stakeholders. This was timely and well received. We emphasised the value of specialist training beyond STCW through industry self-regulation. The support for the revised standards in the training scheme managed by the Institute was welcome and the significant investment in IT (£100k) and staff (doubled to 20) made by the Institute over the past year appreciated.

training regimes are in place to meet these needs. DNV GL SeaSkills asserted that hands-on experience is required for true competence, but considers that 10 years is too long for the journey to Master, so greater use should be made of simulators to fast track experience, particularly in emergency situations. ROVOP, a provider of services – ie people – reiterated that quality staff are more cost effective. To ensure this quality they have set up their own training academy. Structured career development is offered over a period of six years. Each person is provided with a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) USB stick with clear competency requirements and outcomes to make that person responsible for their own CPD. IMCA's training guidelines are taken as the base but the aim is to apply higher standards and to be the best.

Other training providers in this session – Simsea, The Underwater Centre, Mojo

Maritime, and Swire Blue Ocean – spoke along similar lines about their training provision, with much support for team training for specific operations to provide cost savings at sea. Swire gladdened the hearts of many by declaring that all recruits to the sector must have an apprentice period offshore, and that the safety culture has to be learnt at sea rather than in colleges. It was agreed that standards within the offshore and wind farm sector must be set by those with maritime experience and coordinated to meet the challenges of the changing environment operationally and socially.

### Innovation and technology

Much of the session on innovation and technology in skills development focused on Crew Resource Management (CRM) and soft skills team training in addition to innovation in technology. It was suggested that, given the aging work force, quicker training is needed to fill the approaching gap in supply when experienced practitioners retire. It was suggested that a learning ability assessment should be carried out at the recruitment stage, and that 40% of total training time should be focused on people skills, with the other 60% being project-specific procedures training.

### Regional training

The final session considered regional training needs for the Gulf of Mexico, NW Europe and Brazil. Inevitably, cabotage manning requirements came in for comment. The complexity of regulations in some countries, particularly Brazil, created difficulties for the operating companies, and the point was made repeatedly that competence is not just a piece of paper. The quality of instructors in training centres was agreed to be as important as selecting the right people for training.

Some of the previously expressed concerns were discussed again. These included loss of joystick shiphandling skills, the potential for different DP training standards to emerge from new authorities, the decrease in core navigation skills due to reliance on GPS, and the negative effect on technical expertise on board due to reliance on shoreside support.

It was refreshing that the input and discussions throughout this forum were candid, showing a willingness to address the challenges facing the sector and seek solutions. Time and again the need to recruit, train and retain quality people was seen as the way forward, even though the quality available in some key areas was said to be in short supply.

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