



Nordic know-how

Successful teamwork on the bridge is essential for safe shipping. According to two Finnish captains with a wealth of experience between them, a crew works well under the Nordic management model.

Earlier this year *The Economist* ran a 14-page report titled “Why the world should look at the Nordic countries”. Among the success factors it examined was the flat management model that companies use in these countries.

“In Scandinavia, companies manage with goals and values rather than control and strict chains of command,” the report said, adding that: “They pride themselves on their flat structures and democratic ways, which they feel promote trust and cooperation.”

“Swedish and Finnish crew have been using that model for years. It’s slowly spreading throughout the shipping world,” says Captain Magnus Winberg, senior lecturer at Aboa Mare Simulation Center in Espoo, Finland.

Captain Dan Wikingsson, currently MD of Salen Ship Management, agrees. “On most vessels the hierarchy is still strictly maintained, it’s certainly not a democratic environment. When things go wrong, it’s important to have one person ultimately in charge. But it’s a fine balance. A dictator-style management comes at a risk. A modern captain focuses on teamwork. You can’t have a one-man show anymore.”

Wikingsson is convinced that tragedies caused by human error, such as the *Costa Concordia* accident off Italy last year, are less likely if three factors are strictly implemented at all company levels: proper assessment, training and uniform procedures.

“I think it’s far too easy to make one individual, the captain, the scapegoat for what led to the *Costa Concordia* disaster. It’s the responsibility of the company’s management to maintain a healthy, safety-conscious culture and that senior staff are trained, audited and fit for their duties,” he says.

He says the best company culture he has experienced was that of Malaysian-based Star Cruises, established in 1993 after it bought two Finnish ferries *Kalypso* and *Athena*, which then became *Star Pisces* and *Star Aquarius* respectively.

“The crew of those two ferries brought a Nordic management culture with them. At the time, although well established in Scandinavia, the new company thought the consensus-based approach was novel. Star Cruises went on to become very successful,” says Wikingsson. So what makes for successful teamwork on the bridge?

The February edition of *The Economist* that urged readers to look at the Nordic model



“Every person in a bridge team must be fully trained and fit for their tasks and duties. Training and knowledge build confidence. It’s also important to have the tasks distributed according to a plan so that every member of a team knows exactly what is expected of them. This allows them to prepare before operations

“At the same time, team members must be cross-trained and familiar with the duties of the other team members. It’s like a football team, where everyone knows their position, what they are supposed to do and what everyone else is supposed to do,” says Wikingsson.

Winberg agrees, adding that: “Human resource management is now considered so important that the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) has made courses in this subject mandatory.

“You can have the best equipment, but if your organization doesn’t work, it’s no good. Better to have slightly older equipment and good management. It’s not the machines that matter, it’s the people,” adds Winberg.

Text: Helen Karlsen