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# Effective Communication as a critical management and leadership skill onboard vessels

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**Abstract.** Nowadays, proficiency in Maritime English is compulsory for seafarers of all ranks and maritime professionals. It is a common view that effective communication is centered as one of the qualities most highly valued in all companies and types of industries. Effective communication not only on the navigation bridge but also in the engine room is a very crucial issue that has to be taken care of by all parties concerned, and that is to say, Merchant Marine Academies, maritime training centres, Ministries of Shipping, Maritime companies, classification societies, international maritime institutes and all people who work within this evolving Industry. Advanced communicative skills aim not just at the smooth operation of the vessel but also at the well-being and safety of the crew and the vessel itself.

## **1. Introduction. Maritime English within the shipping Industry**

Nowadays, proficiency in Maritime English is compulsory for seafarers of all ranks and maritime professionals. It is a common view that effective communication is centered as one of the qualities most highly valued in all companies and types of industries. Effective communication not only on the navigation bridge but also in the engine room is a very crucial issue that has to be taken care of by all parties concerned, and that is to say, Merchant Marine Academies, maritime training centres, Ministries of Shipping, Maritime companies, classification societies, international maritime institutes and all people who work within this evolving Industry. Advanced communicative skills aim not just at the smooth operation of the vessel but also at the well-being and safety of the crew and the vessel itself.

More and more people globally working within the Shipping Industry demonstrate a deep interest in learning this maritime communicative code or improving their level of Maritime English since it is an essential tool of their daily routine in their maritime community. Apart from this, it is widely admitted by all maritime students who have a considerable amount of sea service that by learning to effectively use maritime terminology they acquire the communicative competence for their operational duties onboard and at the same time gives them the opportunity to get better positions and higher salaries.

The IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases have been available since 2001. And It is therefore understandable that only those generations of officers having graduated after 2001 are familiar with them, and they do not represent the majority of active officers yet. It's the maritime companies that impose trends in maritime education according to their needs. New technology tendencies and advances introduced in marine engineering sector and new maritime legislation concerning safety have created the necessity to keep the marine engineering terminology constantly updated at a time when the whole maritime sector has gone through a profound transformation.

Although Maritime English and its teaching in all maritime training institutes, universities and colleges is of crucial importance, there is a considerable lack of educational books dealing with it such as glossaries, textbooks etc. That's why nowadays we see several projects of glossaries of terms arise from the perceived need to provide guidance to students at Merchant Marine Academies all around the globe, in the correct use of terms related to Marine Engineering, covering general aspects of it with the scope to provide cadets and marine engineers of all ranks with the appropriate terms and vocabulary to use in the performance of their daily routine duties. Good Communication skills help foster an open and authentic rapport between leaders (captains or chief engineers) and their teams, which increases productivity and efficiency ensuring safety. For a maritime professional working on ships, understanding and using a standardized communication system is not only important to improve communication abilities but also to facilitate social harmony and teamwork on board.

In the recent years, maritime safety has been impacted by communication problems due to language barriers. Relationships break down when there is poor or non-existent communication, and success of operation and well-being of seafarers are at risk. According to the statistics, lack of proper communication has been the main contributing factor in several maritime accidents, leading to total loss of the vessel and / or its cargo, and sometimes even worse, to injuries and fatalities. 80% of accidents at sea or even more are caused by human error. With half due to poor communication. This problem is mostly found onboard vessels having multilingual crews. It increases during emergency situations when people must react as quickly as possible under conditions of extreme pressure.

## **2. Communication as key factor for the operation of engine department**

In past times only the captain and the deck officers were expected to have good communication skills but in this day and age this perception has changed. Seafarers use to say that navigation bridge is the mind while the engine room is the heart of the vessel. These two departments interact between them and are equally responsible for the safe running of the vessel. It is therefore important that deck and engine officers both possess effective communication skills in order to maintain proper communication procedure during emergency situations and ship operations of any kind.

Although engineering has been viewed till now only as a technical field, communication in engineering is vital to succeeding as a marine engineer. As the shipping industry is advancing, the paperwork culture on ships is increasing enormously. A new model of marine engineer officers emerges that requires proficiency in English also for them. Management level engineers onboard ships take on a key leadership role in the engine room department. The duty of managerial level officer goes beyond the technical knowledge and therefore requires excellent communication and leadership skills. Onboard vessels, at least the 2nd engineer and the chief engineer are expected to be able to work alongside other managerial staff of other departments, classification societies, organizations or companies, such as surveyors, coast guard officers, consultants, agents, ship and cargo owners, clients and others. This interaction is on a daily basis. The fact that not everyone they interact with has the same technical expertise renders their role more complex and demands from them to possess advanced communication skills. They have to know how to write efficiently an email or a damage report or complete correctly all machinery documents, pollution prevention certificates, and log books (sulphur record, oil record book etc.) and other official papers. It is more apparent than ever that they act as leaders who interface with government officials and guide their own engine room team.

In addition to this, proper and safe operation of machinery by engineers is of paramount importance for the safe navigation of vessels. Especially during bunkering procedures, manoeuvring, starting up engines, machinery cooling down situations, carrying out maintenance works, engine repairs in port or during passage at sea. Under the prevailing circumstances, we all can imagine how difficult it could be for engineers to perform all these operational tasks in a noisy environment under huge pressure trying to establish a good communication with crewmembers of different age, nationality, culture, mentality, religious beliefs, etc.

### **3. Elements of an effective communication onboard vessels**

Effective communication consists of giving and receiving communication clearly, precisely and in a convincing way to groups as well as individuals at all levels. Officers in the engine room and on the bridge should be able to interact with ratings effectively in a risk and time sensitive environment by using clear phrasing, terminology and speed of delivery and a range of communication methods such as written, spoken, hand signals etc. to render their message clear and maintain a constant and direct flow of information. They should also be in a position to explain plans, expectations and assign roles, give concise briefings and updates at appropriate times, actively seek and act upon feedback and receive feedback constructively. Naturally, acknowledgement of cultural diversity in communications is a critical matter that has to be taken into consideration.

Essentially, effective communication boils down to leadership and management skills and builds trust between parties involved. Effective communication can prevent conflict situations from happening, welcomes and includes others, establishes an atmosphere of participation and builds a productive working relationship through cooperation. Effective communication performed at an operational level, as we have mentioned above, can contribute to a shared understanding, empowerment and carrying out duties effectively but when it is exercised at a management level can lead to something more than that such as aspiring, influencing by setting an example or direction and persuading others in a way that results in acceptance and agreement or even in behavior change. Effective communication can be achieved through training programs, reporting systems, safety committees, regular meetings onboard and seminars at the training department of shipping companies, etc.

Furthermore, seafarers being proficient in English will find themselves in a much better position to get a promotion at sea or on land as well as to be given a competitive advantage in the maritime business as many maritime companies have adopted this way of thinking.

### **4. Importance of marine engineering glossary**

For all of the above reasons, I strongly believe that the collective effort to develop this English - French glossary of maritime terms could constitute a very useful tool in the hands not only of engine cadets but also of marine professionals, who wish to improve their mastery of technical English, a first step in a long process for further development and self- study for improvement. The glossary consequently aspires to become an essential guide for using maritime terms correctly and effectively in the workplace. Its aim is to get learners involved in dealing with maritime situations – both ashore and offshore – thus developing interactive communication activities so that the learners will be able to cope with business situations, to provide a wide range of vocabulary of maritime terms, acronyms, abbreviations and perhaps marine fixed phrases, to consolidate the most important maritime business jargon and to reinforce writing techniques through the development of letters, reports, memos and emails.

### **5. Conclusion**

The main objective regarding the discipline of marine engineering terminology for everyone who is interested in Maritime studies or for those who are already maritime professionals is to enhance their theoretical background, their reading comprehensive skills, strategies and broaden their relevant vocabulary in order to be able to communicate more effectively during their daily routine duties onboard vessels. Marine Engineers of all ranking are required to acquire maximum confidence in the mechanisms of the English language and of course in the Maritime terminology. Therefore, the development of naval engineering glossaries, specialized material such as authentic or semi-authentic texts, exercises and various other written and oral activities are considered to be an essential tool for those who are bound to encounter in real life professional situations.

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