Crewtoo™ Seafarers Happiness Index

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Introduction

Perhaps one of the most important corporate social responsibilities any company or industry has is the happiness of its employees. At Crewtoo we felt that it was vital to begin understanding seafarers, so we developed an ongoing system to monitor and report back to the industry on seafarer job satisfaction: the Crewtoo Seafarers Happiness Index.

The shipping industry often talks about seafarers – debating the realities of life at sea, and worrying that we aren’t bringing enough new talent into the industry, while struggling to keep those we have. For all the talk, there has been very little evidence of how seafarers actually feel about their jobs. For us the lack of real understanding was troubling and we wanted answers to the fundamental question...

Are seafarers happy?
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Happiness Matters

Enquiring about someone's happiness may seem a simple question, one that you might ask and be asked a dozen times a day. But start to think about it and it's actually quite a complex enquiry, perhaps one of the most profound we face.

What does it really mean to be happy, in your life, your job, your relationships and career? For seafarers these are key issues, and ones which have seemingly been overlooked.

The Crewtoo Seafarers Happiness Index allows our members to speak out on important matters of seafarer satisfaction on a regular basis.

At Crewtoo we believe that satisfied, well fed, fit, and engaged seafarers are vital to the present and future of the industry. Happy people stick around, happy people work well, they embrace challenges, they look to excel and share with others. In short, happiness matters and it needs to be measured, assessed, and understood. The lessons then need to be applied to ensure that we are looking after seafarers properly and responding to their wants and needs.

Support for the initiative is growing, with unions, charities, owners and managers all rallying to the cause and getting the seafarers they work with involved.

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With more data will come an even clearer indication of how issues affect seafarers – and then, once we know how they feel, we can address the issues. Keeping seafarers happy is vital, but we need to know how they feel. The Crewtoo Seafarers Happiness Index makes this possible.
Quarter 2 of 2015 has allowed us to gather three additional months of data – and already we are seeing patterns and important issues emerge. This new report is part of our ongoing campaign to raise awareness and to assist with the shipping industry decision making process. No more will we have to guess what seafarers think, the reports will tell us all loud and clear how people working at sea feel about fundamental issues.

The data includes responses from globally based seafarers responding to a targeted, web-based survey by Crewtoo, part of KVH Media Group. The seafarer respondents included:

- **50+ Nationalities**: Nationalities such as the UK, Philippines, Poland, Croatia, Germany, USA, Canada, India, Turkey, many African nationalities and others.

- **11% Captains**: Mariners from across all ranks and onboard departments, with Masters representing the largest proportion of responses by rank.

- **25% Work on Bulk Carriers & Container Ships**: Seafarers from a range of vessel types and sectors with bulk carriers and container vessels making up the largest proportions.

- **Ages 16-69**: Largest number of respondents were once again in two distinct groups: age 26-30 and age 51+.
10 Benchmarks of Seafarers Happiness

Asking the Questions that Matter

Since the start of 2015 we have been asking seafarers how happy they feel with their life at sea...the numbers are building, and illustrate what it means to be a seafarer today. The Crewtoo Seafarers Happiness Index is growing and we hope it will become an important part of the shipping industry’s decision making process. By helping to highlight what seafarers think of aspects of life at sea then together we can make a real difference. The ongoing reports of the Crewtoo Seafarers Happiness Index examine not just the data returned, but the potential underlying trends and reasons for any movements.

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And now for the Numbers…

With this second quarterly report on seafarer happiness levels it is possible to begin to explore trends in the data, and to try and appreciate what trends or events impact the levels of satisfaction of those at sea.

The overall Crewtoo Seafarers Happiness Index levels amongst seafarers is currently at 6.44 on a scale of 1-10. This is a very slight rise from the first quarter – however, there are a number of individual areas which have been falling.

1. Human Angle
   - How happy are you generally when you are at sea?
     - Isolation, loneliness and a lack of connectivity remain the core concerns. The cumulative effects of issues were felt to impact heavily, and seafaring was termed a "rollercoaster" of emotions.
     - Score: 6.45

2. Connectivity
   - How happy are you about the contact you are able to have with your family when you are at sea?
     - Seafarers crave the connection that online access brings, and it seems there is a two-tier dynamic developing in the industry – with seafarers being either connected or not. Seafarers without connectivity are amazed that they should be denied the access which so many people take for granted.
     - Score: 6.76

3. Getting Ashore
   - How happy are you about your access to shore leave?
     - Today, shore leave seems to signal a procession of inspections, and more work to be done with many feeling that arriving into port was simply a trigger for more work, not any form of relaxation.
     - Score: 6.10

4. Talking Cash
   - How happy are you about your wages/salary?
     - Some seafarers are earning well, while others are not only offered low salaries – sometimes they do not even receive the payments owing to them. There was very little middle ground in responses to this issue – respondents felt well paid, underpaid, or were never paid.
     - Score: 6.23

5. Meal Deals
   - How happy are you about the standard of food you eat onboard?
     - Food is an important issue onboard ship – from the purely nutritional demands needed to fuel a vessel’s workforce, through to the social benefits and bonds which come through people enjoying their dining.
     - Score: 6.34

6. Exercising
   - How happy are you about your ability to keep fit and healthy onboard?
     - Some seafarers do get to exercise, and the benefits when they do are to be found across the board. Exercise appears to be a major contributor to happiness amongst our seafarers.
     - Score: 6.60

7. Training
   - How happy are you about the training you receive?
     - For some seafarers, training is a simple case of professional development and advancement, for others there is a sense of entitlement and in some cases even resentment. Getting to the issues is not always easy, but in many ways it highlights the fact that “training” is no catch-all concept.
     - Score: 6.74

8. Teamwork
   - How happy are you about interaction with other crew members onboard?
     - Communication, interaction and team building were recognised and encouraged, though language issues were felt to be a barrier at times, and there were concerns that on occasions cliques and divisions can occur when certain nationalities congregated or spent time together.
     - Score: 7.16

9. Working
   - How happy are you with your workload?
     - A heightened workload level is likely to lead to tiredness, stress, and fatigue. Some respondents felt the issue was being managed well by the management ashore and senior officers onboard. Others felt the workload, particularly on short sea voyages, could be completely overwhelming.
     - Score: 6.35

10. Welfare
    - How happy are you with welfare facilities when you are ashore?
      - If crew are going to struggle to get ashore, while spending money and time, then it is vital that the facilities they can access make them happy. The responses from seafarers seemed to paint a two-tier system of nations which look after them and those that don’t.
      - Score: 5.68

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In analysing the general levels of overall happiness of seafarers the question allows a more open, encompassing view of the areas which have greatest bearing on satisfaction at sea.

From the impact of inspections, to poor management onboard and the ever present threat posed by isolation and loneliness, the range of answers received from seafarers to this question shows how the cumulative impacts take effect. People working at sea have to juggle many competing demands.

It is not all bad news – there is still an overwhelming sense of professional pride and of excitement at working onboard ships, and the seafarers who shared their views seemingly are as well versed in the opportunities their profession allows as they are the threats.

From the positive responses, it was stated that time at home made up for periods of, perhaps, unhappiness at being away from home. One seafarer captured the nature of being at sea, terming it a “rollercoaster with your feelings” – sometimes working at sea comes with real highs, while sometimes there are lows too.

The happiest seafarers claimed that issues such as “proper rotation” and adequate pay made a difference. There were a number of respondents who stressed the importance of meeting new people and of making friends onboard.

Happiness, it was stated, “is being satisfied with your work as a seafarer while keeping in touch with your families at all times”.

There were a number of responses which stressed the fact that many seafarers feel “born” into the profession, and that the time they spend at sea reflects the fact that despite the challenges, they are happy in their role.

Pride in a job well done was quoted as a reason to be happy at sea, while others felt that, “good work, good salary and security” were the key facets of seafaring which made the difference.

The reality of working at sea came across through concerns voiced about the fears of working in a dangerous environment. While some felt they were just “one mistake from death”, there were others who also questioned the safety approach and management process.

Paperwork and the expanding workload for seafarers were seen as having a major impact on quality of life at sea. Some respondents stated that owing to the demands of paperwork they were constantly busy, and with so many reports to produce there were allegations that hours or rest were being falsified. It was also stated that good officers will start to leave the sea because of the heavy bureaucratisation of all aspects of seafaring.

Fatigue and stress were mentioned repeatedly by respondents. Watch patterns were mentioned, with “6-on-6-off” shifts proving particularly hard to manage. Issues of leadership and management onboard also came to the fore.

Commercial pressures and the level of shipboard inspections are also seemingly taking their toll on seafarers, especially on vessels in which seafarers do not feel they receive sufficient support from the management ashore.

Historically we would perhaps have expected seafarers to be happier when their vessel was in port. With increasing time constraints and pressures, this no longer seems to be the case. For seafarers having to deal with multiple inspections, cargo work, security demands, and the various port authorities that board the vessel, then the stress and workload in port are ramping up to almost unsustainable levels.

One respondent stated, “I am very happy when at sea but when our vessel enters port, it is a very hard time”. For a survey which measures happiness, this statement seems to capture a rather depressing but increasingly held view of our times and of what it means to be a seafarer today.

Some port authorities were also subject to criticism, more specifically the stance taken by the United States with regards to shore leave for seafarers. Despite recent steps to improve access to facilities ashore it seems that getting ashore in the US is still very problematic for seafarers.
Question 2

How happy are you about the contact you are able to have with your family when you are at sea?

6.76

The issue of contact with family and connectivity is an extremely significant issue currently. Seafarers crave the connection that calls, messaging and even emails can bring, and it seems there is a two-tier dynamic developing in the industry – with seafarers being either connected or not.

Seafarers without connectivity are seemingly amazed that in this high-tech era that they should be denied the access which so many people take for granted. This is a serious issue for those who do not feel they have their connection at either the quality or cost that they deserve.

Reliable Internet availability and reasonably priced satellite phone cards seem to be the absolute minimum that many seafarers demand. Without these provisions there is a serious drop off in satisfaction, and thus happiness levels.

Even where the levels and standard of connection is not as good as at ashore, there is still a feeling that any kind of connectivity is better than none.

Seafarers who reported receiving “20 minutes free phone call daily and 24 hours free Internet” where markedly happier than those who did not. Links to home and the outside world are now becoming one of the most enjoyable moments of being a seafarer today.

Aside from paying off, the times seafarers can feel in touch are the next best thing.

Seafarers noted that as the rest of society is ever more connected and used to being in almost constant contact, for individuals to be so far out of the loop can be ever more difficult to manage. Such issues have a tangible and negative effect on seafarer happiness.

The major gripes from seafarers on this subject related to either not having any access to the Internet or calls, or where there was the capability then some owners made it expensive for them to use the services available. One respondent stated that “without Internet access life is too hard” – and that sentiment perhaps sums up the fact that today people expect to be connected.

The happier seafarers in our sample spoke almost universally of the pleasure they had from being able to speak or communicate with home. Talking to family made their life at sea so much more bearable and closed the distance they felt between them.

For seafarers who serve on connected vessels, the quality of the service was vitally important to them. Some spoke of experiencing speeds which were likened to, “dial up Internet in 1998”. They felt that some systems provided levels of connection speeds and quality which were below “normal accepted” standards.

Cruise ships were stated to have, perhaps unsurprisingly, the best connection options for crew. The particular favourite means of interaction with home was via Whatsapp and Facebook messenger.

There were repeated calls from a number of respondents who wanted to see pressure to make Internet access for seafarers compulsory on all ships. If and only, they said, all vessels were connected to the web, that would make seafarers even happier.
Question 3

How happy are you about your access to shore leave?

6.10  ↓  DOWN  0.03

Shore leave, or the lack thereof, is a perennial problem area for the modern seafarer. Long gone are the days when seeing port hove in to sight meant something to look forward to. Today, it is more likely to signal a procession of inspections, and more work to be done.

Given that going to sea used to be seen as a means of seeing the world, today things are different. One respondent stated that “shore leave takes time, energy, and effort. It sometimes contributes to fatigue before going back on board for duty again”.

Perhaps the most repeated words in answering this question were “relax” and “relaxation”. Seafarers claimed that the benefits of being able to unwind and escape the pressures of shipboard life, even for a short period, were important.

This was a pattern repeated in a number of responses and the downward trend of the Crewtoo Seafarers Happiness Index indicates that this is a problem area. Some respondents asked what shore leave actually is – having not had a chance to take any for a number of years.

Restrictions, stringent security, and high costs placed on seafarers are seen as being significant, and they have a negative effect. A number of seafarers stated that even getting ashore would cost them at least 100 USD, and so very few crew went ashore these days.

As well as security personnel at ports, there were criticisms of port agents, who they felt could make the process of accessing shore leave easier and cheaper, if they so desired. There were also criticisms that all too often port agents simply do not want the extra work which is associated with completing the paperwork for shore leave. Praise was given to various charities for their provision of transport and seaman’s clubs and missions.

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The chance to break free from the norm, to dress differently and have a change of environment was seen as being extremely beneficial. Being denied this or it being so difficult to get ashore was repeatedly negatively viewed.

Some countries came in for criticism, and seafarers felt that the United States, Australia, and Saudi Arabia made it extremely difficult to head ashore. Some ranks were also deterred from shore leave – a number of countries reportedly will not allow security contractors to travel ashore.

The harsh reality of vessels working to tight schedules and seafarers having to keep pace was cited. This was considered especially true for vessels trading in compact areas such as European waters, and particularly the North Sea. The sheer number of port calls would perhaps suggest access to shore, but the work needed meant that seafarers were seldom given the chance for “stretching legs on the road”. Other examples were of seafarers on three-month oil tanker trips grabbing a few hours ashore at a remote oil terminal at best.

To hear of repeated responses in which access to shore leave was either denied or made difficult was disappointing. Seafarers are aware of the importance of using shore leave as a way of “refreshing our minds and soul” and of a break from the strenuous or mundane work onboard. It was also seen as a way of relieving homesickness and loneliness felt at sea.
The issue of salary and wage levels is always a contentious one, and as might be expected there is a wide and divergent set of responses from seafarers. Some are earning well, while others are not only offered low salaries – sometimes they do not even receive the payments owing to them.

There was very little middle ground in responses to this issue – respondents felt well paid, underpaid, or never paid.

Despite this, there was a recurring theme – it related to the level, not of salary, but of sacrifice and workload. Naturally, the more seafarers were asked to deliver, the more they felt they should be paid. Issues of personal sacrifice were mentioned, and time away from home was not considered to be sufficiently factored in. “Risk”, “pain”, and “sacrifice” were terms which were used.

“I signed up for more than USD1200 but my agency only pays me USD800”.

Some ranks were particularly vociferous about wage levels. Junior officers and senior catering staff voiced opinions that their vital roles in running the ship were not recognised adequately. The role of chief cook, for instance, was a theme from a number of respondents. It was felt that the responsibilities of handling all stock, accounting, and also cooking – while keeping the entire crew fed and safe from food poisoning, was worthy of a high grade of remuneration. There was a sense that since the demise of the “purser” role on many vessels, then the chief cook has risen on the responsibility scale, but not necessarily on the wage scale.

Even in companies in which wages were deemed to be at steady levels, there were concerns that through cost cutting, junior staff were expected to take on more senior elements of responsibility, but at the same rates of pay.

There were also a number of concerns about the processes which companies use to pay salaries back to families at home. A number of respondents complained of delays or complications. “I signed up for more than USD1200 but my agency only pays me USD800”.

There were also calls for a better and more transparent system of evaluating wages – as a number of respondents felt that simply relating wage levels to rank does not tell the whole story. They feel that different vessel types, different trades and port calls all have a massive impact on the actual work which is demanded.

With the lowering oil price, and some concerns over lost projects in the offshore shipping side of the industry, there were some who were hesitant to complain, but who felt that a freeze in wages and bonuses was becoming evident. This will be an area to monitor in future reports.

The positive aspects of wages were that many seafarers still felt that salary levels were significantly higher than the national average wages in their own countries. Therefore, there is a still a massive incentive to come to sea. This “good money”, as it was termed, is the reason that seafarers keep going back to sea.

There was some dissatisfaction with the impression that shore wages have increased at a rate higher than those at sea. While some appreciated that shore wages need to be at levels to attract high quality seafarers into the management structure ashore, there was a sense that the challenges, dangers, and work levels ashore are far less than they are at sea, and so wages should reflect this.
Question 5

How happy are you about the standard of food you eat onboard?

6.34  ↑  0.08

Food is an important issue onboard ship – from the purely nutritional demands needed to fuel a vessel’s workforce, through to the social benefits and bonds which come through people enjoying their dining.

Those who reported they were catered for by high quality or even “excellent” cooks, reported far higher happiness levels - not just in this question but across many others. The importance of good quality staff is clear, but so too is the need to provide good, fresh, nutritional ingredients.

A number of respondents were concerned that the quality of food / provisions sent to the vessel were not of good quality. There were some who believed that owners may have been cost cutting, but there were also allegations that chandlers may also be on the make - charging for quality goods, but providing lesser ones is a trick as old as shipping. It is to be hoped that this is not the case.

Away from the issue of quality of supply, it was interesting to read that seafarers are increasingly aware of their dietary needs and of the importance of good nutrition, though it was felt that, “healthy food is still a myth on ships”. One respondent allighted on where some blame may lie: “Pure and simple, I eat too much when onboard”.

Some chief cooks and catering staff came in for extremely high praise, which was positive and uplifting to read. One seafarer didn’t even like the food at home when he signed off as the cook onboard was so good. Perhaps the effects of “biryani to die for” are pretty compelling. The most positive response stated, “Chief Cook is awesome. Give the man a medal”.

Alas, it was not all good news. Whether through cuts in the quality, the amount of food onboard, or through the perceived incompetence of some catering crews, there were many who were not at all happy with the issue of food onboard. There were a number of criticisms of too much fried food, or of poor cooking techniques in general, with many mentions of overcooked vegetables. There was also concern about the levels of food waste generated. It was suggested that some cooks are not sufficiently well trained in making food last or of innovating to get more from the supplies onboard.

“Pure and simple, I eat too much when onboard”.

Interestingly, there were a number of responses from cruise vessels – where the crew complained that they were treated extremely below par food. While it is no surprise that passengers would get the best food available, it seemed surprising that there was such a wide gap between the standard of food for crew and passengers.

A rather surprising dichotomy occurred in a number of responses: Seafarers felt guilty about eating well onboard while they felt their families back at home couldn’t or weren’t. This may well relate to wage levels or problems sending money home.

There were many who voiced concerns that cultural aspects of food were not sufficiently addressed. While the Maritime Labour Convention clearly states that minimum standards for food should consider “religious requirements” and “cultural practices”, there were seafarers who felt that this was not the case.

The nationality of the cook does have bearing on the cultural aspects of the cuisine, as is perhaps natural. However, it seems that work is needed to ensure that seafarers are given food which they can enjoy and which adequately and positively reflects their culture.
A major focus of happiness is often exercise, and here we look at how access to facilities or time to enjoy them is making a difference to seafarer welfare and wellness.

For many respondents it was stated that their vessels do not have a gym and there was a sense that they wished the Maritime Labour Convention had been a little more decisive in this regard.

"Being fit and healthy is a choice people make"

The MLC states, “consideration” should be given to a host of recreational facilities and these include sports equipment, “including exercise equipment, table games and deck games”, and where possible facilities for swimming. Alas for many it seems that such “consideration” has resulted in the answer being “no”.

Even on vessels where there is a surfeit of exercise equipment, sometimes the demands of port calls and onboard work mean that it does not get used.

Some seafarers do get to exercise, and the benefits when they do are to be found across the board. A number of respondents said that with exercise comes increased energy, vitality, and an ability to tackle the tough work onboard ship. Studies of exercise have long shown the benefits to mental health, and many seafarers commented that when they were able to exercise it reduced stress dramatically.

Work schedules do play a role in whether people exercise or not, and while some state that they choose to sleep rather than go to the gym, others feel that seafarers owe it to themselves to find even short periods of time to work out a little.

For some, there is seeming confusion – comments such as “when I work 12 hours per day when can I go to gym?” would perhaps warrant an obvious answer, but this is clearly a mindset issue and it seems that some seafarers do not see the immediate and important benefits of exercise.

It seems that this is as much a case of education and engagement as it is one relating to equipment and time. "Being fit and healthy is a choice people make", said one respondent, and that seems a very wise view.

The message is very clear, the more seafarers have access, time, space, and encouragement to engage in exercise, the happier they are. The realities of life at sea, with busy ships, small crew numbers, and a temptation to play video games can erode this – so it needs to be pushed, managed, and taken seriously.
The job in hand.

Others recognise that enhanced skills and knowledge as to whether the training they receive equips them for the job.

Where due regard is paid, then seafarers are happy to embrace the opportunities to learn, to improve, and to pick up new skills or enhance existing.

From a shipboard perspective, the experience of training and the happiness with it totally depends upon the quality and nature of senior officers who are meant to be training and mentoring other staff.

There were some concerns about when and how training is conducted, especially issues such as shipboard training which could interfere with hours of rest. While others expressed concerns about training ashore when on leave, a number of respondents felt that all too often this impacted too heavily on their vacations. There were also concerns raised about the fact that seafarers were often undertaking training at their own expense.

There were particular complaints about what seafarers deemed, “training for compliance only”, meaning courses or approaches to training which only really delivered a tick in the box, rather than anything positive or tangible.

Some companies clearly have a good system for mentoring and training. There were numerous comments that they felt their company training to be “excellent”. At its best the training is professional and practical and with a desired goal.

A number of positive comments emerged about computer-based training and online systems, with Videotel courses being singled out for particular praise. The free training access that Videotel granted to seafarers on the ebola virus was also particularly well received and welcomed.

Working and hours of rest onboard need to be managed when training is to be delivered onboard, while the need to provide seafarers with sufficient leave when they are away from the vessel for training is also a bone of contention.

Where due regard is paid, then seafarers are happy to embrace the opportunities to learn, to improve, and to pick up new skills or enhance existing.

Getting to the issues is not always easy with so many conflicting views and responses, but in many ways it highlights the fact that “training” is no catch-all concept. For some it is the level of mentoring they receive onboard, others the courses they feel compelled to complete to remain in a job. Others recognise that enhanced skills and knowledge are win-wins for all.

There were some seafarers who claim that their shipboard colleagues are actively against training, “they do not want to learn any more”. This seems a rather provocative and bizarre statement. However, it does seem that some have concerns as to whether the training they receive equips them for the job in hand.

Training is both a pivotal and emotive issue for seafarers – it is also extremely complex. For some it is a simple case of professional development and advancement and needs to be grabbed, for others there is a sense of entitlement and in some cases even resentment.

There were also concerns raised about the fact that seafarers were often undertaking training at their own expense.

It is to this complex background that the recent responses gave a rather confused, but on the whole “happier”, response to the issue.

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Question 7

How happy are you about the training you receive?

6.74

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Where due regard is paid, then seafarers are happy to embrace the opportunities to learn, to improve, and to pick up new skills or enhance existing.

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For seafarers, regardless of the other aspects which affect their happiness, interaction with other crew members and the friendships, bonds, and professional support they can bring are vitally important.

Given the amount of mixed nationality crews operating, there have been concerns as to how this could impact individuals. However, most responses were positive in this regard. The respondents spoke of the pleasure of getting along with people, and of how positive their friendships and camaraderie were.

It was important, according to the responses gained, to ensure that communication, interaction, and team building were recognised and encouraged. Language issues were felt to be a barrier at times, and there were concerns that on occasion cliques and divisions can occur when certain nationalities congregated or spent time together.

Good communal facilities onboard make it easier for seafarers to relax together and to enjoy shared experiences, such as movies or games.

Such factions could be seen as divisive according to some respondents, and it was felt important for senior officers to ensure that a full, encompassing, shipboard “team” ethic prevailed. They promoted the concept of a group dynamic which transcends nationality.

In the challenging environment of shipboard life, there was pride expressed in the fact that seafarers are so adaptable and able to maintain harmonious relationships in trying and difficult circumstances.

Unfortunately for some, the concepts of friendship and camaraderie are not always possible to promote. There were some respondents who felt it was never a case of fellow crew being considered “friend”, they are merely “colleagues”. Perhaps unsurprisingly such views emerged from the less happy seafarers. Whether friendships beget happier seafarers, or happy seafarers make friends easier is one for a more psychological analysis.

There was a worrying suggestion that some older, perhaps traditional beliefs still pervade. Some seafarers spoke of senior officers taking exception to junior officers having interaction with crew members. Given the small numbers of crew onboard many vessels today, seafarers felt that the more traditional divide between officers and crew perhaps needed re-examining.

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Alas it was repeatedly stressed that many seafarers these days carry their own movies, music, and games and there is a tendency for some to spend most of their free time by themselves. It was stressed that solutions need to be found, and that some onboard “social media” style systems could help to better integrate those onboard.

Respondents also felt that management and leadership make a major difference too. Good senior officers with positive management skills are able to foster a good operational environment and this also then flavours the social aspects onboard.
Question 9
How happy are you with your workload?

6.35 ↓ DOWN 0.08

Workload is an ever present issue for today’s seafarers, and it would be impossible to assess the true satisfaction of those working at sea without addressing it.

A heightened workload level is likely to lead to tiredness, stress, and fatigue – and these are some of the most dangerous and potentially damaging issues facing seafarers.

“Too much to do and too little time to do it in”

For some respondents the issue was being managed well by the management ashore and senior officers onboard, although a number commented that systems onboard were designed to ensure that they were able to maximise work, but so too their rest periods. They felt that the situation was managed, and that they worked as necessary and with due regard to the safety management system. Indeed, a number of respondents felt that a full workload helped the time to go more quickly and distracted them from missing family and friends.

That is the positive side of the equation, in which sensible decisions are made with a view to ensuring pragmatic results; however, not all felt that way. Responses from seafarers working in ships which did not have extended passages between ports were especially concerning.

Repeated responses indicated that short sea voyages could be completely overwhelming. The workload generated by shipboard communications, pre-arrival and departure checks and other requirements meant that severe workload spikes were reported.

Numerous responses captured the sense that there is “Too much to do and too little time to do it in”.

This was also a theme with junior officers stating that the demands of paperwork mean that supposed rest time is spent catching up. A negative spiral of workload demands can soon develop.

Paperwork was repeatedly felt to be a negative element of life at sea. Some even believed that every year there is more and more paperwork to the extent that more time is spent recording the work than is spent doing it. There were some who pointed the finger at their managers ashore, but others aimed higher and felt that the regulatory authorities are to blame. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) came in for repeated criticism. It is interesting to note that the IMO has recently announced a decision to ensure that regulations do not negatively impact in this way, so perhaps this will eventually be reflected in a rising index?

Aside from the issue of paperwork, the main thrust of negativity in this regard centred on too many inspections. With complaints surrounding vetting inspections, port state control, annual surveys, safety audits, security checks, the workload was seen to rapidly increase. Given the fact that respondents also spoke of minimal crew and unfair distributions of workload across personnel, it is perhaps easy to see why the index is falling in this question.
When and where seafarers do manage to leave the ship, then the issue of welfare facilities takes on enormous significance – if crew are going to struggle to get ashore, while spending money and time, then it is vital that the facilities they can access make them happy.

The responses from seafarers seemed to paint a two-tier system when it comes to welfare provisions ashore. Most felt that Europe, the US, and Australia provided fairly well for them, while other nations and areas were perceived to have very little in the way of facilities.

There were a number of respondents who felt that terminal operators should do more – and they asked why ports can’t offer free Wi-Fi to vessels and why they cannot provide free shuttle buses to “civilisation” away from the terminals.

Some said they did not use facilities as they felt them to be unwelcoming and unappealing. There were other comments which may potentially tie into this; seafarers complained of the increased presence of “mafia” and “organised criminals” looking to take advantage of crews coming ashore; they also spoke of corruption.

It may well be that these seafarers were referring to the provision of over-priced taxis, but it is an area of potential concern if seafarers feel under threat as they leave the vessel. This is another possible barrier to seafarer happiness and enjoyment of life at sea.

Most seafarers shared similar views in what they expected of welfare facilities: They want free Internet, telephones, lots of reading materials and a chance to catch up with news at home. Many also wanted to see sports and recreation facilities, ranging from pool tables to football and basketball courts; swimming pools are highly desirable in warmer climes.

The centres which did have many of these facilities drew unequivocal praise from respondents, and many felt that the better seafarer centres are exceptional and provide an amazing welcome for those coming ashore. There was an excitement for some about being able to break free of the vessel and relax.

At the most basic level, a number of respondents felt that visiting a seafarer centre was far preferable to staying on the ship, and so regardless of the facilities on offer, they would always choose to make the trip if time and access are permitting.

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Question 10
How happy are you with welfare facilities when you are ashore?

5.68 ↓

When and where seafarers do manage to leave the ship, then the issue of welfare facilities takes on enormous significance – if crew are going to struggle to get ashore, while spending money and time, then it is vital that the facilities they can access make them happy.

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About the Crewtoo Seafarers Happiness Index

Crewtoo is committed to monitoring important benchmarks of seafarer happiness on a regular basis. Seafarers will be surveyed approximately every three months, and reports on the trends will be published at crewtoo.com.

For the second index, completed in July 2015, the data includes responses from globally based seafarers from across all ranks and onboard departments; in ages ranging from 16 to 66; from more than 50 nationalities including the Philippines, UK, Poland, Croatia, Germany, USA, Canada, India, Turkey and many African nationalities; and from a wide range of vessel types and sectors.

Crewtoo is the world’s largest online network of the seafaring community, with more than 110,000 members. Crewtoo was launched in 2011 by KVH Media Group.

Contact us.

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Have you considered asking 100,000+ seafarers a question? If the answer is yes, email Anneley Pickles at apickles@kvh.com to find out more about our bespoke Crewtoo Survey service.