Exploring the Factors that Make Filipino Seafarers Quit Their Sea Jobs

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Abstract:
This study used the normative-descriptive method. A modified-standardized survey questionnaire was employed in this research. Majority of the Maritime Instructors as respondents of the study agree on the following factors as the causes which make the Filipino seafarers quit their sea jobs: hectic life; personal/ family problems; homesickness and seasickness within a few months; long distance relationships suffered; they hardly adjust to other crew onboard; they suffered fatigue onboard ship; inability to cope with the strenuous nature of life at sea; inhumane and unsupportive attitude from mentors at sea;; ill treatment of seafarers through unfair contracts; desertion by shipowners and salary arrears; insufficient shore leave; the lack of support from shore side staff can lead to frustrations for seafarers; the peculiar nature of working in the shipping industry; separation to work at sea creates disruption in the marital life; there have been many unlawful arrests of seafarers due to criminalizing unintentional marine pollution, the industry runs the risk of exposing seafarers to media criticism as well as discouraging disclosure of needed feedback regarding accidents in order to prevent their occurrence; unprecedented volume of regulations and conventions in the shipping industry; workplace safety issues onboard ships; and the aging factor. But majority of the Maritime Instructors disagreed on the following factors: on-board politics; differences in the level of expectations between the younger and older generations in the seafaring industry; shipowners are reducing the size of crew onboard their ships due to shipboard technology; and that short-term job contracts reduce commitment. Maritime shipping companies must take care of their employees by improving employees’ job retention and career growth opportunities. Thus, the Maritime Instructors must be well-educated on the benefits, privileges and rights as a Maritime professional through relevant trainings and social awareness programs.

Keywords: explore, factors, Filipino, seafarers, quit, sea jobs.

Introduction
An individual’s quality of life is directly influenced by their kind of job, its conditions and statuses. The same is true with the Maritime seafarers and professionals, whose unique and exceptional type of environment cannot be disregarded. The significance of these genre of profession or career as well is truly evident especially in this era of fast moving global community. More and more seafarers are pivotal to traverse on-board the vessels as this will further keep the world moving. As a factual
matter, seafarers can spend more than six months onboard a ship once leaving port. These seafarers thus endure a highly stressful work environment and a significant degree of fatigue relative to other areas of employment. The accumulated stress and fatigue have a direct negative effect on seafarers’ health that may threaten both their own safety and that of their colleagues, and lead to operational accidents. Undeniably, these kinds of issues can be compounded by the current conditions in the shipping industry. Onboard cultural clashes occur frequently, because of the multinational workforce. And in many cases, seafarers find themselves unable to alleviate their stress through positive means, often resorting to alcohol or cigarettes, and sometimes leading to addiction of these substances. As a result of this particular working environment, seafarers tend to feel more deprived relative to those in other occupations. Enhancing seafarers’ support system for a better working environment may result in higher subjective satisfaction with their workplace, which would lead to greater organizational harmony. Considering the unique nature of maritime occupations, in which seafarers are required to operate efficiently in the ship’s socially-isolated environment and successfully perform tasks to increase subjective satisfaction. Hence a human resource management to improve the seafarers’ quality of work life is vital. While maritime workers reap high rewards, and the life of being a seaman is an appealing prospect to many young people, there are problems faced by seafarers that can lead some to quit their lucrative jobs at sea. And most of the reasons for leaving a seafaring job are also directly related to an increase in the risks of on-the-job accidents and injuries. When the presence of dangerous working conditions continues to increase, without any steps being taken by the vessel’s owners or ship’s captain, seafarers are right to look for a safer work environment.

Ship owners have a legal obligation to provide maintenance and cure to injured maritime workers under maritime law. If you are unable to work at your maritime job because of an accident or injury, you may be entitled to compensation for medical expenses, lost wages, or loss of earning potential. Pekcan et al. (2003) also suggest that less seafarers are staying at sea beyond 10 years. Those who do remain may stay until retirement, yet such a category of people is increasingly becoming rare as a result of deteriorating working conditions onboard. Considering that it takes an average of 4 years to produce junior officers and an additional 6 years to have them become senior officers (Eler et al. 2009), the statistic of many seafarers leaving within 10 years (Moreby 1975; Shiptalk 2008; Ljung 2010) is quite disturbing since most may not become masters thereby worsening the prevailing labor crisis at the higher echelon of a ship’s crew complement (Caesar et al. 2013). At a certain stage in the career of seafarers, there may be a convergence of termination factors which makes it difficult for them to become senior officers and hence leave to landside jobs (Cahoon et al. 2014). At this stage, the seafarer may be in their late 20s or early 30s, where externalities are also having an impact on voluntary turnover decisions, such as becoming married, beginning a family or being concerned about ageing parents. In a study of Danish seafarers and specifically officers, Haka et al. (2011) found that the major reasons for leaving seafaring are the following: spending a long time away from home and family, problems posed by cultural differences, isolation or loneliness among officers. Thus, the need to improve retention among seafarers exists, and understanding the reasons for attrition is central to finding solutions to the problem.

According to Seafarers Right International (2014), every seafarer has their right in terms of regulated working hours and also during their rest hours. Per the Maritime Labor Convention of 2006 (MLC), the hours of work are stated as either maximum hours of work, or minimum hours of rest: the maximum hours of duty must not exceed 14 hours in 24 hours, and 72 hours in any seven-day period, or the minimum rest hours must not be less than 10 hours in a 24-hour period, and 77 hours in whichever seven-day period; the hours of rest mean the time spent outside of duty on account of the ship, short breaks are not included; the hours of rest can be
divided into two periods, it must be at least six hours, the interval during rest hours should not be longer than 14 hours; the account should be taken of the danger posed by the fatigue of seafarers; any mandatory musters or drills must be performed in a way that minimizes the disturbances of rest hours and does not induce fatigue; and the schedule/table of service at sea and service at port for all job positions must be posted on the ship, it should be in the work language of the ship and in also in English. Further, based on Arsenie, Hanzu-Pazara, and Surugiu (2014), seafarers also consider the higher standards of training provided by companies to be really useful. At the same time, shipping companies should start developing and implementing programs for the retention of seafarers which provide the opportunity for good career development.

Mack 2007; Mitroussi 2008 identified the reasons for poor retention among seafarers as being responsible for ship officers moving to landside jobs. These reasons as elaborated by Barnett et al. (2006) include the following: a lack of opportunities for career progression at sea, the need for young officers to start or build a family, the sudden emergence of landside opportunities and poor working conditions onboard (influenced by increased workload, stress, loneliness, isolation and cultural diversities). Other pertinent issues that constitute poor human resource practices among shipping industry employers and as raised by seafarers as reasons for their leaving the industry include as follows: the ill treatment of seafarers through unfair contracts, desertion by shipowners and salary arrears (Couper 2000), insufficient shore leave, inability to contact families while at sea, highly pressurized working conditions and the additional workload onboard. Also, the lack of support from shore side staff can lead to frustrations for seafarers and their eventual movement to landside jobs. This problem is more common where the shore side staff do not have a seafaring background as they are unable to appreciate the dynamics of the job at sea (Sherar 1973). These poor human resource practices demotivate seafarers and also lead to reduced or loss of job satisfaction (Forsyth 1990; Kronberg 2011). According to Barnett et al. 2006, retaining ship officers at sea is quite difficult when one considers the increase in demand for their operational skills among landside employers. There are many shore-based career positions that ship officers occupy as they move from the onshore to the offshore sector of the maritime industry. The increased demand for the expertise of ship officers and other categories of seafarers among landside employers is given further impetus by the relatively high remuneration rates being offered for the positions. For instance, Wild (2012) discovered that high salary is often offered by oil companies to attract people with seafaring experience for onshore jobs. This serves as an additional source of competition for the already limited pool of officers working onboard ocean-going ships.

Based on studies, all seafarers essentially share similar reasons for their departure to land (Barnett et al. 2006), with separation from partner and family cited as the common reason (Rochdale 1970; Barnett et al. 2006). Hence, many seafarers having families become less satisfied with their jobs at sea, and this significantly influences their decision to reduce years spent at sea (Forsyth 1990). According to Iversen (2011), separation increases loneliness among seafarers and when coupled with fatigue and stress (Parker et al. 1997) creates mental depression—a cause of suicide among seafarers. Early researchers (Hill 1972; Moreby 1975; Forsyth and Gramling 1990) acknowledge that separation creates disruption in family and marital life, and this is a cause of high attrition among seafarers (Oldenburg et al. 2009; Haka et al. 2011). Separation in itself is stressful for both seafarers and their partners, leading to the loss of a critical psychogenic protective factor onboard (Oldenburg and Jensen 2012). Hence, separation does affect not only the partner at sea but also the one at home (Thomas et al. 2003). According to Jeżewska and Iversen (2012), the impact created by separation of seafarers from their families is multidimensional, and its severity is influenced by several factors (for example, spouse, children, working conditions, contact with family). Thus, the uniqueness of
occupations in the shipping industry partially contributes to the difficulty in retaining people to work at sea (Moreby 1975; Oldenburg et al. 2009; Haka et al. 2011). Other dimensions of industry's peculiarity are stress and fatigue which are induced by high workload, extensive paperwork and reduced crew levels. Zaar and Hammarstedt (2012) found that stress and fatigue also contribute to the difficulty in retaining young seafarers. In many researches, it is noted that the workplace health and safety issues also constitute another important factor in the working life of seafarers, and there are many concerns in this regard that could influence their movement to landside jobs (Oldenburg et al. 2013). Concerns regarding the health of seafarers have long been an issue, and the ship has remained one of the most dangerous workplaces (Sampson and Thomas 2003; Jaremin et al. 2006). Consequently, seafaring is regarded as one of the most hazardous occupations in the world (Oldenburg and Jensen 2012), with suboptimal labour conditions (Bauer 2008), especially on Flag of Convenience (FOC) vessels where insufficient compensation constitutes one of the various forms of seafarer rights abuse (Bloor et al. 2000; MarineInsight 2011). Seafaring is an occupation that has always been associated with high risks due to shore and shipboard exposure (Bloor et al. 2000).

Research Methodology

Design

This study used the normative-descriptive type which is commonly used to explore opinions according to respondents that can represent the whole population.

Respondents

The respondents of this research study were the Maritime teachers in the College of Maritime Education at the university. Both the Marine Engineering and Marine Transportation college instructors were included in this intellectual endeavor. The purposive strategy approach is supported by Esterberg (2002), who argued that a carefully chosen subject pool allows the researchers to explore different experiences among various individuals or groups.

Environment

This research study was conducted in the University of Cebu Lapu-Lapu Mandaue (UCLM), particularly in the Maritime building. The school is located at A.C. Cortes Ave. Looc, Mandaue City. It is one of the pilot branches of the University of Cebu.

Instrument

The research instrument of this study was a modified-standardized survey questionnaire. This was pilot-tested among the selected teachers of the university. Upon having done this, the modifications were made to make the questions clearer and understandable when administered among the Maritime Instructors as respondents.

Statistical Treatment

The study utilized the normative-descriptive survey method where the data were collated, tabulated, and subjected to statistical treatment. To determine the percentage of the respondents, the Simple Percentage was used. The frequency of the respondents generated was divided by the total number of Maritime Instructors, then multiplied by 100%.

Results and Findings

Eighty percent among the Maritime Instructors belongs to the age bracket of forty-one years old and above. Only twenty percent among them are thirty-one to forty years old. The respondents of this research are all male Maritime Instructors. Fifty percent among them have been teaching in the university from five to ten years and the forty percent among them are those five years and below in the university. Sixty percent among the Maritime Instructors are the Bachelor’s degree holders of the Maritime course or profession and the forty percent among them have units in Master’s degree programs. Further, seventy percent among the Maritime Instructors have had an on-board seafaring experiences for eleven years and above. Twenty percent of them had
the on-board seafaring experience for six to ten years.

Pertaining to the factors that make Filipino seafarers quit their sea jobs, fifty percent among the Maritime Instructors agreed that they had then an unsettled lifestyle while on-board. But the other fifty percent among them disagreed that they had an unsettled lifestyle while on-board. Eighty percent among the Maritime Instructors agreed that they had a hectic life while on-board. And the ten percent of the respondents strongly agreed on this premise. Fifty percent among them also disagreed that they quit their jobs due to on-board politics. But the forty percent among them agreed on the existence of on-board politics as one cause of quitting their jobs. The ten percent among the respondents disagreed that they had the social life while on-board. Forty percent agreed on this premise and the ten percent strongly agreed on this statement. Fifty percent among the Maritime Instructors strongly agreed that their being away or separated from their family caused them to quit their jobs and the other fifty percent among the respondents agreed on this statement. Seventy percent among the respondents agreed that they quit their on-board jobs due to personal or family problems but this was disagreed upon by the thirty percent of the respondents. Fifty percent among the Maritime Instructors as respondents of the study disagreed that the rise in maritime piracy is the cause why they quit their on-board Maritime jobs. But the forty percent among the respondents agreed on this statement and the ten percent strongly agreed on the matter. Seventy percent among the respondents disagreed that they quit their on-board jobs due to health issues and the twenty percent among them strongly agreed on this premise. Thirty percent among the respondents disagreed on this statement. Seventy percent among the Maritime Instructors agreed that homesickness and seasickness within a few months had caused them to quit their on-board jobs. The thirty percent among them strongly agreed on this statement. Seventy percent among the Maritime Instructors agreed that long distance relationships suffered and led them to quit their on-board jobs. Thirty percent among them strongly agreed on this premise. Sixty percent among the respondents agreed that they hardly adjust to other crew onboard but the thirty percent of the respondents disagreed on this statement. Moreover, seventy percent among the respondents agreed that they had the inability to cope with the strenuous nature of life at sea and the thirty percent among them disagreed on this premise. Fifty percent among them disagreed that they had classroom learning difficulties and the forty percent among them agreed on this matter. In addition, sixty percent among the Maritime Instructors agreed that they experienced inhumane and unsupportive attitude from their mentors at sea but the forty percent among them disagreed on this statement. Fifty percent among the respondents agreed that the lack of career prospects caused them to quit their on-board jobs but the forty percent among the respondents disagreed on this statement. Fifty percent among the respondents disagreed that there are poor human resource practices but the forty percent among them agreed on this prevalence while on-board. For some nationalities, less opportunity to rise up the hierarchical ladder on-board to become a senior officer triggers their movement to land, forty percent of the respondents disagreed on this premise. Twenty percent among the respondents strongly agreed and the thirty percent of the respondents agreed on this statement. According to the fifty percent among the Maritime instructors as respondents of the study, they agreed that the lack of opportunities for career advancement onboard caused them to quit their on-board Maritime jobs. The forty percent of the respondents disagreed on this invocation. Moreover, seventy percent among the Maritime Instructors as respondents of the research agreed that the ill-treatment of seafarers through unfair contracts caused them to quit their on-board and the twenty percent among them disagreed on the statement. Fifty percent among the Maritime Instructors as respondents of the study agreed that the desertion by shipowners and salary arrears also caused them to quit the Maritime on-board jobs. But this was disagreed upon by the thirty percent.
of the Maritime Instructors. Additionally, seventy percent among the Maritime Instructors as respondents of the study agreed that the insufficient shore leave caused them to quit their on-board Maritime jobs and the thirty percent among them disagreed on this premise. Forty percent among the Maritime Instructors as respondents of the study agreed that their inability to contact families while at sea caused them to quit their on-board jobs. But this was disagreed upon by the forty percent of the respondents. Sixty percent among them agreed that the highly pressurized working conditions and the additional workload onboard can cause them to quit their jobs as Maritime seafarers. And the twenty percent among them strongly agreed on this statement. The lack of support from shore-side staff can lead to frustrations for seafarers was agreed upon by the seventy percent of the Maritime Instructors but the thirty percent among them disagreed on this statement. Interestingly, sixty percent among the Maritime Instructors as respondents of the study disagreed that their differences in the level of expectations between the younger and older generations in the seafaring industry caused them to quit their on-board jobs. But the forty percent among the Maritime Instructors agreed on this statement. Furthermore, sixty percent among the respondents disagreed that the increase in demand for their operational skills among land-based employers caused them to quit their jobs. And the thirty percent among them agreed on this premise. The relatively high remuneration rates being offered for the land-based seafaring positions caused the Maritime professionals to quit their on-board jobs. The latter premise was disagreed upon by the sixty percent among the respondents and the forty percent among them agreed on this statement. Additionally, sixty percent among the respondents agreed that the peculiar nature of working in the shipping industry pushed them to quit their on-board Maritime jobs. But the forty percent among them disagreed on the said statement. Ninety percent among the respondents agreed that their separation to work at sea creates disruption in their marital life. But only ten percent among them disagreed on the statement. That there have been many unlawful arrests of seafarers due to criminalizing unintentional marine pollution, the industry runs the risk of exposing seafarers to media criticism as well as discouraging disclosure of needed feedback regarding accidents in order to prevent their occurrence, this premise was agreed upon by the sixty percent among the respondents. Only thirty percent among the respondents disagreed on this statement. Furthermore, sixty percent among the respondents disagreed that their training and transfer of skills for seafarers are deemed inadequate as the cause for them to quit their jobs. But the forty percent among them agreed on this premise. And seventy percent among the Maritime Instructors agreed that the unprecedented volume of regulations and conventions in the shipping industry caused them in quitting their on-board works. But the thirty percent among them disagreed on this statement. The forty percent among the respondents disagreed that the shipowners who are reducing the size of crew onboard their ships due to shipboard technology as the cause for them to quit their jobs. Thirty percent among them strongly agreed and the other thirty percent among them agreed on the statement. Seventy percent among the respondents agreed that the workplace safety issues onboard ships caused them to quit their on-board jobs but this was disagreed upon by the thirty percent of the respondents. Another finding here revealed that sixty percent of the respondents disagreed that short-term job contracts which reduce commitment caused them to quit their jobs onboard. But the forty percent among the Maritime Instructors agreed on the matter. And finally, fifty percent among them agreed that the aging factor caused them to quit their on-board Maritime duties and jobs and this was strongly agreed and supported by the twenty percent of the Maritime Instructors.

**Conclusion**

Majority of the Maritime Instructors as respondents of the study agree on the following factors as the causes which make the Filipino seafarers quit their sea jobs: unsettled lifestyle while on-board; hectic life; away or separation...
from the family; personal/family problems; health issues; homesickness and seasickness within a few months; long distance relationships suffered; they hardly adjust to other crew onboard; they suffered fatigue onboard ship; inability to cope with the strenuous nature of life at sea; inhumane and unsupportive attitude from mentors at sea; lack of career prospects; a lack of opportunities for career advancement onboard; ill treatment of seafarers through unfair contracts; desertion by shipowners and salary arrears; insufficient shore leave; inability to contact families while at sea; highly pressurized working conditions and the additional workload onboard; the lack of support from shore side staff can lead to frustrations for seafarers; the peculiar nature of working in the shipping industry; separation to work at sea creates disruption in the marital life; there have been many unlawful arrests of seafarers due to criminalizing unintentional marine pollution, the industry runs the risk of exposing seafarers to media criticism as well as discouraging disclosure of needed feedback regarding accidents in order to prevent their occurrence; unprecedented volume of regulations and conventions in the shipping industry; workplace safety issues onboard ships; and the aging factor. The highest percentage which the Maritime Instructors agreed to was on the fact that separation to work at sea creates disruption in their marital life. On the other hand, majority of the Maritime Instructors disagreed on the following statements or factors which make the Filipino seafarers quit their jobs: on-board politics; lack of social life while on-board; classroom learning difficulties; poor human resource practices; for some nationalities, less opportunity to rise up the hierarchical ladder onboard to become a senior officer triggers their movement to land; differences in the level of expectations between the younger and older generations in the seafaring industry; the increase in demand for their operational skills among landside employers; the relatively high remuneration rates being offered for the land-based seafaring positions; training and transfer of skills for seafarers are deemed inadequate; shipowners are reducing the size of crew onboard their ships due to shipboard technology; and that short-term job contracts reduce commitment.

**Recommendations**

In the research of Nigel (2008), the provision of attractive remuneration and adequate motivation is used by some ship management companies in a bid to improve retention among crew (Mitroussi and Notteboom 2012). Studies have however confirmed that organizations cannot rely on monetary rewards alone to achieve the desired level of retention among staff; it is practically inadequate in the face of growing complexities. This is even truer for shipping, an industry with peculiar realities. To attract young people into the maritime industry, there is a need for improvement in working conditions onboard ships in order to meet the expectations of the current generation of jobseekers. This should practically focus on the following areas: reducing long duty periods at sea and proportionately matching it with vacation periods without resorting to reduced salary, improving internet access, improving accommodation onboard, encouraging and increasing female presence onboard ships as well enhancing job security through improved social security initiatives. Working conditions at sea onboard ships may conflict with the expectations of seafarers and reasons why people take up a career in seafaring. Thus, shipping industry employers need to know the kind of people they are recruiting in order to effectively manage their expectations, and this requires a thorough understanding of the reasons and factors influencing people to enter into seafaring. Thus, improving working conditions onboard ships is essentially paramount for the retention of ship officers at sea. Additionally, Maritime shipping companies must take care of their employees, make them feel valued in their work organization onboard, and improve employees’ job retention and career growth opportunities. On the part of the academe, continue to update and educate the Maritime Instructors on the benefits, privileges and rights as a Maritime professional through relevant trainings and social awareness programs.
References


