Learning from experts

The talent challenge

There is a global war for talent as employers strive to build teams for the jobs of the future. How can the maritime sector compete for the best and the brightest?

Nia Jeysson-Romanzina, Director and Founder, iCubed, Switzerland

The long-term success of the maritime industry depends on its ability to attract talent, which will require an understanding of the needs and desires of a global and diverse workforce. In this session, Nia Jeysson-Romanzina shared her perspective on how leaders can build the companies of the future and manage complex diversity.

According to Nia Jeysson-Romanzina, success in the international market for talent will require companies to have an organizational culture that creates a sense of belonging, where people feel valued, accepted, and seen. A sense of belonging fosters loyalty, trust, and motivation among employees—all important factors for success.

An element in creating a sense of belonging is to effectively manage complex diversity. Complex diversity is based on the realization that diversity cannot be reduced to a few simple characteristics such as gender or nationality. In this sense, there is no such thing as non-diversity, since every individual is unique.

The value of having a diverse workforce comes from having different perspectives in the room. Research shows that diverse groups consistently outperform homogeneous groups in problem solving. Managing complex diversity is, therefore, a way to improve company performance and competitiveness.

But how can companies manage complex diversity? To Nia Jeysson-Romanzina, the key is to understand what inclusion means. In a metaphor, if diversity is the mix, then inclusion is getting the mix to work well together. Diversity without inclusion is worthless; inclusion without diversity is pointless.

In practice, inclusion is difficult to realize, and leaders need to think and work hard toward improving inclusion in an organization. Here, a key challenge is overcoming unconscious biases, which can lead to misjudgments and sometimes serious consequences. For instance, it could lead to the working performance of different employees not being fairly judged or to the failure of recruiting the employees that could bring the most value to the company.

Nia Jeysson-Romanzina gave a number of simple techniques that can be used to deal with unconscious biases. Examples included the use of standardized and objective assessment criteria for performance evaluation, the use of diverse hiring panels, and changing job descriptions to make them gender balanced.

Another key point was the important role that leaders play in shaping their organization and the organizational culture—both intentionally and unintentionally, and the numerous steps that leaders can take to be an attractive and diverse workplace, such as:

- Let it be known, consistently and frequently, that creating and attractive and diverse workplace is one of your and the firm’s top-three priorities.
- Make it personal and link it to business strategy.
- Lead by example and pay attention to unwritten rules, your own intentions, and your own interactions.
- Hold other leaders and managers accountable for all of the above.
Working group outcomes

Competing for the talent of the future

In order to succeed in the long-term, the maritime industry needs to attract young talent. This is a challenge, since the industry is currently not well-known and is not offering a value proposition that matches the desires of millennials. To address this challenge, this working group suggested there is a need to improve the image of the industry and develop a more attractive value proposition for young people.

Being able to attract the right talent is a key factor in building a successful company and industry. According to this working group, however, the maritime industry is currently not in a good position in the competition for talent with other industries.

One important factor is that the industry is not particularly well-known, or indeed associated with negative perceptions, such as being disconnected, being away from family, and being a dangerous industry.

At the same time, the value proposition that the industry offers, is not seen to match the demands that young people are looking for. It was the impression of the working group that millennials want to understand what a company does to positively impact society, and that they expect better working conditions, as well as well-being, connectivity, and more flexible ways of working.

The working group agreed that the maritime industry has the potential to better its image, since it can play a crucial role in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. For instance, as a facilitator of global trade, the industry can contribute to equitable economic growth and job creation in developing economies. The industry is also taking important strides in improving its environmental performance, notably when it comes to decarbonization.

The group suggested a collaborative branding campaign to attract the talent of the future, proposing a tagline that emphasizes the positive role the industry can and should play in the world: Connecting across the oceans, responsibly, for the future of our planet.

The group also saw a need to make it more attractive for young people to pursue a career in the maritime industry, for example by articulating a more compelling value proposition, by addressing diversity issues, and by introducing clear pathways for career development.

“We must go back to the millennials and offer them a value proposition that makes them excited about joining our industry.”

Ian El-Mokadem, Chief Executive Officer, V.Group, United Kingdom