Improving safety performance

What can the maritime industry learn from the airline industry on safety?

Ruben Morales, General Manager, Corporate Safety, Hong Kong Airlines, and Vice Chairman of IATA’s Accident Classification Technical Group.

While safety in shipping has improved, on average 1000 ships are still lost every year. Shipping also continues to have a high number of work-related injuries and fatalities compared to other industries. One industry that has managed to significantly improve its safety performance is the airline industry, reducing incidents by 70% in the last 10 years. In his presentation, Ruben Morales shared some of the best practices and collaborative experiences that have allowed the airline industry to make such impressive progress.

Ruben Morales started by highlighting the similarities between shipping and airlines, not least the global nature of both industries, leading him to conclude that the experiences of the airline industry were relevant to shipping.

According to Ruben Morales, the most important factor in improving airline safety is the industry-wide collection and sharing of operational data by IATA, an independent industry association.

Data is collected on an ongoing basis, irrespective of whether incidents occur or not. In addition, incidents trigger a requirement to rapidly produce a report that contains all facts about the causes and consequences. Together, the relevant findings are then incorporated in safety procedures across the industry.

Industry collaboration alone is not enough; there is also a need for binding regulation. National regulation based on a framework issued by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), an international organization like the IMO ensures that relevant safety measures are implemented by all airlines. Ruben Morales argued that close cooperation with the industry in developing and drafting regulations guaranteed that it is as efficient as possible.

Finally, Ruben Morales emphasized the importance of a strong safety culture. This requires a team of people dedicated to safety issues, training, and empowering employees when it comes to safety. As an example, Ruben Morales pointed out that airline captains always have the right to refuse to fly if they find the situation unsafe.

In the subsequent discussion, there was a clear consensus amongst participants that shipping would benefit from building on the experiences of the airline industry in striving for a zero-incident industry.
Working group outcomes

Together in safety

Although some progress has been made on the safety record of the maritime industry, there is room for further improvement. This working group set out a vision of a zero-accident industry and developed a roadmap toward this goal centered around leadership, responsibility, and collaboration.

The working group was united by a strong desire to improve the safety performance of the maritime industry, since the industry—despite progress being made—still suffers from too many losses of ships and lives.

The long-term vision set out was zero accidents. Since every accident can have a devastating impact on seafarers, their loved ones, the environment, and on the image of the maritime industry. The group also formulated short- and medium-term goals of reducing the number of incidents by 30% within the next five years and by 50% in the next ten years.

The group agreed that this vision can only be realized if all the stakeholders take responsibility for keeping seafarers safe and work together to make it happen. With this in mind, the group developed a roadmap for collaborative action to improve maritime safety. The initiative—named ‘Together in Safety’—will be based on leadership, responsibility, and collaboration.

- Leadership: Top management must make safety a visible and personal priority for their work, for instance through visits to ships. They must also continuously engage with and empower seafarers, for instance give them the power to stop operation if they consider it unsafe.
- Responsibility: Everyone involved must recognize the devastating effect that injury or fatalities have on seafarers and their loved ones. It is important to create a safety culture with a systemic approach to incidents, rather than a blame culture focusing on compliance.
- Collaboration: The industry must create a common language and collaborative mindset. The success of this work will be defined by the free flow of ideas and information across the industry.

The group identified a number of concrete ideas for collaboration that should be explored further. This included having companies waive copyrights to allow for better information use and the sharing of best practices, the sharing of existing accident reports to establish the baselines necessary to monitor progress, and the further standardization of safety equipment and training.

A key principle for “Together in Safety” identified by the group was to build on already established structures and guidelines related to maritime safety in order to avoid reinventing the wheel or duplicating existing efforts.

The work would initially be led by a smaller group of industry leaders and key stakeholders, who would drive the work forward, but the aim was to involve more companies, industry bodies, and other stakeholders in due course to maximize impact.

“One human life lost is one too many.”

Grahame Henderson, Vice President, Shipping and Maritime, Shell, United Kingdom
Working group outcomes

Leveraging big data to improve maritime safety

The working group was brought together by a shared interest in how big data can be used in the maritime industry, with a focus on improving maritime safety.

This group quickly agreed that a shared challenge could help the industry to work together to unleash the potential of big data in the maritime industry. On this basis, they set an ambitious vision for 2030: to reduce safety incidents by 70%, insurance costs by 50% and no oil spills or fatalities, all through the use and sharing of data.

The group suggested that a starting point would be to identify existing data flows and leverage systems already onboard ships to increase the amount of available data. This would allow for an increase in data collection without new capital investments.

The next step would be to explore the establishment of an industry-wide platform for sharing data related to safety. One important barrier identified by the group was that companies might not be willing to share information that could put them at a disadvantage in a commercial context.

Based on this, development of a business plan could lead to the launch of a pilot project. Building on the learnings from the pilot project, a roadmap for how to roll out the initiative to the wider industry could be developed. These learnings could also be used to launch data sharing initiatives related to other collective challenges – for instance, related to fuel consumption or supply chain optimization.

The group proposed that an industry-led working group facilitated by the Global Maritime Forum could scope and drive the project forward. The aim would be to present the first results at the Global Maritime Forum’s Annual Summit in Singapore in 2019.

The key stakeholders that should be involved, in addition to ship owners and operators, would be the type of companies already collecting an extensive amount of data – for instance, P&I clubs, insurance companies, and classification societies. Equipment makers, customers, management companies, ports, and flag states could also be important stakeholders of a big data sharing platform.

“Strong collaboration between all stakeholders can bring the data together that we need to raise our safety standards.”

Jan Rindba, Chief Executive Officer, D/S Norden, Denmark