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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AMONG SEAFARERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR WELL-BEING, TEAMWORK, JOB PERFORMANCE, AND MARITIME SAFETY

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ABSTRACT

Seafaring is a high-risk and high-stress occupation characterized by prolonged isolation, demanding work schedules, confined living conditions, and exposure to hazardous environments. These occupational conditions place significant emotional and psychological demands on seafarers, influencing their well-being, performance, and safety at sea. In recent years, emotional intelligence has emerged as a critical factor in managing stress, enhancing interpersonal relationships, and improving professional effectiveness in high-pressure work environments. This paper examines the concept of emotional intelligence among seafarers and analyzes its role in occupational stress management, teamwork, job performance, and maritime safety. Drawing on existing literature and insights derived from an MBA-level empirical framework, the study highlights how emotional intelligence competencies—such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills—contribute to resilience, effective communication, and safe operational behavior onboard ships. The paper concludes that emotional intelligence is a vital non-technical skill that should be integrated into maritime education, training, and human resource practices to enhance seafarer well-being and sustainable maritime operations.

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INTRODUCTION

The maritime industry plays a vital role in global trade and economic development, with seafarers forming the backbone of international shipping operations. Unlike most land-based professions, seafaring requires individuals to work for extended periods away from family and society, often under physically demanding and psychologically challenging conditions. Long working hours, isolation, harsh weather, multicultural living environments, and high-risk operational settings contribute significantly to emotional strain among seafarers. In recent years, increasing attention has been directed toward mental health issues among seafarers, including stress, fatigue, anxiety, depression, and burnout. Beyond clinical mental health concerns, emotional intelligence has emerged as an important psychological resource that enables individuals to recognize, manage, and regulate emotions effectively. In the maritime context, emotional intelligence is particularly relevant due to the need for teamwork, leadership, and decision-making under pressure. This paper explores emotional intelligence among seafarers and examines its implications for well-being, teamwork, job performance, and maritime safety.

Emotional Intelligence: Conceptual Framework: Emotional intelligence refers to an individual's ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions in oneself and others. Core components of emotional intelligence include self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These competencies enable individuals to cope with stress, communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and maintain positive interpersonal relationships.

Unlike cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence is considered developable through training and experience. In high-stress occupations such as seafaring, emotional intelligence supports emotional regulation, resilience, and adaptive behavior. Seafarers with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage emotional exhaustion, respond constructively to challenging situations, and sustain psychological well-being over long voyages.

Seafaring as a High-Stress Occupation: Seafaring is a unique profession characterized by prolonged isolation, rigid hierarchies, and constant exposure to operational risk. Seafarers must live and work in confined environments, often with colleagues from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These conditions demand not only technical competence but also emotional adaptability and interpersonal sensitivity. Common psychological challenges faced by seafarers include loneliness, homesickness, sleep disturbances, anxiety related to safety risks, and interpersonal conflict onboard ships. Without adequate emotional coping mechanisms, these challenges may lead to reduced job satisfaction, impaired concentration, and increased vulnerability to mental health issues. Emotional intelligence plays a critical role in helping seafarers manage these stressors effectively and maintain emotional stability in demanding maritime environments.

Emotional Intelligence and Maritime Safety: Maritime safety depends not only on technological systems and regulatory compliance but also on human factors. Many maritime accidents have been linked

to stress, fatigue, poor communication, and emotional instability rather than purely technical failures. Emotional intelligence contributes to safety by enhancing situational awareness, emotional control, and decision-making under pressure. Seafarers with high emotional intelligence are more capable of remaining calm during emergencies, communicating clearly, and coordinating effectively with team members. They are also better able to recognize emotional distress in themselves and others, reducing the likelihood of errors caused by emotional overload. As a result, emotional intelligence indirectly but significantly supports accident prevention and safe operational behavior at sea.

Emotional Intelligence and Teamwork on Board Ships: Effective teamwork is essential for shipboard operations, where tasks are interdependent and coordination is critical for safety and efficiency. Emotional intelligence enhances teamwork by fostering empathy, trust, conflict resolution skills, and effective communication. In multicultural ship crews, emotional intelligence enables seafarers to navigate cultural differences, avoid misunderstandings, and adapt to diverse interpersonal styles. Crew members with higher emotional intelligence tend to be more cooperative, tolerant, and supportive, contributing to improved morale and stronger team cohesion. These qualities are particularly important in the confined and high-pressure environment of a ship.

Emotional Intelligence and Job Performance: Emotional intelligence has been shown to positively influence job performance by improving motivation, emotional regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness. In the maritime context, emotionally intelligent seafarers demonstrate better stress tolerance, problem-solving ability, and commitment to work responsibilities. Higher emotional intelligence is also associated with improved leadership effectiveness, especially among officers responsible for managing diverse crews. By understanding and regulating emotions, seafarers are better able to maintain focus, respond appropriately to operational challenges, and sustain consistent performance throughout long and demanding voyages.

Implications for Maritime Training and Management: Despite growing concern about seafarer mental health, emotional intelligence remains underemphasized in maritime education and training. Most training programs focus primarily on technical skills and regulatory compliance, with limited attention to emotional and interpersonal competencies. Integrating emotional intelligence development into maritime education, leadership training, and human resource practices can yield significant benefits. Training programs focused on self-awareness, emotional regulation, communication, and empathy can enhance seafarer resilience, teamwork, and safety performance. From a management perspective, recognizing emotional intelligence as a strategic resource can contribute to sustainable workforce development in the maritime industry.

CONCLUSION

Seafaring is an emotionally demanding profession that requires individuals to function effectively under prolonged stress, isolation, and risk. Emotional intelligence emerges as a critical non-technical competency that enables seafarers to manage stress, maintain well-being, enhance teamwork, and contribute to maritime safety. This paper highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in shaping seafarer performance and organizational outcomes. By incorporating emotional intelligence into maritime education, training, and management practices, shipping organizations can improve crew well-being, operational efficiency, and safety at sea. Emotional intelligence should therefore be recognized as an essential component of professional competence in modern maritime operations.

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