

Set Sail Towards an Inclusive Workforce at Sea

# How Maritime Leaders Play a Crucial Role in Ensuring an Inclusive Work Environment for All Crew Members

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines how maritime leaders can create a more inclusive work environment at sea, allowing every crew member to feel psychologically and physically safe and to be themselves onboard vessels. The paper focuses on a large group of maritime leaders who have embarked on a personal leadership journey as part of a cultural transformation.

Training, evaluations, and learning conversations with more than 1148 Top4 Officers in Maersk A/S form the empirical data of this paper. Peer-reviewed articles and two published reports from the field are included to discuss if the Top4 Officers have gained more knowledge and tools to create an inclusive work environment onboard after completion of the training.

The paper concludes that the maritime industry has a huge responsibility for improving the work culture onboard vessels. It is vital that the industry continuously implements different initiatives on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, ensuring that maritime leaders have the necessary tools and support to partly drive the cultural transition so that all crew members feel psychologically safe, respected, and included onboard.

## **Introduction**

A report from May 2023 concludes that *"the oil and gas industry is significantly lagging behind in recruiting, developing, promoting, and retaining diverse talent. Today, only 22% of the industry's global workforce are women, and 22% are racial and ethnic minorities"* (IOGP, 2023, p. 3). The oil and gas industry are expected to define and demonstrate social responsibility, and some requirements are related

to climate, but governments are also setting regulatory requirements on gender pay gaps, gender, and ethnicity. The industry is not representative of the communities they serve and is also lagging in leadership in terms of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I). The industry has a huge impact and responsibility for securing a future workforce, meeting the sustainable global energy demand, and living up to the requirements on DE&I when it comes to attracting and retaining employees of all backgrounds (IOGP, 2023). In a poll of industry executives across the oil and gas industry, more than 41% of respondents answered that attracting and retaining a talented workforce is one of the top three issues (Bain & Co. in IOGP, 2023).

## What is DE&I?

Diversity is not only about gender, race, and ethnicity. Having a diverse workforce also includes employees with diverse religious and political beliefs, educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientation, culture, and disabilities. Bain & Co. defines DE&I as:

**Diversity:** Dimensions that differentiate or make alike, including but not limited to race, gender, sexual orientation, skills, backgrounds, personality traits, and other characteristics that shape our identities.

**Equity:** Structures, systems, processes, and initiatives designed to promote fair treatment, access, opportunities, and outcomes for all people.

**Inclusion:** The feeling of belonging in your organization and team, feeling treated with dignity as an individual, and feeling encouraged to fully participate and bring your uniqueness to work every day (Bain & Co. in IOGP, 2023).

A lot of companies have multiple initiatives and DE&I strategies, and some lead to cultural change. The report states that ultimately, individuals, and particularly leaders must adopt new cultural behaviours, centered around emotional intelligence, empathy, and inclusion. To change our behaviour and work culture, it is necessary that there is support and commitment from top management so that expectations are aligned, and people managers have the required skills to transform a collective workforce (IOGP, 2023). Diverse teams that are fostered in an inclusive and equitable environment contribute to increased innovation, creativity, and problem-solving capabilities. Companies that value diversity and ensure equity for all their employees are more likely to attract and retain talent,

leading to a more diverse workforce (Nidhi et al., 2023). To create and sustain an inclusive culture, the organization needs to create a set of policies and practices that give all employees the necessary competencies and enable everybody to do their best at work. The organization must raise the bar and create a new baseline of inclusion that supports leveraging and unleashing diversity (Miller & Katz, 2002).

## **Bullying, Harassment, and Violence Among Seafarers**

A report requested by the Danish Ministry of Industry, Business, and Financial Affairs and the Danish Maritime Authority (SDU & CMSS, 2023) investigated the risk factors for bullying and harassment in six different segments of the Danish merchant fleet. The investigation was done among 3,470 seafarers and concluded that across different companies, there is a significant number of cases of bullying, harassment, unwanted sexual attention, threats of violence, and actual physical violence. The most frequently exposed are the youngest age group under 31, women, new arrivals, junior officers, and seafarers from the cargo segment. *"The total number of reported cases of threats of violence, bullying, and harassment is on a scale that makes it seem untrue that it is about single individuals, single shipping lines, or single segments in the industry [...] the qualitative results talk about a broadly anchored bullying culture that has a negative impact on the mental health of some seafarers"* (SDU & CMSS, 2023, p. 2).

Both reports conclude that the industry is lagging in implementing DE&I initiatives, and this will affect future generations and the collective workforce (IOGP, 2023). Seafarers are missing clearer communication from the shipping companies and are calling for more tangible and concrete tools for daily use (SDU & CMSS, 2023) such as the Leading as One program.

In Maersk Training, we are working closely together with Maersk A/S, which has committed to improving life and well-being for all seafarers onboard their vessels. That is why, as part of a cultural transformation, they reached out to Maersk Training to design and deliver leadership training for all Top4 Officers (Top4's) under the headline Leading as One. The leadership training is targeting 2434 Top4's from Maersk A/S and 180 Top4's from Maersk Line Limited and is conducted by a maritime facilitator and a facilitator with a background within organizational learning, change management, or psychology. The trainings take place at three different locations around the world, and the Top4's are being

trained within subjects like psychological safety, communication, role modelling, trust, and inclusion.

## **Methodology, Results, and Analysis**

Training, evaluations, and learning conversations with more than 1148 Top4 Officers in Maersk A/S who completed the leadership training form the methodology of this paper. The empirical data is discussed in relation to the research question:

***Do the Top4 Officers, after completing the leadership training Leading as One, feel that they have gained more knowledge and tools to create an inclusive work environment onboard?***

Data indicate that 93.6% of the Top4's agree that the leadership training has improved their overall understanding of leadership. This substantiates that leaders need to be equipped with competencies to build an inclusive workforce (Miller & Katz, 2002). Building an inclusive workforce also requires emotional intelligence. Through observations during the training and having conducted individual learning conversations with the participants three to four months after completion, I have seen how the Top4's are curious and eager to learn more about themselves, which is why we also during the training push them out of their comfort zone, e.g. sharing personal stories, which builds trust amongst the crew.

The Top4's has a huge responsibility because they are role models onboard, and they are responsible for handling the physical and psychological safety of the crew. 91.4% agreed to the question *'The leadership training improved my ability to act as a role model for the desired culture onboard'*. This shows that the Top4's are aware of their role and responsibility in raising the baseline when it comes to creating a culture where everyone can be themselves and feel included and respected (Miller & Katz, 2002).

Lastly, data indicates that 92.4% of the Top4's feel better equipped to drive behavioural change in their crew. Research shows that when it comes to creating an inclusive workplace, leaders need support from top management, which is crucial to succeed with a cultural change (IOGP, 2023). This also reflects the study from the maritime industry (SDU & CMSS, 2023), where seafarers are missing clearer communication and concrete tools that they can use in their daily work.

## Conclusion

This paper concludes that until recently, bullying, harassment, and violence across the maritime industry have affected the work culture and mental health of the seafarers. Research shows that it is pivoted to work with DE&I initiatives both on a strategic and organizational level to improve the above.

As leaders of the vessels, the Top4 Officers are role models and carry the responsibility of ensuring that all crew members feel psychologically safe, respected, and included onboard. Through the Leading as One program, they have gained more personal awareness and tools to support and create an inclusive work environment. Driving behavioural change is partly their responsibility; however, they also need ongoing training and support from their management for the cultural transformation to succeed. Building an inclusive work environment needs to be a top priority in the maritime industry. A continuous focus on developing the employees' skills within different DE&I aspects is a vital lever in this effort as well as retaining and attracting a diverse workforce.

## References

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