

THE NAVIGATOR

Inspiring professionalism in marine navigators

FREE



Error Management

Creating an onboard safety net



A free publication by The Nautical Institute in association with the Royal Institute of Navigation



To err is human...

Have you ever made a mistake? If so, I hope you were lucky and that you or someone spotted it before it caused an incident! The good news is that you can improve your luck and manage situations so that errors are less likely to happen and more likely to be caught before they become incidents.

As humans, it's natural to make mistakes, just as it's natural to have moments of creativity and insight. It's likely at some point that you will make a mistake and that your fellow crew members will do so as well. However, with thought and reflection, professional navigators can reduce the likelihood that a mistake will result in an accident. The simple process of having two qualified people check a decision (thus reducing single person error) can improve safety by more than a factor of 10!

OOW: "Come Port 20 degrees" –
Helmsman: "Don't you mean Starboard, Sir?"
– OOW: "Oh yes, thank you, I haven't had much sleep lately, come STARBOARD 20 degrees" – Helmsman: "Starboard 20, Sir."

Teamwork matters. But young officers often spend 90% of their time as the sole decision makers on the bridge, responsible for the passage plan or what manoeuvre to carry out to avoid a collision. In this position, how can you strive for a blemish-free career? The answer is thoughtful management and, yes, teamwork – even when you are apparently alone on the bridge.

Many factors can increase the likelihood of a mistake. These include fatigue, stress, distraction, multi-tasking, poor visibility, complacency, heavy traffic or close proximity to navigational hazards. How can you create an environment where natural error is prevented or captured? Good passage planning is essential to identifying and anticipating where errors are more likely to occur. Bridge equipment also offers a wide range of alarms and support tools that, if understood and used intelligently, can help with error capture.

Where rating are used as lookouts, they should be encouraged to understand the operational aspects of navigation and collision avoidance, so that their intervention can be useful and add to the effectiveness of the bridge team. If you are still in doubt, call the Master.

It is important to understand and accept that errors do happen, and establish a 'just culture' on board that will explore how and why an error may have occurred. Identify and share near-misses so people can learn from them, both those on board and with the industry as a whole.

This issue of *The Navigator* explores the importance of recognising the Human Performance and Limitations (HPL) of navigators. Training, competence assessment, continuing professional development (CPD) and safety management should all help reduce errors to a bare minimum. It's well worth reflecting on error management, discussing these issues with your fellow bridge team members, and of course sharing this and previous issues of *The Navigator* with all on board.

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