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# The Dynamics of the Onboard Interpersonal Relations Based on Gender Issues. Study Case on Training Voyage Onboard MIRCEA Tall Ship

*Alecu TOMA<sup>1</sup>, Carmen Luminita COJOCARU<sup>2</sup>, Octavian TARABUTA<sup>3</sup>, Marius CUCU<sup>4</sup>,*

<sup>1</sup> *Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy, Romania, [alecu.toma@anmb.ro](mailto:alecu.toma@anmb.ro)*

<sup>2</sup> *Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy, Romania, [carmen.cojocaru@anmb.ro](mailto:carmen.cojocaru@anmb.ro)*

<sup>3</sup> *Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy, Romania, [octavian.tarabuta@anmb.ro](mailto:octavian.tarabuta@anmb.ro)*

<sup>4</sup> *Mircea cel Batran Naval Academy, Romania, [marius.cucu@anmb.ro](mailto:marius.cucu@anmb.ro)*

**Abstract:** *The paperwork is aiming to reveal the interpersonal relations particularities arose on gender diversity onboard maritime ships, considering the conclusions drawn from a set of training voyages carried out, annually, on the summer practical stage, onboard Mircea Tall Ship, owned by the “Mircea cel Batran” Naval Academy. The data were collected alongside 2003-2010 training voyage and the statistical data were collected from direct interviews with the male and female cadets, carried out during the 2010 summer voyage. The conclusion were very encouraging for the diversity management point of view, no significant gap or misalignment being observed alongside the study, in regard of interpersonal dynamic and the determinant factors in a seagoing crew. The study is really useful for the future research onset, in order to be continued with a in-depth analysis of the collected data with the reference not only to the interpersonal relations but to the individual perceptions and performance as well. The present research has been carried out by the authors within MENTORESS project - Maritime Education Network to Orient and Retain Women for Efficient Seagoing Services.*

## 1. Introduction

During the summer time “Mircea cel Batran” Naval Academy uses to organize the annual onboard training at sea for its military cadets, both males and females, deck or engine specialties. The average number for the crew member is 220, out of which, 1/5 females, counting cadets from the Naval Academy (approx. 50, 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study) and from the Navy Petty Officers School (approx. 40, 2<sup>nd</sup> year of study). Beside the cadets, female commissioned and non-commissioned officers, teachers or other personnel categories, were deployed onboard as well, being taken under consideration within the drawn conclusions. For the study purposes were summarized the conclusions drawn alongside those voyages overtaken during 2003-2010, due to the fact that a psychologist has been deployed either onboard for special monitoring tasks, or assigned for specific evaluations before and after the training voyages. In fact, in 2003 ((i.e. 30<sup>th</sup> of July to 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2003), was the first voyage with mixed personnel on cadets’ level, the gender issue being considered commonly on training activities from that moment on. As referential in crew structure analysis the 2010 voyage has been chosen as the baseline for the present study, presenting all the required parameters for a proper analysis, when specific data on interviews had been collected and processed.

## 2. Methodology and Experimental Design

The conducted research has been grounded on the empirical instruments, the final conclusion coming out from a systematic analysis of the interview results or from the observation forms filled in alongside the monitoring action onboard. As assumption in the theoretical support, the crew concept in the present empirical research has been assimilated to the classical social micro group, being defined by the following five major features as applicable for the crew perspective as well:

- 1) to have a specific number of members;
- 2) a minimum interaction to be established among the members on face-to-face basis;
- 3) the interactions between members to be focused on common purposes, conducting joint activities;
- 4) the members' status and roles to be clearly defined within a social psychosocial framework;
- 5) to exist a core of the group, as result of the personal features mixture (Zlate, 2004, pp. 406).

Considering these characteristics as essential for the psychosocial group profile of the ship crew, it can be further considered as responsible with the workgroup performance, commonly assessed among other psychological or social variables resulted from the sea hardship conditions, or onboard specific roles and responsibilities.

The conducted study had aimed not only the static relations established within the group considering the gender issue, from formal perspective (as assumed by the functional roles and responsibilities), but also the results of the intra-group interactions. This perspective is in full compliance with the theoretical theory met on different authors, claiming that on the one hand, the group dynamic is a result of the intra-group psychosocial interactions and, on the other hand, what counts more is related to the resulted culture and conceptions, as change and shape (Zlate, M., 2004, pag. 450).

The gender issue has been treated as an important variable of the diversity management, with strong particularities for the maritime sector, where even the onboard roles and tasks are unique, the perceptions and finally the cultural environment is very particular, embedded by the multicultural and intercultural variables involved within the psychosocial framework. Both for civilian merchant ships and for the Navy crews, the diversity management is an important factor to be consider once assessing the crew performance and offering real instruments to the management dealing with such elements will be always valuable for the sake of efficiency and effectiveness.

Beside the planning activities and voyage preparation, coordination and mission conducting specific framework considered as usually, the summer training onboard "Mircea" Tall Ship (see the picture bellow) has got along with the time, the meanings of diversity management, not only because of the gender issue, but also because of the multicultural factors onboard, each voyage counting more than 5 nations present onboard. Students from different nations (i.e. Turkey, Bulgaria, Poland, China, Latvia, Greece, Germany, Ukraine) had joined the training voyages, bringing together both genders, males and females, but also different cultures and perceptions related to the diversity management, constituting a proper challenging environment for psychological studies.

For the study purposes, considering the 2010 voyage, a multidisciplinary specialized team has been assigned, having as major objective the monitoring of the individual psychological and psychosocial mechanisms, related to the personality attributes of each crew member as whole, functioning within a specific framework, and over passing different adapting stages onboard the ship. The operational objectives of the study were elaborated according to the systemic approach of the personality as a specific type of organizing the psychosocial or psychophysics features of the individuals (Cristea, 2015, pp 157). The systemic approach allows a good perspective against the social axiology of the crews, being feasible to bring into the light the trio values-attitudes-ideals as a functional model that arbitrate the social behavior of the individuals.



Figure no. 1: Diversity Management onboard MIRCEA TALL SHIP

Therefore, following up this conceptual framework, the operational objectives have been ultimately focused on the next parameters, considered distinctively for the present study:

- the personality style explained by the explicit behavior of the students/cadets, both males and females, during the onboard activities and the assigned tasks and responsibilities;
- the dynamics of the interpersonal relations within the mixed crew, analyzed as social micro-group;
- the onboard individual adjustments and the psychological stress felt by the participants alongside the throughout the daily activities.

The knowledge processes, the research methods and psychological assistance techniques used throughout the overtaken study had been selected in accordance to the personality attributes possessed by the studied subjects, to the external factors that influence the crew dynamics as social group (i.e. social factors, cultural factors, reference groups, natural environment, technical endowment etc.) or to the internal factors, responsible with the working dynamics of the crew as performing onboard team (individuals, intra-group, inter-group).

### 3. Conclusions

The working instruments used throughout the conducted researches had consisted in: monitoring forms, assessment sheet, psychological tests, interview meetings, individual/groups observation form, non-directive interviews, systemic observations, statistics methods, systematically applied during 2003-2010. For the 2010 voyage, considered in particular for this study case, the individual interview test had been applied on 89 cadets, out of which 10 female cadets. For each cadet an observation form had been filled in, as result of psychological and behavior monitoring within specific tasks. The major drawn conclusions resulted from the conducted researches as from the psychological assistance provided onboard were the next ones:

- most of the students, males and females, had proved a low physical resistance to long-term sustained effort, constitutionally the female cadets being more fragile than the male cadets, which has allowed to assert that, in the effort pursued to overcome the physical weakness, the females cadets had better tolerated the frustration, being more persistent, more ambitious, more persistent in work tasks compared to the male cadets.

- the awareness of the relation between status, role, aspirations and behavior had been settled relatively quickly for all participants, materializing in the situational dynamism of each individual, which finally led to a change in task attitude and increment of the intrinsic motivation for training activities. Gradually, all participants in the training voyage had internalized the significance of mission activities, minimizing confusion with the leisure activity. Military students expressed a slower tempo but more sustained pace in performing tasks than civilian students, proved as more participatory.

- the assessed students (both females and males) who obtained high scores in the applied psychological questionnaire on the scales of Nervousness, Aggressiveness, Sociability, Trend to Dominance, Extraversion and Masculinity, had adapted themselves quicker to the onboard conditions in shorter time, becoming during the process of social adjustment, group cohesion factors, integrating in the group also those cadets with insulating tendencies or least sociable attitudes.

- an important variable in the overtaken analysis was the interpersonal sympathetic relations, resulting as consequence of the gender issue consideration, being underlined the next observations:

- o Initially, there were settled certain tendencies of emotional engagement among males and females, maintaining a certain motivational tonus and a certain emotional climate, in which one gender or another attitude towards the sex partner could develop. It had been observed that the girls were more centered on the physical ego (physical appearance, clothing) and used non-verbal language specific to the gender role, especially in relations with the male cadets. The interpersonal attraction was mainly based on the difference in the social status of the students of the Naval Academy and the students at the Petty Officer School, the major point of focusing the girls' attention officer students against to non-commissioned cadets, being in fact the virtual power perceived as potential perspective of the females against their male ideal.

- o In the background, other factors facilitating interpersonal attraction were activated alongside the applied monitoring studies on the basis of gender differences, namely: the need to group affiliation (especially in case of unfamiliar conditions generating disturbing diffuse emotions) and the proximity favored by the restricted physical space onboard the ship, concluded by the familiarity and the positive evaluation due to the repeated exposures to the same stimulus. Also, individual characteristics, similarity or complementarily played an important role in facilitating interpersonal attraction, as widely reflected in the literature (Neculau, 2003).

- o after accommodation period, in the second stage of the onboard training program, the interpersonal attraction relations determined by the gender issues, had been replaced by the comradeship relations, as result of the commonly carried tasks.

- o on the other hand, in every case, the women's presence onboard the ship had determined a specific censured verbal and non-verbal behavior from men's side, more protective and pro-social in any case.

- throughout the onboard mission, a strong psychological stability pylon came from the leadership on board; here the presence of teachers/instructor was extremely valuable, promoting an empathic style compatible with the male and female cadets perceptions, imposing the authority based on competence and morality.

- the crew behaves as a restrictive group, being distinguishable an inter-affective climate instauration among the team members, men and women, resuming the continuous interactions within the common tasks, into affective and cooperative type of relations.

- the psychological stress was perceived according to the individual equation and to the perceptive errors of the psychic software, as being well known the fact that the individuals react psychologically to the perceived reality through the lenses of "his own glasses" and not focused on the objective reality.

- in case of the short time perspective, as within the training stage at sea, it has been observed that the self-stress has mobilized, trained and energized the individual, both women and men, for the carried activities required by the training mission.

#### **4. Future developments**

The investigation approach applied in this study case should be considered as a preamble for further in-depth research on gender differences within the framework of interpersonal working relationships on board the ships, both for military and civilian sectors. Most probably, the conclusions are likely to be overcome in the future the theories that invoke in case of gender issues analysis "the process of brain lateralization that either involve certain hormones or psychological reports on gender differences, recorded from experiences lived by the individuals in their childhood" (Moscovici, pp. 235). On the same issue it could be provided support to the recent theories of the gender inter-individual differences psychology, where the assertions of the Eagly model postulate that role assignment, in regard of gender division of labor should be only a results of the acquisition of gender-specific skills, beliefs and expectations. (Moscovici, 1998, pp. 243).

On the other hand, the exploratory scientific approach, as empirically carried out and concluded in this case study, can serve to facilitate the professional acting of the leadership onboard crew management, contributing to improve the processes of adapting and integrating young specialists, men or women, to work at sea, for diluting some dysfunctions in mixed, multiethnic, multi-sectoral groups and for building the personal and professional excellence of the seafarers, consensual with the criterion of gender difference.

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