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Bridging the gap: Aligning culture between ship and shore

Master's thesis in Maritime Management

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Abstract

This thesis aims to find strategies for, and barriers to, cultural alignment between ship and shore. The results of this research show that: (1) to align culture between ship and shore, an organization must adopt a culture based on people-first values, holistic communication, low power-distance, and two-way trust; and (2) the main barrier to ship-shore alignment is a culture that contains elements of hierarchy, patriarchy, autocracy, and disjointed communication.

The cultural elements that were shown to support alignment were also shown to negate the barriers. These barriers were found in a literature review to be common descriptors of 'how it is to work at sea'. Together these points exhibit the crux of the issue: that *seafaring culture itself* prevents alignment between ship and shore. In other words, cultural alignment cannot be achieved if seafaring culture is allowed to remain in its current state. The results therefore highlight its tremendously problematic nature.

The need for a different style of leadership is growing in the maritime industry as the cultural gap persists between ship and shore. A transformational type of leadership based on trust, holistic communication and people-first values will serve to both negate the problematic aspects of seafaring culture and align culture between ship and shore. This will make it possible for seafarers to work in a culture that benefits both them and maritime organizations, taking into account the modern world, its challenges of complexity and ever-increasing requirements for intellectual diversity.

The report is written in English.

Keywords: maritime, seafaring, culture, ship, shore, organization, trust, communication, hierarchy, power-distance

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1. Introduction

Seafaring is an old and multifaceted human concern. There is evidence that people have been going to sea for hundreds of millennia in a purposeful and organized fashion for fishing, transport and exploration (Bednarik, 1997). The modern maritime industry also transcends various modern constructs: government, science, energy, and international borders. Surprisingly, considering its global reach and various sectors, culture on ships remains largely static. The ‘seafaring culture’ of today still resembles that of a hundred years ago, despite the significant changes that have characterized the human experience over the last century (Grasmeier, 2020a, p. 269; Kitada, 2010, p. 8).

Seafaring culture is described by many researchers as hierarchical, patriarchal, autocratic, and masculine (Acejo, 2021; Baum-Talmor, 2021; Bielic et al., 2017; Fernandez & Krootjes, 2007; Grasmeier, 2020b, 2020a, p. 260; Kitada, 2010, p. 23, 2021; Lundh, 2010, p. 38; Sampson, 2021b, 2021a; Thomas, 2006). The strict hierarchy creates a sense of order in a high-stakes environment where little can be controlled (Berg, 2013; Räisänen, 2009; Rediker, 1989, p. 154). Its oppressive elements have their origins with European colonizers and are perpetuated by the post-colonial labor market (Bielic et al., 2017; Grasmeier, 2020b, 2020a, pp. 260–261; Sampson, 2021a). These are deeply rooted and global aspects of seafaring cultural history.

On shore, hierarchical culture in organizations emerged during the industrial revolution to enable the management of large groups of people working on simple and directed tasks (Grasmeier, 2020a, p. 269). However, (western) shore-based industries have been slowly shifting away from hierarchical and autocratic management styles since the mid-20th century, when industry began to diversify and increase in complexity (Alvesson, 2002, p. 14; Schein, 1976). The complexity required managers to access and apply knowledge that was held in all levels of the organization. It began to be understood that flattening the hierarchy enabled honest conversations and allowed for the questioning of leadership, making the knowledge accessible to leaders and facilitating increased organizational efficiency. This transformation of organizational culture gained momentum in the 1980s with the explosion of information technology and continues to develop in this direction as industry becomes increasingly multifaceted (Schein, 2006).

The shore-based structures of modern maritime organizations have largely followed this trajectory; their organizational structures have moved on from the hierarchical managerial styles of the early 20th century (Grasmeier, 2020b, 2020a, p. 260). In addition, most have clear policies laid out with regards to their cultural ideals and these are applicable to both ship and shore (Berg, 2013; Sampson et al., 2019). The policies outline company core values on issues such as safety, health, and respect and are usually outlined in a mandate document such as Stena Line’s ‘Principles, Convictions

and Basic Values' (Olsson, 2019) or the Canadian Coast Guard's 'Mandate' (Canadian Coast Guard, 2019). The general ideas in these mandates filter through to other policies such as Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Belonging (DIBE) policies, occupational health and safety policies, and fleet safety manuals. In large maritime organizations, these documents are numerous, detailed, and regulate most aspects of life and work onboard (Berg, 2013; Knudsen, 2009; Sampson, 2021a).

However, regardless of these sweeping changes in organizational cultural norms on shore, traditional 'ways of doing things' seem to remain deeply engrained on ships (Bielic et al., 2017; Goss, 2008; Grasmeyer, 2020a, p. 270). Even as younger generations join ships and move up through the ranks, established customs and values persist at sea, irrespective of how their shore-based counterparts are structured (Grasmeyer, 2020a, p. 261; Kitada, 2021; Maritime and Coastguard Agency, 2004). Bullying and stress continue to be prevalent (Oldenburg et al., 2013; Papadopoulou, 2019; Pauksztat et al., 2022; Sampson, 2021a, 2021b; Slišković, 2017; Slišković & Penezić, 2016) and the shipping industry has a high incidence of work-related psychosocial and psychosomatic issues (Fernandez & Krootjes, 2007; Jonglertmontree et al., 2022; Kinalı et al., 2022; Oldenburg et al., 2010; Sampson & Ellis, 2021). In addition, recruiting and retaining personnel has become increasingly difficult (Belcher et al., 2003; International Labour Organization, 2006; Maritime and Coastguard Agency, 2004).

Of course, ships are often hundreds of miles away from their organizational leadership, and communication methods can be unreliable (Bielic et al., 2017; Pauksztat et al., 2022; Thomas, 2006). Seafarers work in shifts that are drastically different from those working ashore, often working 12 hours per day for consecutive weeks or months and staying 'on-call' during their rest-time onboard (Sampson, 2021b). This dichotomy between the structure of office work and work onboard ships increases the difficulty of maintaining regular contact between shore-based leadership and crews at sea (Berg, 2013; Bhattacharya, 2015). However, the steadfast resistance to change that characterizes the seagoing contingent of the shipping industry begs the question: are the physical distance and complex communication issues the only factors in ship-shore misalignment, or are there other issues at play?

This research will therefore explore the unmistakable gap between the intentions of shipping companies and the current reality of work onboard ships. It will attempt to bring to light both the strategies that bridge the gap between ship and shore and the barriers that widen the gap between ship and shore. In doing this, it will endeavor to show how a maritime organization can successfully align the cultures of ship and shore and provide organizational support to its crews, regardless of the physical separation and complex communication issues.

The end goal is therefore to improve the quality of life of all seafarers, which links to the

UN's Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, which aims to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all." (United Nations, 2023)

1.1. Aim

To explore the strategies that maritime organizations use for aligning culture between ship and shore, and barriers that exist for maritime organizations while attempting to align culture between ship and shore.

1.2. Research Questions

R.1. What are the strategies for aligning culture between ship and shore?

R.2. What are the barriers to aligning culture between ship and shore?

1.3. Limitations

The scope of this report is to explore strategies for aligning culture between ship and shore and barriers to aligning culture between ship and shore. Presented are seafarers' and shore-based managers' perceptions in private organizations from Europe, Asia and North America. The organizations are in the sectors of oil and gas, container shipping, ship management, and passenger transport.

2. Theory and Background

To provide theory and background, the fields of organizational psychology, sociology and anthropology are used to explore how basic organizational theory has developed over the last century. The historical context provides a foundation for describing organizational culture. How it is quantified and assessed is then explored, leading to a description of how it can be influenced, changed, and supported in modern organizations.

The organizational theory presented allows for an assessment of the nature of seafaring culture with regards to its historical context, which shines light on its modern characteristics. In addition, the description of how organizational culture is influenced provides a framework for understanding how culture may be aligned between ship and shore.

2.1. Organizational Culture

For this thesis, the organizational psychologist Edgar Schein's definition and 'culture model' is used to give an overview of organizational culture. Though research of other psychologists and sociologists is drawn on, Schein is chosen as a main reference for organizational culture theory: his case studies stretch across both industry and international borders and his theories are widely used by both academics and practitioners (Collins, 2021, p. 6; Håvold, 2000).

The classic works *Mirror for Man* by Clyde Kluckhohn (2017, 1st edition 1949), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* by Frederik Barth (1998, 1st edition 1969) and *Interpretation of Cultures* by Clifford Geertz (1973) were used to gather insight on the term 'culture' via anthropological theory. To delve more specifically into the evolution of the term 'organizational culture' throughout the 20th century, sociologist William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1993, 1st edition 1943), psychologist Kurt Lewin's "Frontiers in Group Dynamics" (1947), industrial psychologist Roger Harrison's *Understanding Your Organization's Character* (1972), social philosopher Charles Handy's *Understanding Organizations* (2006, 1st edition 1976), and organizational psychologist Peter Frost et. al's *Organizational Culture* (1985) were used. To revisit the 'thread' that these authors (and countless others) contributed to over the last century is to witness a culmination of breakthroughs in the field of organizational theory that have brought us to a certain understanding of it today. However, as society and the human experience changes, so does organizational theory, therefore its metamorphosis is a large part of the theory itself. Schein was chosen as a main reference for this thesis as his work seems to be acutely aware of the ever-changing nature of organizational theory. In addition, his writing is clear, succinct, and easily understood.

Schein's reach in the field of organizational psychology is broad: he developed and re-developed his theories for over 60 years, with a respectful and questioning approach to his research:

“the most stimulating way to proceed is to stay open and humble, get in touch with my own biases and filters so that I can see and hear what is really out there” (Schein, 2006).

Additionally, Schein’s theories hold special significance for the maritime industry as it is today. He notes the changing world has implications for organizational development with regards to multiculturalism, increasing complexity of human systems, information technology and social responsibility (Schein, 1976, 1986b, 1986a, 1993, 1996a, 2006). Undeniably, these are factors that are key to modern maritime stakeholders.

According to Schein (as interviewed by Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010), these new realities must be managed with a different kind of leadership, one that listens, questions, and accepts help. This leans more towards ‘transformational’ leadership: ‘we work together to achieve a goal that benefits both of us’, as opposed to ‘transactional’ leadership: ‘you do something that benefits me and I compensate you’ (Avolio et al., 1999; Lin & Lu, 2023). This is not a new revelation; sociologist Mats Alvesson (2002, p. 14) noted that in the 1980s organizational structure built on formal hierarchy and bureaucracy became significantly less useful—new forms of organizations began to emerge in which “ideas, beliefs and values [were] central” to their governance. As Schein, Alvesson notes that cultural issues are crucial as society becomes increasingly international and multicultural. However, the simplicity of the insights which Schein provides in his research into building healthy organizations are fitting for this study.

2.1.1. Defining Organizational Culture

Schein (1984) defined organizational culture as “the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration.” Other definitions of the term ‘organizational culture’ vary (Alvesson, 2002, p. 3; Campbell et al., 1970, p. 390; Hofstede et al., 1990), insofar as the complex nature of culture itself (Geertz, 1973, p. 4; Kluckhohn, 2017, pp. 22–37; Williams, 1985). Roger Harrison (1972), a social psychologist who studied experience-based learning processes, similarly defines the term, “organization ideologies” as “the systems of thought that are central determinants to the character of organizations.”

Alvesson (2002, p. 12) notes that when analyzing organizational culture, “values are less central and less useful than meanings and symbolism in cultural analysis.” Alvesson therefore prefers the definition presented by Frost *et al.* (1985, p. 17): “Talking about organizational culture seems to mean talking about the importance for people of symbolism—of rituals, myths, stories and legends—and about the interpretation of events, ideas, and experiences that are influenced and shaped by the groups within which they live.”

Regardless of semantics, organizational culture is a complex human system, in which shared history, values, learning experiences, behaviors and meanings are paramount to its study.

Schein's 'basic assumptions' stem from collective experiences, and give people in an organization their core values, which influence their behavior and decisions; often on a preconscious level. The values emerge and develop over time, influenced by multiple elements such as the company history, the nationalities of its employees, and the industry it operates in (Schein & Schein, 2016, pp. 14–15).

The many factors that shape organizational culture make it complex, deeply engrained, hard to measure, and difficult to change without a full understanding of its historical context and evolution within the organization (Alvesson, 2002, p. 1; Hofstede et al., 1990; Johnson et al., 2008; Schein, 2006). Adding to this complexity, in large organizations, there exists subcultures that evolve as people in smaller groups learn together to adapt to their own external and internal circumstances that may be different than the parent company's, i.e., their specific tasks, working environment and team dynamics (Schein, 2006).

Alvesson (2002, p. 1) underscores the importance of structure and terminology for understanding the intricacy of organizational culture in his book *Understanding Organizational Culture*: "a well elaborated framework and a vocabulary in which core concepts – culture, meaning, symbolism – are sorted out is necessary for understanding and for qualified organizational practice."

2.1.2. Observing and Measuring Culture

If organizational culture is so complex and nuanced, how do we know it exists and affects the behavior of people within an organization? To answer this question, it is fitting to look back to when Schein began noticing in earnest the impact of culture while working as an organizational psychologist in 1980. He saw that within companies, management styles influenced both the organizational culture and people's behavior. However, while observing the effects of management styles, he began to see a pattern emerge linking people's behavior directly to the culture that existed in the organization: decisions on every level were affected by their organization's culture (Schein, 2006). This pattern is substantiated by Alvesson (2002, p. 6): in an organization, "the entire decision-making process from preparation to implementation to a large extent reflects cultural beliefs and meanings about what is rational, natural and effective."

In addition, Schein found that an organization's culture could permeate multinational organizations, even when its employees had different national cultures. Although, managing this is more complex than just 'covering up' national culture with organizational culture: cultural differences must be considered and allowed for when working across them, as he found in multiple case studies documented in his book *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (Schein & Schein, 2016).

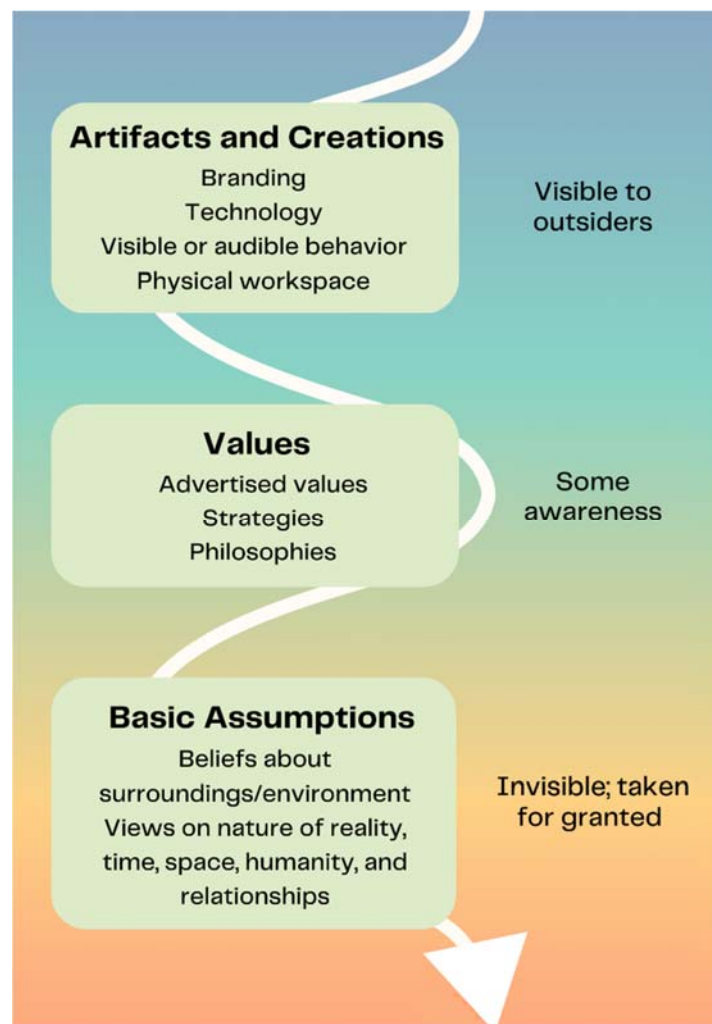
From a maritime standpoint, this perspective is reinforced by studies that observe how differences in national culture affect safety culture on ships (Håvold, 2000; Lin & Lu, 2023; Lu et al., 2012).

2.1.3. Schein's Culture Model

Based on his experience as a practitioner, Schein (2006) created a culture model to identify and analyze culture. His culture model consists of three levels: artifacts, espoused values, and tacit taken-for-granted assumptions. He illustrated in the diagram, "The Levels of Culture and Their Interaction," (Figure 1) that we experience—or see—culture at various levels, and some levels are more visibly apparent, or "observable" than others. It shows the three levels of culture, from most to least observable as (1) artifacts and creations, (2) values and (3) basic assumptions (Schein, 1984).

Figure 1

Schein's model of organizational culture: "The Levels of Culture and Their Interaction."



Note. Adapted from "Coming to a New Awareness of Organizational Culture" (Schein, 1984)

2.1.3.1. Artifacts and Creations

The first and most apparent level of Schein's (1984) model is artifacts and creations, referred to simply as 'artifacts' in his later works (2006). Artifacts consist of all the physical things that surround and embody the organization: for example, the construction of the buildings, the company documents, the office layout, visible or audible behavior patterns, and shared stories within the organization. Artifacts are easy to observe but can be difficult to understand because of the depth of history involved in their creation. Thorough study is required to obtain a full understanding of the meanings behind them, for example, stories contained in the social memory of the organization must be interpreted: they can be the source of, or rationale behind, organizational values and assumptions (Schein, 1984).

2.1.3.2. Values

'Values,' or 'espoused values,' are the second level of the model and consist of publicly advertised claims of an organization and its members about the reasoning behind their organizational practices. These also require some excavation to be fully understood as they focus on what people *declare* as the motivation for their actions, which may capture only what they *would like* their reasoning to be, or rationalizations after the fact. These do not always match up with the fundamental reasons for their behavior, which, according to Schein (1984), "remain concealed or unconscious."

2.1.3.3. Basic Assumptions

Schein (2006) calls these preconscious thought processes "the essence of culture," and in his culture model they are the third level, labeled the basic assumptions. These are the underlying assumptions that determine how a group thinks, how it feels and how it comes to understand things in a particular way—from which light it views things. These thought processes are shaped by the culture of the organization and are "learned responses" (Schein, 1984) that have their origins in espoused values. The espoused value leads to certain actions and if those actions generate a positive response or solve a problem, the behavior is repeated until it transforms into an underlying assumption—that is, until it is no longer part of the organizational consciousness. These assumptions, being so firmly rooted and repeatedly reinforced, are taken-for-granted beliefs of "how things really are" (Schein, 1984).

2.1.4. Elements of Organizational Culture

Edgar Schein and his son Peter Schein (2016, p. 6) would later expand on the definition of culture in their book *Organizational Culture and Leadership*:

The culture of a group can be defined as the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well

enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems. This accumulated learning is a pattern or system of beliefs, values, and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness.

Though not invalidating the former definition, the modern definition goes more in-depth with regards to shared learning and teaching within a group, their effects on not only the *behavior* of people, but also their *thought patterns*, and how and why these develop into a subconscious system that marbles the organization. This leaves one with a broad but dynamic definition that can be used as a basis for analyzing culture in any organization (Schein & Schein, 2016, pp. 5–6).

To reach this definition, the Scheins (2016, pp. 3–5) expanded on the elements of culture, providing more detailed examples of how culture can be perceived. They used an augmented list of cultural elements to show how complex culture is, given its reach into many sub-levels of components. The list is paraphrased here to give some concrete examples of how culture can be observed and studied and is arranged in order of most visible to most implicit. Maritime examples will be used where possible to illustrate the content in terms of this thesis.

(1) Language patterns. These are seen/heard when people communicate: the type of language they use; or the regularities of "small talk" in the interactions, such as "How's it going?" answered by, "Not too bad," or "Cheers," followed by "No worries." The patterns show the verbal customs that are present in a group throughout various situations. In the maritime industry, an example of this is the long-standing tradition of using curse words. Another, perhaps more meaningful example, is the use of brief, to-the-point language that is universal across maritime, and cannot be misinterpreted, for example, "I have the con," or, "Put a reef in the mainsail."

(2) Climate. The general feeling of a group that is displayed by the physical arrangement of the organization and the physical interactions between both employees and outsiders to the organization (where and how they take place). One example of this onboard ships is the location and size of the accommodations; the officer's living quarters often being larger and higher up in the superstructure of the ship than that of the less senior crew, which highlights the hierarchy present onboard. On some ships the officers and crew have separate dining areas which further illustrates this. On the other hand, isolation of ships at sea creates an impression of a tight-knit team whose members rely on each other in life-and-death situations. The distance between ship and shore management is another expression of the 'physical arrangement' of the group and shows the dichotomy between the office and at-sea contingents of maritime companies.

(3) Rituals and celebrations of key events. For example, a holiday party and traditions therein, or how groups mark milestones such as project completion, promotion, or retirement. A famous example of this in maritime culture is the age-old tradition of marking the passage of certain places in the world with a ceremony or tattoo.

(4) Advertised and embraced values. The principles that the group claim to hold dear and make visible publicly. These could be illustrated by a motto, such as the Canadian Coast Guard's "Safety first, service always" (Canadian Coast Guard, 2022) , or tanker company Hafnia's purpose: "We put people and relationships first to challenge the industry of today, so we can deliver the industry of tomorrow" (Hafnia, 2023b)

(5) Formal philosophies. The overall principles and policies of a group that influence their behavior towards various internal and external stakeholders. These statements can often found in less-advertised, but still visible, documents such as ferry company Stena Line's *Principles, Convictions and Basic Values of Stena AB* (Olsson, 2019) or Hafnia's *Safety and Quality Policy and Diversity, Equity, Belonging and Inclusion Policy* (Hafnia, 2023a, 2023c).

(6) Group norms. The unspoken principles in the group, that have evolved over time and could be embodied in a statement such as "good enough for government work," implying that one should not give more effort than is necessary when working in the public service.

(7) Rules of the game. Also unspoken, but more specific such as the general knowledge on ships of the importance of respecting a watchkeeper's sleeping hours, that could have evolved out of a knowledge of the safety that is sacrificed when a watchkeeper is deprived of sleep. Schein & Schein (2016, p. 4) define these as "implicit, unwritten rules for getting along in the organization, 'the ropes' that a newcomer must learn to become an accepted member." Interestingly, Schein & Schein interjected an idiom with its roots in maritime culture: 'knowing the ropes'—with the many lines present on large sailing ships it was imperative that sailors learned the location and purpose of each one to be able to adjust the sails quickly (Knowles, 2006, p. 194). This is a good example of the unspoken 'rules of the game' that must be followed on a sailing vessel.

(8) Self-identity of the organization. How it views itself with regards to what kinds of people work there, what the purpose of the organization is, and 'how it does things' in general.

(9) Engrained skills. The special skills required for particular tasks. These are taken for granted and passed on to new workers without necessarily being written down. This could appear in as an element of culture in the maritime industry as, for example, the operation of a pneumatic needle gun on a ship—it is likely not found in written instructions but most

people who have worked at sea probably have some idea about why it is done and what is required for the job.

(10) Thinking patterns, mental frameworks, or specific language. These are ways of speaking and thinking taught to new members of a group during the onboarding process. Schein calls this the socialization process of new members, and it creates the “shared cognitive frames that guide the perceptions, thoughts and language.” For example, on ships, the specific language used when people address the commanding officer or chief engineer respectively as ‘Captain’, or ‘Chief’, (even when the relationship has developed to a first-name basis) illustrates the mental framework of hierarchy that is present.

(11) Shared definitions or meanings. Words or phrases whose definition evolves as a group works together. The new meanings of these words or phrases have a shared historical context within the organization and would mean something very different to someone who was not a member of the organization. On a ship, this could be a phrase like, “Good morning,” used at any time during the day or night to greet someone who is starting their shift, instead of signifying a greeting that would happen before noon in most other places. One example of a shared meaning in a Canadian Coast Guard ship’s engine room sub-culture was, “the shit hit the fan,” which meant the sewage tank had overflowed. In another location outside the subculture of the engine room it would take on its general definition: ‘everything went drastically wrong’.

(12) Characteristic symbols. The symbols created and evolved in a group that are used to distinguish or define itself. These “root metaphors,” as Schein calls them, can be obvious or tacit, and influence the visible artifacts of the organization. Schein notes that this level of culture is created by “emotional and aesthetic response” as opposed to the “cognitive or evaluative response” of members of the group (Schein & Schein, 2016, pp. 3–5).

2.1.5. Aligning Organizational Culture

Elements that make up a culture are described by Schein (1984) as learned solutions that are “anxiety-reducing” or “positive problem-solving.” Anxiety related to the unknown is an undeniable facet of human nature; reduction of this necessitates the development of shared language and understandings, which fulfills our basic human need for consistency and cognitive order. Anxiety caused by hostile environments or unstable relationships forces groups to develop coping mechanisms. In high-stakes arenas, anxiety reducing behavior serves to limit people to actions that have worked previously.

Positive problem-solving emerges as groups attempt various methods of completing a task until they find one that provides an acceptable result. The method will then be used repeatedly until

it fails to work. In contrast to anxiety-reducing behavior, positive problem-solving situations use logic and reasoning to arrive at a solution, whereas anxiety-reducing behavior is an emotional response to stress (Schein, 1984).

According to Schein (1984), analysis of motive is central in understanding how to change the behavior of the group. Behavior that emerges as a result of positive problem-solving requires innovation to find 'another way of achieving the goal'. Behavior that arises from avoiding anxiety can be changed by eliminating the source of anxiety or providing another way to avoid the anxiety. The anxiety-reducing mechanism in humans has been programmed into us for as long as we have existed: our survival has relied on it and in this way, it has become an immovable aspect of our limbic system (Price, 2003). Behaviors learned as a result of anxiety, therefore, are more difficult to change than those learned by positive problem-solving. It should be noted that these systems are often intertwined in practice, but the distinction must be made to clarify the cognitive process that is responsible for the learned behaviors (Schein, 1984).

Organizational culture needs to change when one of two scenarios arises: (1) when the usual techniques no longer work, or (2) when a change in the organization's environment demands a different way of working. When an organization reaches this point, its leadership plays a pivotal role in the initiation of the change process and is vital for providing guidance during it.

Kurt Lewin's (1947) change theory states that to create a lasting change in human systems, three phases must be considered: unfreezing, moving, and re-freezing. This is known as Lewin's three-step model. Although some criticism of Lewin's theory exists (namely that it is over-simplified) (Burnes, 2020; Cummings et al., 2016), it has become the most widely-known model for organizational change, and is still used by many organizational psychologists today as a base theory for practice (Crosby, 2022; Endrejat & Burnes, 2022). Schein (1996b) notes that, "few people have had as profound an impact on the theory and practice of social and organizational psychology as Kurt Lewin."

According to Lewin's models, to initiate a change process, an unfreezing of sorts is required: the old ways must be disconfirmed when introducing the new (Schein, 1984). Lewin (1947) notes, "to break open the shell of complacency and self-righteousness it is sometimes necessary to bring about deliberately an emotional stir-up." For this reason, psychological safety must be provided to counter this 'emotional stir-up' while navigating new information and practices (the 'moving' phase). In other words, some form of security must be afforded to ease the transition into new ways of doing things (Schein, 1984). For example, putting at ease any worries employees might have about (1) how they will be supported in the implementation of the new system, or (2) anxiety they feel about changing a particular behavior.

The entire change process takes consideration and effort by leadership, and is best done with openness and involvement, leading to trust and commitment (Burnes, 2020; Lewin, 1947). Lewin's studies showed that lasting change was achieved more often with a democratic process rather than instruction (Lewin, 1947); which is substantiated by a scoping review of 60 years of literature in organizational change (Oreg et al., 2011).¹

Whyte (1991) substantiates the power of the democratic process in organizational change by stressing the importance of stepping away from "paternalistic programs" and instead focusing on "ways in which underdogs can participate in improving their own conditions." His perspective is presented from a research viewpoint, in that through "Participatory Action Research," or PAR, the subject of the study can contribute to the research with the end result of improving their own situation. He postulates that this approach applies to organizations as well: soliciting feedback and knowledge from all levels of the organization has the result of both improving the situation of the contributors and increasing the efficiency of the organization.

On the other hand, one cannot assume that receiving directives from executives necessarily indicates a dictatorship. Alvesson (2002, p. 12) underscores the importance of distinguishing between "socially unnecessary domination" and legitimate management, as "to some extent all forms of management means [sic] domination and to some extent all social life presupposes constraint." Therefore, one must understand the root causes of organizational behaviour and the historical context of the culture to be able to identify valid managerial action vs. gratuitous control, acknowledging that the difference between the two is often debatable. Organizational culture itself therefore presents a paradox as Alvesson (2002, p. 13) explains: it has the capacity to "*simultaneously* create order, meaning, cohesion and orientation, thus making collective action, indeed organizational life, possible *and* to restrict autonomy, creativity and questioning" and be a barrier to progress and efficiency.

Therefore, a barrier to changing (or aligning, as the case may be) culture in an organization can be the nature of *organizational culture* itself, as it inherently restricts progress and change. Other barriers to changing, developing, or aligning culture are elements one might see in a dictatorship: hierarchy, coercion, withholding information, dishonesty, and mistrust. Multi-national organizations can have issues aligning culture across borders, due to the significant influence of varying national cultures on an organization. This concept also applies to multi-national teams within organizations, as is found on many ships. Furthermore, the size of the organization can present a

¹ Indeed, Lewin had more than just his academic research to justify his belief in democracy, his life experience gave him a frighteningly stark picture of the alternative: "Lewin held a clear-eyed vision of the influence of leadership on groups and on the change process, forged by his experience as a Jewish male growing up in Germany during the pre-Nazi years and during Hitler's rise to power" (Crosby, 2022).

barrier to cultural alignment as Schein (2006) suggests: “with growth and success organizations evolve subgroups which evolve subcultures; if those subcultures are not aligned, if they begin to conflict with each other, such conflicts are the greatest source of systems pathology.”

2.2. Seafaring Culture

Having arrived at a definition of organizational culture, and having come to a basic understanding of how it is created, observed, quantified, and aligned, the nature of seafaring culture will be examined using these insights.

Any social unit that has a shared history will have undergone a collective learning process and developed a culture (Schein & Schein, 2016, p. 15). This development is unavoidable for organized social units that exist for periods of time—without shared values, beliefs and meanings, interactions would be rife with confusion and require time and effort applied to interpretation (Alvesson, 2002, p. 2). Over time, shared learning experiences develop into stories, myths, or unspoken truths, and become cemented into organizational consciousness, further embedding communal beliefs and values. In many cases, culture arrives at a certain place without a common knowledge within the organization of why or how; without a discernable historical path.

As such, studying the shared history of a social unit is paramount in determining its cultural orientation. Schein, in an interview with Canning (2020), stressed the importance of this: to be able to know where one is, one must look at how one got there—“only then will we be able to understand the practice of culture, what gave rise to it, and what we may have to change.”

2.2.1. Defining Seafaring Culture

Looking at seafaring through this lens, seafaring culture will be described, considering seafarers as the ‘social unit’ and maritime history as their ‘shared history’. This description will be used to provide a current view of seafaring culture today and show its significance for the maritime industry with regards to aligning culture between ship and shore.

The strength of a culture is, in simple terms, the amount of culture that exists in a group. A strong culture will have a good ability to maintain its influence through changes in the organization’s membership whereas a weak culture will be more influenced by incoming beliefs and values (Schein, 1984). The level of this strength depends on the length of time it has existed, the commitment of the people who make it up (self-identifying as seafarers in this case), and the “emotional intensity” (Schein & Schein, 2016, p. 15) of their shared experiences. With only these characteristics of culture in mind, one might infer that seafaring culture is as strong as it gets: it is one of the oldest industries in the world (Bednarik, 1997), its members have a strong attachment to their seafarer personas and the social unit (Grasmeier, 2019; Hult & Ljung, 2012; Papadopoulou, 2019, p. 10; Scribner, 2021) and they work in the dangerous and uncompromising environment of the sea (Fernandez & Krootjes,

2007, p. 54; MacLachlan, 2017; Sampson, 2021a, p. 4; Shea, 2005). Using Schein's notion that the strength of a culture prescribes its tendency to resist change, the strength of seafaring culture is then perceived as a contributor to its static nature that is relatively oblivious to major societal trends. Richard Goss (2008), a former seafarer turned economist, muses, "it is strange that in the maritime world [...] people rarely make use of ideas regarded as normal practice elsewhere."

There are other variables that influence seafaring culture and that have largely remained inherent to seafaring over its history, reach over the globe, and in its various sectors (e.g., shipping, military, fishing, etc.). These include long hours, shift work, the remote and confined nature of the work, the mobility of ships, and multiple nationalities that often exist onboard (Brasher et al., 2010; Fernandez & Krootjes, 2007, p. 50; Papadopoulou, 2019, p. 11; Sampson, 2021a, p. 4). Global travel of seafarers resulted in the "rapid diffusion" (Rediker, 1989, p. 159) of seafaring culture. The strength of the culture endured this dispersion, creating a well-known seafaring culture that still exists today.

As noted in section 2.1.5, elements that make up a culture are remedies to situations that serve to either reduce anxiety or solve problems. Framing seafaring culture in this way, causes of anxiety or problems encountered in seafaring have created a culture that is (1) hierarchical, (2) paternalistic, (3) authoritarian, (4) masculine, (5) somewhat coercive, and (6) exclusive. These elements are explained as follows.

2.2.2. Hierarchical, Paternalistic, and Authoritarian

The hierarchical nature of seafaring culture is uncontested in the literature reviewed for this study (Acejo, 2021; Baum-Talmor, 2018, 2021; Bielic et al., 2017; Fernandez & Krootjes, 2007, p. 50; Grasmeyer, 2020b, 2020a, p. 131; Kitada, 2010, p. 23, 2021; Lundh, 2010, p. 38; Sampson, 2021b, 2021a; Thomas, 2006). Hierarchical culture emerges in safety-critical organizations where predictability is vital; where it is desired that people know their roles and not question their superiors. Historically, this meant that seafarers were loyal to their captains insofar as they complete their jobs in order to preserve their own lives at sea and have great discipline in carrying out those jobs for the same reason—their lives are at stake, directly or indirectly (Rediker, 1989). They are highly skilled at the jobs they perform and, historically, were limited to specific tasks onboard the ship.

Although hierarchy has always been synonymous with working on ships, in medieval times, the captain had a sort of "first man among equals" (Grasmeyer, 2020a, p. 17) status. The hierarchical nature of seafaring, however, became intensified during the 19th century by military regimes as a way to control the strong transnational counterculture of seafarers. The seafaring counterculture was problematic to military operations, as identifying first as a seafarer overpowered sailors' sense

of national pride that was beneficial to warmongers (Grasmeier, 2020a, pp. 17–18). Problematically, hierarchy is linked with a tendency for ‘saving-face’, which precludes a safely operating ship by encouraging dangerous power games or covering up mistakes, as social anthropologist Marie Grasmeier found in her study of life on ships (2020a, pp. 294–299).

The nature of seafaring demands that employees are taken care of while at work; they must be provided with food and lodging. This gives seafaring a paternalistic element. Not only are the necessities of life provided, but they are also controlled, as are many aspects of life onboard (Grasmeier, 2020a, p. 174), which exacerbates the patriarchal culture (Kitada, 2010, p. 15). This control of life onboard is necessary for running a ship; certain organization is required (e.g., food must be rationed properly) and strict rules must be followed (e.g., no smoking by the fuel tanks) to ensure safe passage. However, the paternal element can break down communication, as Grasmeier (2020b) notes: oftentimes on ships there exists as a “fear of authority by feeling a childlike dependance and inferiority towards the authority figure,” which diminishes the will to ‘speak up’.

Hierarchy and paternalism create a culture that is authoritarian. According to Schien (1984), in authoritarian cultures, “(1) truth comes ultimately from older, wiser, higher status members; (2) people are capable of loyalty and discipline in carrying out objectives; (3) relationships are basically lineal and vertical; (4) each person has a niche that is his or her territory that cannot be invaded; and (5) the organization is a solidary unit that will take care of its members.” This is opposed to a culture of “individual freedom” which embodies individualism and questioning leadership.

2.2.3. Masculine

The masculine element of seafaring culture has long been shaped by the “mostly male workforce,” (Sampson, 2021b) that has perpetuated at least since the days of European explorers (or colonizers) and traders (or exploiters), and military forces (Kirkby, 2017; Kitada, 2010, p. 3; Ljung et al., 2014, p. 22; Rediker, 1989, p. 32). Elements of modern seafaring culture, therefore, had their beginnings with white male oppressors. Though the background of these masculine elements in seafaring is problematic, some of them are not “overtly unpleasant” (Sampson, 2021b): a strong work ethic, respect for duty, action-oriented mindset, rewarding initiative and effort, knowledge tied to status, stoicism, wit, and emotional resilience. Other aspects of the masculine/military influence are not so beneficial to seafarers: contempt for individuality (Kitada, 2010, p. 23; Sampson, 2021b), assumptions of female incompetence (Belcher et al., 2003, pp. 48–49; Thomas, 2004), and honor over truth leading to a culture of silence (Sampson, 2021b).

The after-effects of colonialism have further implications for seafaring culture as Grasmeier (2020b, p. 1) postulates:

The shipping industry features an almost complete globalisation, including its labour market, and a racialized work organisation. Shipowners can choose their workers on a worldwide labour market. On this global market, they usually recruit seafarers for different positions in the organisational hierarchy from different regions. (*White*) Europeans hold most of the senior positions while the junior officers and ratings mostly originate from *labour supply countries* of the global South. Thus, the ship constitutes a *postcolonial space* where global North-South relations project into the well-defined space on the micro-level of interpersonal relations among crewmembers.

According to Grasmeyer, this explains to a certain degree how organizational culture on ships has remained largely static despite its progression in (western) society. Beginning in the mid-20th century, traditional authoritarian and coercive management approaches (formed to organize large groups of people during the industrial revolution) started evolving into more collaborative approaches, creating flattened, or less hierarchical organizations (see section 2.1 for Schein and Alvesson's substantiations). Grasmeyer (2020b) elaborates on the transformation: "the focus of management strategies shifted from external control to proactivity and self-motivation on the side of the workers. Now, work was to be organised in more or less independent teams." However, with the global labor market perpetuating postcolonialism and its associated hierarchy onboard ships, collaborative values are resisted, regardless of the organizational culture of the shore-side contingent.

2.2.4. Coercive

A coercive culture is created when individuals are confined, physically, psychologically, or financially (Schein & Schein, 2016, p. 278). In this case, seafarers are physically confined to the ship when it is at sea. Elements of coercion in a culture create strong countercultures (e.g., 'crew versus officer', or 'deck versus engine room'): overarching coercive cultural elements impel people to forge their own cultural groups as a kind of protection against coercion (Lawrence & Robinson, 2007).

This aspect of seafaring culture has been likened to Goffman's (1961, p. xxi) 'total institution': "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life." Though Goffman's studies focused on mental hospitals and penitentiaries, his descriptions of these institutions to life and work onboard ships have been paralleled by many authors studying maritime culture (Fernandez & Krootjes, 2007, p. 56; Grasmeyer, 2020a, p. 124; Kitada, 2010, p. 23; Knudsen & Froholdt, 2009; Rodríguez-Martos Dauer, 2009, p. 15). Indeed, some seafarers themselves use prison terminology as a metaphor for seafaring

life: one telling example being a Filipino seafarer's colloquial term for their work contract: 'senténsiyá' which means 'sentence' in Tagalog (Lamvik, 2012, p. 67).

There are some criticisms of this idea (Grasmeier, 2019; Lamvik, 2012, p. 72; Theotokas et al., 2014), namely that the onboard experience differs in many ways from Goffman's examples of total institutions. Camilla Mevik (2016, pp. 30–33) found, in a study of life onboard an offshore supply ship, that many aspects of Goffman's total institution were either not present or negated by certain aspects of shipboard life. Where Goffman's total institution strips 'inmates' of a sense of self, shipboard camaraderie promoted individualism; where the total institution does not focus on wellbeing, efforts were made onboard the ship to provide leisure activities.

Additionally, crew members are given means to contact their support system on shore, these communications are neither limited or monitored as they might be inside a prison or mental institution. Though the communication may be unreliable and hard to access, it is not designed by leadership as such; it is simply a result of being on a ship at sea. Lamvik (2012, p. 68) surmises the prison metaphors should not be taken literally: "a vessel is similar to a prison in the sense that both constructions involve seclusion or isolation from the outside world," but has little else in common with Goffman's 'total institution'.

Due to the physical confinement of seafarers on ships the coercive aspect is present although not central in seafaring culture, as one still has the ability to make fundamental choices about life (e.g., whether to remain on the ship for the long term or not) while working at sea.

2.2.5. Exclusive

According to anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1998, p. 15), an important part of delineating a culture is investigating how people within it separate themselves from others. He hypothesizes that the boundaries denoting the separation are the crux of defining culture. Using this approach to look at seafaring culture, then, one notices the things that distinguish it: the common language used, the traditions enacted, the habits and superstitions, and the tacit, taken-for-granted 'ways of being' onboard (Barnett et al., 2006; Grasmeier, 2020a, p. 329). These characteristics of seafaring overshadow life and work onboard every ship, regardless of the industry it is in (e.g., military, shipping, fishing) or the country it is managed from (Borovnik, 2004).

Any culture can be viewed as 'exclusive' when using this definition. However, seafaring culture seems to be especially so: it takes time for new members to be accepted into the culture, yet after indoctrination, the members identify strongly as seafarers and can easily be recognized as such by other seafarers, and rarely depart from this method of self-identification regardless of how long it has been since they set foot on a ship (Grasmeier, 2019; Hult & Ljung, 2012; Kirkby, 2017; Papadopoulou, 2019).

2.3. Work at Sea is Changing; The Culture is Not

A strong culture has existed at sea for many years, formed by the many unique and extreme characteristics of seafaring, and concentered by the tenacity of seafarers to their own personas. This is the historical backdrop for a maritime culture that endures mass societal change.

However, *work* at sea is changing. In the past, a typical sailor's job was specific and directed. Today, seafarers have much more knowledge and responsibilities onboard ships as crew numbers reduce and technology becomes more complex (Ljung, 2010; Ljung et al., 2014, p. 5; Lundh, 2010, p. 45; Shea, 2005). As explained in section 2.1, these developments in the human experience create a need for more autonomy, questioning, and decision-making skills from employees, and more humility, trust, and listening from supervisors, which are at odds with the silo-like management structures that have carried over from seafaring's past.

3. Methodology

This thesis follows guidelines and regulations for data collection and analysis that allow the research to be duplicated. The methods used are therefore explained herein and pertain to: (1) literature review for theory and background, (2) literature review for secondary data collection, (2) qualitative strategies used to answer the research questions, (3) criteria and methods for choosing participants and the demographics of the participants involved, and (4) analysis of the qualitative data. Finally, ethical considerations of conducting this research are commented on.

3.1. Theory and Background

To provide theory and background, (1) the current state of seafaring culture and its historical context will be described, (2) organizational culture will be defined, and (3) how organizational culture is influenced will be investigated.

A literature review using narrative synthesis was used to provide an overview of the “current state of knowledge” (Popay et al., 2006) regarding the aforementioned. The review looked at articles in the field of organizational studies and culture in the maritime industry. Newer (i.e., published within the last ten years) peer-reviewed journal articles were used to show current research and theory on organizational culture and the current state of seafaring culture. Books and older (i.e., published over ten years ago) peer-reviewed journal articles were used to provide theory and background on organizational behavior and the historical context of seafaring culture.

For the theory and background on seafaring culture, search terms used were, “seafaring culture” “quality of life at sea” “seafarer wellbeing” “maritime culture” “maritime organizational culture” “communication between ship and shore” “culture on ships” “organizational change in the maritime industry” “working ashore in the maritime industry” and combinations and/or synonyms of.

For theory and background on organizational culture, search terms used were, “organizational culture” “influencing culture in organizations” and “defining organizational culture” and combinations and/or synonyms of.

The citations in the relevant sections of the literature were used to find further details and the original sources of the information. Databases used were: EBSCO, Science Direct, SCOPUS, JStor, ResearchGate, ProQuest, Sage Journals, Taylor and Francis, and PubMed.

3.2. Identifying Gaps in Previous Research

A secondary data search was done to find the degree to which the key research questions may have been previously answered and if so, in what detail. In this way, we attempt to minimize duplication of, and identify gaps in, previous research (Grant & Booth, 2009; Popay et al., 2006). Search terms used for this purpose were, “influencing culture at sea” “communication between ship

and shore” “managing ships at sea” “maritime organizational culture” and combinations/synonyms of.

As in the theory and background research, the references in the literature were used to find further details and the original sources. Databases used were: EBSCO, Science Direct, SCOPUS, JStor, ResearchGate, ProQuest, Sage Journals, Taylor and Francis, and PubMed.

3.3. Answering the Research Questions

To answer the key research questions, qualitative research approach was used. Interviews were done with former seafarers working in management roles at maritime organizations, and, if possible, current seafarers from the same organizations. The goal of the interviews was to investigate what strategies companies use to align ship culture with their organizational culture, how well the strategies work from the seafaring perspective, and what barriers are present for the organizations when trying to achieve cultural alignment on their ships.

3.3.1. Interviewee Criteria

Shipping companies in various sectors were contacted: cargo, oil and gas, ship management, and passenger transport. The shipping companies were chosen via web-based research, specifically looking for companies that had at least one advertised initiative for reaching out to and/or supporting their seafaring crews. This was done to gather as much information as possible on influencing shipboard culture: it was theorized that interviewing companies who made some kind of effort to ‘bridge the gap’ would provide more relevant data.

The chosen shipping companies were contacted via email, web-based contact forms or social media such as LinkedIn. The request was made directly to senior management, or the HR or communications departments of the companies. The contact person at the shipping companies that responded was interviewed, or if they were not suitable, they recommended another person from within their company and provided contact details. Details about the purpose of the research were provided and this enabled the contact person to recommend interviewees that may have some insight to the research questions. To choose the seafarer interviewees, recommendations were made by the management interviewee or contact person.

Two shore-based manager interviewees were also chosen via recommendations from a contact in the maritime industry, as people who might give some insight to the research. The interviewer had not met any of the interviewees previous to the interview.

All interviewees were required to have at least one year of seafaring experience as a senior officer. Additionally, the shore-based managers had worked in a role such as marine superintendent or vessel manager (meaning they were in direct contact with ships crews) for at least one year.

3.3.2. Demographics

All interviewees were male and between the ages of 48 and 58, with the average age of 54 years. They had all worked as a master at sea for at least one year; the average number of years spent as a master at sea was 17. Their nationalities were Canadian (1), Danish (3) and Indian (3).

3.3.3. Interview Methods

The interviews were semi-structured and directed by the interviewer to focus on a number of topics using an aide-mémoire. The prompts used by the interviewer were open-ended and structured in a way as to be non-leading, based on best practices for qualitative research (Burnard, 2004).

The goal of using semi-structured interviews was to ascertain the interviewee's perceptions about cultural alignment between ship and shore in their organizations. In this way information was gathered that was considered the most relevant to the interviewee, and interviewer bias was minimized (Eungoo & Hwang, 2021). In addition, this method allows the interviewer the opportunity to develop new ways of understanding the research questions, while remaining flexible yet consistent with the aid of the aide-mémoire (Wildemuth & Zhang, 2016, p. 240)

The agenda focused on the following themes: organizational culture; organizational documents that lay out basic values and policies; perceptions of cultural alignment between ship-shore; barriers to cultural alignment between ship-shore; with whom seafarers communicate with on shore-side (i.e., what position—HR managers, operations managers, marine superintendents, etc.); initiatives to bridge the gap between ship and shore (e.g., wellness programs, employee support programs); available methods of communication between ship and shore and the accessibility of such methods (i.e., alternatives to email, 24/7 access to a designated person ashore).

3.3.4. Analysis

The interviews were conducted and recorded online via Zoom or MS Teams and transcribed by Otter.ai (<https://otter.ai/>) or the MS Teams (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/log-in>) transcription function. The transcriptions were edited for accuracy by comparison with the recordings.

To identify patterns of meaning and interesting features within the data, the data was organized with regards to code using an interpretation-focused strategy. In other words, codes were created by finding both the semantic and latent meanings in the transcripts (Adu, 2019). The coding was systematically applied to the entire data set using the text-analysis program QDA Miner Lite (<https://provalisresearch.com/products/qualitative-data-analysis-software/freeware/>). QDA Miner Lite is a software that allows the user to analyze and assign codes to sections of text and it includes analytical tools to help the user find links between codes and frequency of codes.

Codes were created in the process of coding. As new codes were added, a list of the newly added codes was created. The list of added codes was then applied to the previously analyzed data, ensuring that all data had been analyzed with all codes. The list of codes was then analyzed to see if any codes could be amalgamated into a more general code that existed, for example, the code, 'commitment to anti-harassment policies' could fit into 'commitment to policies,' or 'psychological testing during hiring process' could fit into 'thorough pre-hire assessment'.

The codes were categorized into themes; latent themes were identified as well as semantic to gather as many patterns and "issues of potential interest" (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as possible. In this way, the data was matched with themes and the frequency (and therefore significance) of each theme became apparent.

The coded text was divided into two *groups* according to its relevance to each research question. A word count was then used to find the total number of coded words for both **R.1.** and **R.2.** By using word counts, the 'weight' of the code occurrence could be quantified, as one code sometimes encompassed multiple paragraphs.

Each code was sorted into a *main theme* in each group. Each code then became a *subtheme* within its main theme, for example, the code **People-first values** becomes a sub-theme under the main theme **Management styles** pertaining to research question **R.1.** This shows the relationship between sub-theme, main theme, and the research question.

The number of words that was labeled to each sub-theme was totaled, and a percentage calculated using the total word count for group **R.1.** or **R.2.** This showed each code's proportion in relation to the other codes in the group.

$$\frac{(\text{total no. of words labeled to a sub – theme within group } x)}{(\text{total number of coded words in group } x)} \quad (1)$$

An example of this process is:

$$\frac{(\text{number of words coded as 'R.1.1.1. People – first values'})}{(\text{total number of coded words in 'R.1. Strategies'})} \quad (2)$$

$$\frac{(9800)}{(73065)} = 13.4\% \quad (3)$$

Equation (3) therefore establishes that 13.4% of the discussed strategies for aligning culture between ship and shore are related to **People-first values**. The percentages are used to display each sub-theme's occurrence relative to the other subthemes.

3.4. Ethics

According to Eungoo & Hwang (2021), when undertaking qualitative research, one must adhere to certain ethical conducts: ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy; and practicing beneficence, honesty and integrity. These principles were taken into account while structuring and conducting the research: an informed consent form was signed by all the interviewees prior to the interview, interviewees' and organizations' identifying information was anonymized, data handling was conducted to Chalmers' standards of confidentiality and EU General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the Protection of Natural Persons with Regard to the Processing of Personal Data and on the Free Movement of Such Data, and Repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation), 2016). Harm to participants was avoided by explaining exactly what would be discussed and obtaining approval prior to the discussion, and the interview was conducted exactly as explained. The research findings were presented with as much honesty and integrity as possible by clearly outlining the methods used for the interviews, coding and analysis, and by researching and following best practices explained in peer-reviewed articles (Adu, 2019; Amog et al., 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Burnard, 2004; Eungoo & Hwang, 2021; Grant & Booth, 2009; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Popay et al., 2006; Wildemuth & Zhang, 2016, pp. 239–240).

4. Results

The results of the qualitative interviews were used to answer the following research questions:

R.1. Strategies: What strategies are used for aligning culture between ship and shore and which strategies are most important?

R.2. Barriers: What are the barriers to aligning culture between ship and shore?

The results of the coding analysis are shown in Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1 displays the 23 subthemes that emerged relating to **R.1**. They are grouped into four main themes: **Management Styles, Communication, Company structure/practices**, and **Training**. Table 2 displays the seven subthemes that emerged relating to **R.2**. They are grouped into three main themes: **Culture differences, Company Structure/Practices**, and **Communication**.

Some of the subthemes were relevant to more than one main theme and the 'best fit' was chosen during the coding process. Therefore, less emphasis is put on the occurrence of the main themes in the thematic analysis, instead, details provided by the subthemes and their connections are explored more closely.

Table 1*Strategies for aligning culture between ship and shore*

Main themes [% Occurrence]	Subthemes	% Occurrence
Management style [40.6]	People-first values	13.4
	Commitment to policies	5.7
	Low power-distance	5.5
	Flexibility within culture	4.4
	Problem-solving together	3.6
	Constant improvement	3.5
	Two-way trust	3.3
	Long-term thinking	1.2
Communication [34.2]	Regular communication	6.7
	Requesting feedback	6.3
	Honest communication	5.6
	Communication with entire crew	5.3
	Updated communication technology	4.0
	Physical visits between ship and shore	3.4
	Informal communication	2.9
Company structure/ practices [14.7]	Cross-pollination ²	6.4
	Change management practices	4.8
	Employee retention	2.1
	Thorough pre-hire assessment	1.4
Training [10.5]	In-house training/conferences	5.9
	Soft skills training	1.7
	Helping new members align	1.5
	Investing in employees early	1.5

² Cross-pollination refers to limiting seafarers' time on one ship, seafarers working ashore in temporary positions or ex-seafarers working in management ashore.

Table 2

Barriers to aligning culture between ship and shore

Main themes [% Occurrence]	Subthemes	% Occurrence
Culture differences [63.0]	Nature of seafaring culture	42.6
	Different nationalities	15.1
	New crew members	5.3
Company structure/practices [31.7]	Lack of resources	20.3
	Lack of trust/understanding	11.4
Communication [5.2]	Poor communication practices	2.9
	Remoteness of ships	2.3

4.1. Themes in R.1. Strategies

In the group **R.1. Strategies**, four main themes emerged: **Management styles**, **Communication**, **Company structure/practices**, and **Training**; their rate of occurrence is shown in Figure 2. The main theme **Management styles** accounts for almost half (40%) of the influences for aligning culture between ship and shore that were spoken about during the interviews. **Communication** is a close second at 34%, therefore also plays a significant role in aligning culture according to the data. This is followed by **Company structure/practices** at 15%, and finally, **Training** is the least-occurring main theme at 11%.

Figure 2

Occurrence of main themes in R.1., Strategies for alignment between ship and shore

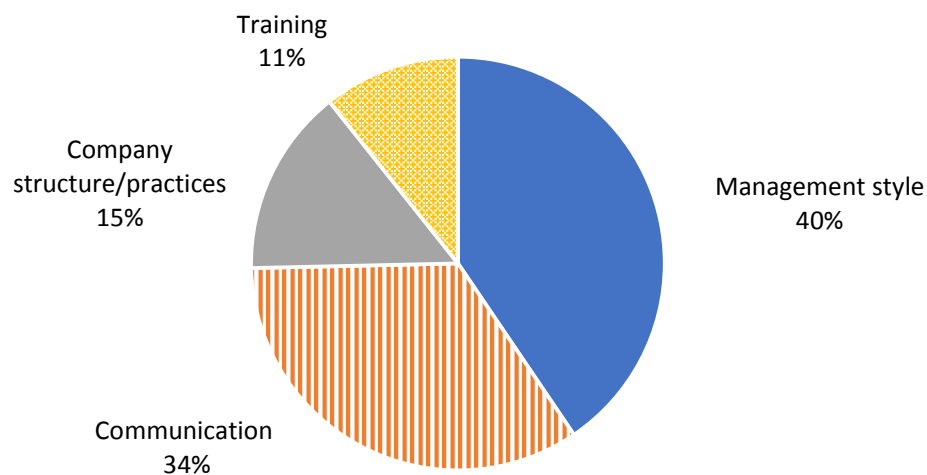
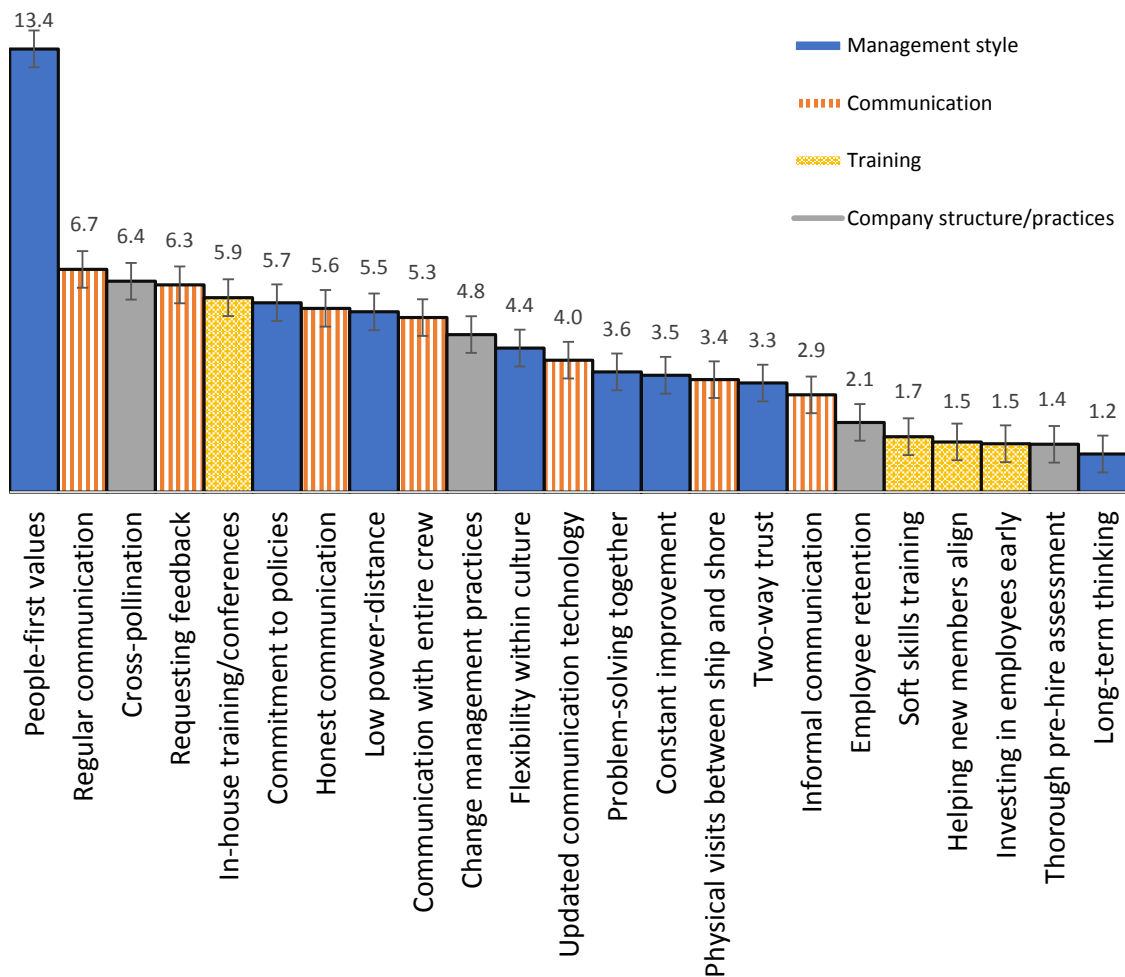


Figure 3 illustrates the occurrence of each subtheme related to **R.1.**, strategies for cultural alignment. Out of the 23 subthemes that emerged while discussing strategies for ship-shore alignment, **People-first values** is predominant by far, according to the data. Figure 3 also reiterates the significance of the main theme **Communication: Communication** subthemes occur four times in the top nine subthemes. In addition, the chart shows that although the main theme **Company structure/practices** is not as substantial in the data as **Management styles** and **Communication**, one of its subthemes is noteworthy, appearing third in terms of occurrence: **Cross-pollination**. Moreover, while the main theme **Training** proved to be least significant with regards to **R.1.**, one of its subthemes, **In-house Training/Conferences**, was also consequential: it was fifth-most discussed out of the 23 subthemes.

Figure 3

Occurrence of subthemes in group R.1., Strategies for alignment between ship and shore



Note. Error bars show standard errors.

In the next sections, thematic analysis is carried out with regards to **R.1**. An introduction to each main theme is presented. Details relating the subthemes to **R.1** are then exhibited and explored. Furthermore, significant embedded and/or chronological relationships between subthemes that appeared during the coding process are presented and analyzed.

4.1.1. Management Styles

Management styles is a main theme that focuses on leadership qualities and cultural practices of management both on shore and onboard.

It encompasses eight subthemes: **People-first values**, **Commitment to policies**, **Low power-distance**, **Flexibility within culture**, **Problem-solving together**, **Constant improvement**, **Two-way trust**, and **Long-term thinking**.

4.1.1.1. People-First Values

Figure 3 shows that the subtheme **People-first values** is by far the most important aspect of aligning culture between ship and shore—it occurs in the data more than *twice* as often as the next-most discussed subtheme, **Regular communication**.

People-first values is, in basic terms, putting the welfare of the employees first. This encompasses their physical safety, mental health, physical health, the welfare of their families, and their financial situation. In practice, this looks like (1) wellbeing programs (including incentives for participation), (2) support systems for families of seafarers (such as offering help for any situation that may arise while the seafarer is away, or organizing family gatherings and peer-support systems), (3) providing access to mental health resources while at home and at sea, (4) commitment to limiting time at sea and prioritizing adequate time off, (5) commitment to, support for, and focus on, Diversity, Equity, Belonging and Equity (DIBE) policies, (6) access to reliable communication, (7) opportunities for anonymous feedback, (8) ensuring proper pay and (9) providing a holistic benefit system (i.e., comprehensive medical and dental insurance).

The data collected showed that the nature of seafaring work creates a need for special attention to **People-first values**, and that a holistic approach to seafarer wellbeing works to build trust and loyalty within crews, which leads to cultural alignment.

This was expressed by many of the interviewees in terms of the provision of a ‘home’ for seafarers and by highlighting the importance of providing physical and psychological safety to ensure productive work.

(CEO of ship management company) The fact that [seafaring] is not just a job, you have to provide a home for these people for months on end and give them a space where they can be both [...] together with each other in their spare time, and work together productively. ‘Home’ is perceived as a place of safety and comfort, along with ‘provide,’ which speaks to

the responsibility of management to realize the specific needs of seafarers while at sea. Also mentioned is the end goal of productive teamwork, which tells of the chronological relationship between **People-first values** and an aligned worksite.

Diversity was a topic touched on by six out of the seven interviewees when discussing aligning culture between ship and shore. More specifically, the importance of commitment to and training for DIBE policies was stressed by most of those interviewees who talked about diversity. The data showed that diversity is a vital part of cultural alignment in that you should not have to “play a role” to be a part of the company—regardless of who you are you should still be able to fit into the culture, “do the job” and have “the exact same psychological and safe working environment” (Captain of container ship).

In addition, diversity benefits cultural alignment in that it increases flexibility—if one can allow for people to be who they truly are at work, one can also better understand other people’s ways of thinking and make allowances for these differences, while achieving the same goal. “Through [diversity] it's easier to make the adjustments that are needed, you know, on all sides, if you want to have a close more closely aligned culture" (CEO of a ship management company). This shows how diversity is closely tied to **Flexibility within culture** as an important aspect of cultural alignment. In addition, diversity and allowing people to be authentic was also associated with viewing the company as a kind of ‘family’ who take care of each other, which strengthens **Two-way trust**.

There is a clear chronological relationship between **People-first values** and **Employee retention** in the data: when people feel well-treated by a company, they see no reason to move on and they make efforts to stay with the company. Even if they decide not to go to sea anymore, they will try to move to a position ashore.

(Interviewer) What helps people to stay with [the company] for so long?

(Captain of LNG vessel) Well, it's a company that [...] in all these years I have been with them [...] this is a company that will genuinely look after you when you are onboard. Look after your interests. It's not a company that just wants you to put you onboard, finish the obligation, [saying,] “You manage things your way.” It's not like that. They are [...] serious about what they say. They implement what they say, they give you the support to execute the things and their policies and their procedures.

This highlights the importance of supporting seafarers—not *only* as the seafarers strive to implement company policies—but in all aspects of their personal wellbeing. In the data this emerged frequently as a mutual relationship between supporting employees’ wellbeing and employees’ support of company policy. In other words, a strong relationship built on **Two-way trust** is required

for crews to accept company values; wherein the employees feel like their best interests are paramount to the company.

Supporting seafarers' families emerged as a surprisingly large part of the subtheme **People-first values**. Five out of seven interviewees spoke about a support system that extends to the families of seafarers and alluded to the psychological safety that is created for seafarers when they feel their families are looked after in their absence, should some situation arise at home. In this way, support of seafarers' families is linked to faith in the company (**Two-way trust**).

(Captain of LNG vessel) In 25 years, I have never even once looked at another company [...] even if you're sailing or something, you have an emergency at home, if they can't get you off, they will give you all the support, they will send somebody to your house if required. So, these are the things that matter—that when [the company] stands by you when you need them, it says a lot about [...] the kind of organization that they are.

Opportunities for anonymous feedback were also shown to be an essential aspect of seafarer wellbeing. Easily accessible and well-advertised channels for this type of feedback provide fundamental psychological safety for seafarers: it gives them a safe place where they can speak their minds without fear of retribution.

(Captain of LNG vessel) We have these reporting cards, and they are kept in a common space on every ship. And they are in self-addressed envelopes. So [the seafarer] can write what he wants. He can put it in that envelope. And he can just post it... anywhere in the world, the postage will be paid by [the company].

Three out of the seven interviewees spoke about providing incentives for participation in wellness initiatives, and the positive effects that these incentives have on cultural alignment by increasing the amount of socializing onboard. In turn this supports the mental health of seafarers, which is an important part of **People-first values**.

(Marine Superintendent in tanker company) [We] encouraged crew to come out with different entertainment ideas, and we have like these reward points where they can [purchase things]. We were pushing for you know, get the guys to socialize more onboard [...] When they were having more of these wellness programs and interactions between themselves, the crew who were normally, you know, controlled and [...] didn't want to open up, they were now getting more friendlier and talking, coming out with more initiatives [...] which was then coming out to [management].

Furthermore, giving seafarers rewards for participating in onboard socialization is correlated with facilitating **Communication with entire crew** which, as mentioned in section 4.1.2.4, helps to foster a **Low power-distance** and also supports the subtheme **Requesting feedback**. The latter two

subthemes are shown, respectively, to have a positive influence on cultural alignment in sections 4.1.1.3. and 4.1.2.2.

4.1.1.2. Commitment to Policies

Commitment to policies was mentioned in all 7 interviews as a non-negotiable requirement for cultural alignment. It appeared often as a focus on safety and welfare of crew, and thereby ‘getting employees home safe to their families’, which builds on the idea that a benevolent company culture is more easily adopted.

(Captain of tanker vessel) [Company values] are structured into all the procedures and the checklists and the references. So, for any particular job, this becomes an integral part, where [an] individual is, you know, automatically following those safety cultures and onboard meetings, discussions. And transparency in the team [is] increased. Each member onboard is very important, [and] they know that this culture has to [be promoted] so that we have a safe ship. And all the values and policies, they filter down to the base, to the lowest most member of the team onboard.

It was emphasized that the policies must not be simply something that is written to fill some regulatory requirement, but as something that is actually used and referred to during work and meetings.

Another vital part of **Commitment to policies** is constant reinforcement to crew members of not only the policies themselves, but also of management’s unwavering support in carrying them out, which links back to **Two-way trust**. In addition, accessibility of the manuals and policies to all crew builds familiarity with them and in turn helps to build a well-adopted company culture.

For example, this captain takes it on as a personal responsibility to ensure that new crew are not only made aware of the policies but of the company’s intentions to stand behind them.

(Captain of LNG vessel) Your policy is all in your manuals accessible to everybody. When you join the ship, you have your safety briefing that takes place [...] I emphasise on this anti-harassment [and] that safety is important. It's not just something on paper, it's something we are serious about. You have the right to stop a job, you are not to not to harass your juniors or intimidate them in any way. So those are things that I personally tell them within the first day that the safety briefing happens. So that's already made very clear that we intend to implement a policy; you [are expected] to follow [it].

4.1.1.3. Low Power-Distance

Low-power distance has effects on the alignment of culture between ship and shore by ensuring that employees were given the right to question and find out exactly ‘why we do things the way we do’. This gives them background information that is vital to their belief and trust in the

policy/direction that arises from the company.

Of course, it is not always the case that because the employee has the reasoning behind the policy, they will agree with it and feel compelled to follow it. Nor does a **Low power-distance** necessarily mean that the policy will change if this is the case. However, it will open the lines of communication, and hinging on the communication being honest, will provide a chance for both sides to gain a deeper understanding of the other. With this understanding in place, if managed correctly, psychological safety can be provided to manage the uncertainty that the employee feels toward the policy (e.g., removing the fear of retribution, or reinforcing the fact that they are supported by the company to work in a certain way).

In turn, **Low power-distance** is bolstered by holistic communication, i.e., these kinds of conversations have to be regularly initiated for the crew to be aware that they are indeed possible. This appeared in the data as interviewees highlighting the importance of conversations that are centered around questioning and listening to everyone onboard, which ties into the subthemes **Requesting feedback** and **Communication with entire crew**.

(Marine Superintendent in tanker company) We just want to get the younger generation to talk. So that's also when our superintendents go onboard. We talk to the cadets, the new entrants into the company, asking them you tell us what you think of our company, rather than [us] telling you what we want for our company.

These types of conversations go hand-in-hand with building **Two-way trust**, shown in section 4.1.1.7 to be an important part of cultural alignment.

(Vice president general manager of ferry company) It's demonstrating that you're willing to be vulnerable [...] to put yourself outside your normal... and try and put [the seafarers'] shoes on for a bit. And that can only really work in my experience, if there's a lot more listening by me and a lot less talking by me [...] it does come down to trust.

4.1.1.4. Flexibility Within Culture

Flexibility within culture is defined here as making allowances and having the capacity to bend while remaining true to core values. This was shown as having some awareness that there may be a cultural shift while a new crew member is taking time to adjust and allowing for that to happen. It also emerged as being open-minded enough to understand other people's thinking and the fact that people may have a different way of reaching the same goal: "Somebody can come up with something from an outside organization [...] something new that we can integrate here and make things better," (Captain of LNG vessel).

This is closely tied to **Constant improvement**, which supports cultural alignment via ensuring relevancy of policies, as elaborated on in section 4.1.1.6.

Having an element of flexibility within organizational culture makes it possible for people to ‘fit within the mold,’ by creating space in the ‘mold’ for authenticity. In other words, a person will more readily adopt a culture that allows for them to ‘be themselves’ within it, as noted with regards to diversity in section 4.1.1.1.

From a multi-national perspective, flexibility was touched on by many of the interviewees: to thrive, the culture must have some adaptability when accounting for local customs and different nationalities. Having a strong company culture to lean on can allow the culture to withstand a few local variations while remaining true to its core values.

(CEO of ship management company) You just can't have the same rules for an office in [Europe] as we have for an office in [Asia]; those two places just work on very different planets. And whereas you can try and make sure that your company culture is embedded in both places, then you have to allow a little bit of customization that bends towards the local flavor.

4.1.1.5. Problem-Solving Together

Problem-solving together—i.e., resolving issues in a non-hierarchical way—promulgates cultural alignment by involving employees in somewhat of a ‘diplomatic process’. In other words, when people are encouraged to offer their opinions and contribute to solutions, they feel they are not only working *for* the company, but that they are an integral, important part of it. Furthermore, the kind of detailed sharing of information that is required for problem-solving makes the reasoning behind policies better understood which helps lead to their adoption.

(CEO of ship management company) You're solving something, you know, not just between shore and ship, but between a number of ships, and you as a coordinator, and you involve more than one senior management team in that problem solving, it's going to change the dynamics of how... people onboard ships feel part of the company. Because I do think that it's easy to feel very isolated today and very [like] an appendix to what's happening, and you don't really see why [it's happening] because you don't understand the business drivers behind [it].

In practice, **Problem-solving together** appeared as not only conversations about issues and solutions throughout all levels of the company, but about participation on committees, contributing to training manuals or courses and **Requesting feedback** in general. This is backed up by Schein (1993): people now have more specific tasks and managers have less knowledge about how every level functions, making it vital to have a flattened organization. And for those ‘flattening’ initiatives to be successful, employees must trust management:

(Vice president general manager of ferry company) The average age of employees in the

company is over 56 right now. So that's going to rapidly change and of course, all this [knowledge] is going to go with it, unless we figure out a way to, to harness that expertise, but we can't harness it if people don't want to talk to us because they don't trust us. Well, so, it comes back to the trust piece again.

4.1.1.6. Constant Improvement

Constant improvement appeared in the data as updating company procedures and values continuously, with emphasis on considering employee feedback. This links in the subtheme **Requesting feedback**, which is positively correlated with cultural alignment (as explained in section 4.1.2.2.). Constant improvement of policies and values (that consider seafarers' points of view) ensures they stay relevant to the company and the work, which helps them to be supported throughout the organization.

(CEO of ship management company) We try and learn, both from the mistakes we make, and also from when things go well, and try [to] create books on [...] this learning. Could be [...] changed to a procedure or policy. But of course, it's all intertwined. And it all helps to reinforce a certain way of doing things, [...] the culture of the company.

4.1.1.7. Two-Way Trust

Two-way trust is vital part of building an employee-supported company culture; it was a common denominator in the interviews expressed as the importance of employee belief in the benevolence and integrity of the company. In other words, if policies are beneficial to the employee, and the employee trusts the company to stand behind its policies, the policies will be more readily adopted.

(Captain of LNG vessel) Somebody may say, "Okay, this is my policy," or "This is how I want it." But [...] in a difficult situation, they will say, "Okay, let's just bypass it." Once [the company does that, you] know that [the policy] is only on paper. [For example,] somebody comes in says, "I'm having difficulty doing this job. I need something more." And you tell him, "No, just bypass [the procedure], but do the job..." [then] he knows that you have already compromised on his safety, he's not gonna want to do something for you over and above the next time. And you'll find many people who will do over and above for [this company]. Because [this company has] that kind of faith in us.

Elaborating on the concept of supporting employees in policy implementation, there were two main points that emerged. (1) Consistent and clear statements, which links to **Change management practices**; and (2) involvement of seafarers in policy creation, which speaks to the subtheme **Requesting feedback**.

Consistency of messaging provides seafarers with a sense of support from the company, in

that the path they are following is the company-sanctioned one if they come up against barriers in the workplace. This also ensures that change agents that exist onboard will be given the confidence to advocate for company policy by seeing, via the consistent messaging, that they can rely on management ashore to stand behind it. Management's awareness of these change agents and focused support was also said to help with this process, bringing to light the importance of holistic communication practices that help to identify where the change agents are within the company.

Involving seafarers in policy creation ensures the policies are relevant to 'work-as-done'. Relevancy of policies was spoken of often, in terms of the importance of regular reviews and incorporating feedback from ships crews. Policies that fit the job and take into account the seafarer's situation are more supported by crews, which makes a substantial positive impact on cultural alignment.

The fostering of **Two-way trust** hinges on providing holistic employee support as mentioned in 4.1.1.1. In addition, **Two-way trust** is strongly linked to holistic communication practices. In other words, the belief in the benevolence and integrity of the company will grow alongside communication practices that are honest, regular, and open: this kind of holistic communication works toward giving employees confidence that the company can be trusted to both work in their best interests and stand behind their statements. "It's not rocket science to me... it's about building the trust. The employees' ability to feel trust in the relationships with those ashore," (Vice president general manager of ferry company).

4.1.1.8. Long-Term thinking

Long-term thinking is a management style that reinforces culture by changing the fundamental focus of the company from 'quarterly numbers' to 'building the reputation' of the company. This way of thinking redirects time and energy into things that establish a strong and aligned culture, such as employee wellness (i.e., **People-first values**).

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) Yes, of course we need to make money.

That's why we're here. But just as much the values. What is it we believe in? How is it we want to treat people? How is it we want to do business? [Do] we just want to do business? Or do we want to do it, you know, in a proper way?

Long-term thinking is also correlated with having a 'family-feel' in the company, for example, having shareholders who focus on the 'generational horizon' of the company. With this long-term perspective, resources such as **In-house training** are allocated to new employees who have the potential to stay with the company for a long time. This was displayed as an investment into a 'pipeline', thereby working towards **Employee retention** and maintaining the culture within the company (see also: **Investing in employees early**, section 4.1.4.4.).

(CEO of ship management company) That training, that commitment to a pipeline, if you will, which is also quite rare in our industry, but that's because, you know, it takes 10 years to make a captain/chief engineer. So, most people just don't make investments in anything that's got a 10-year horizon [...] we're fortunate that we are a family-owned company, with people who think very long-term. And basically, they are about sort of doing things for the [...] for the generational, you know, horizon [...] that's very much part of the company's DNA.

4.1.2. **Communication**

Communication is the second-most significant main theme relating to **R.1.** (see Figure 2). It contains the subthemes **Regular communication**, **Requesting feedback**, **Honest communication**, **Communication with entire crew**, **Updated communication technology**, **Physical visits between ship and shore**, and **Informal communication**. In short, these amount to 'holistic communication practices' and are shown to have a significant positive effect on cultural alignment between ship and shore.

4.1.2.1. **Regular Communication**

Regular communication, when compared with the other subthemes relating to **R.1.**, was second-most occurring, after **People-first values** (see Figure 3). In other words, **Regular communication** was considered by the interviewees to be a highly important part of aligning culture between ship and shore. **Regular communication** is defined here as frequent communication, readily available communication, and structured communications.

The necessity of frequent meetings between ship and shore was mentioned by all the interviewees as a vital contributor to cultural alignment. Frequent meetings were seen as being, as a minimum, once a month, but weekly meetings were referred to by most of the interviewees as an important part of working towards an aligned culture.

Regular meetings ensure the repetition of values and policies and procedures leading to their inculcation. In addition, recurrent meetings help to ensure that values are communicated to every member of the crew (which links to the subtheme **Communication with entire crew**), especially when taking shift work and watches into account:

(Captain of LNG vessel) Not all of the crew can [always participate] but a number of people are selected from the team, like each month on, let's say five of them, and then next five [...] and officers are also selected so that the watches continue and we get the people to talk. So that gives a good understanding for the office, how the culture onboard is [...] if there is a gap [...] or if it is in line with the office culture.

Regular meetings are also an opportunity for **Constant improvement** which was shown in section 4.1.1.6 to have positive effects on cultural alignment via ensuring the relevancy of

procedures and policies.

Alluded to by many of the interviewees was the idea that the more frequent the communication, the more natural it is for people to begin to discuss and resolve issues that arise. In other words, regular communication breeds familiarity which breaks down the power-distance and builds trust, which in turn leads to **Problem-solving together**. Section 4.1.1.5 explains how **Problem-solving together** was shown to contribute significantly to cultural alignment by empowering employees and encouraging them to consider themselves as an integral part of the organization.

(Marine superintendent in tanker company) The main thing is just bridging that gap between the shore and office team, where we have regular conversations [...] with the entire team onboard [and] all the senior superintendents [...] It's like a collective thing that we have on a monthly basis [...] get them to tell us what their problems are [...] It's always an open, up-and-down, to-and-fro communication that goes on.

The availability of communication is also an important part of **Regular communication**. This appeared as having 24/7 support, and if feeling comfortable reaching out to the support at any time of day or night, without fear of retribution. This also works towards building trust and reinforcing a non-hierarchical management style. The positive correlations that **Two-way trust** and **Low power-distance** have to cultural alignment are explained, respectively, in sections 4.1.1.3. and 4.1.1.7.

(Marine superintendent in tanker company) We tell the ships, "You have a problem, do not hesitate to pick up the phone and just call us, irrespective of the weekend..." That communication part is what we stress on, that we got to know what you're doing onboard, please tell us and do not take the stress on you, we are there to help you [...] So that's the main thing, is just to get [the oncoming captain] comfortable to talking to us.

Structured communication was also mentioned as an important part of cultural alignment, in that it is a way for the management to influence the narrative onboard ships. Linking in to **Change management practices**, this encompasses repetitive and consistent messages, and 'checking up' on the status of ongoing solutions or new policies to keep them at the forefront of the crew's collective mind, which helps lead to their adoption.

(Captain of container vessel) The element 'who's in charge of what' is important in many, many respects [...] It doesn't really leave much room for, let's say that something 'falls between chairs' [...] You maybe have scheduled talks with scheduled agendas with scheduled people [...] We sort of say, "Okay, we're gonna discuss these topics. Every time we meet, we're gonna discuss this," and [...] say "Okay, with this item number one, three weeks ago, where are we with that today." So, the structure is quite relevant.

Regular communication encompasses not only ship to shore communication, but

communication on ships, via regular onboard meetings. Since it can be the case that the captain is the main link for communication between ship and shore, onboard meetings and discussions are where the culture has a chance to filter down to the crew. Additionally, these meetings allow for the crew to provide their input, which links to the subtheme **Requesting feedback** (which promotes cultural alignment as explained in section 4.1.2.2).

(Captain of LNG vessel) Our safety meetings [we hold] at least once a month. At that time, besides discussing the schedule of the ship and what has happened, you know, accidents, near misses [...] we start taking feedback from the group, that what do you have, you know, to improve the system onboard. So, all that [...] goes to the office, which is reviewed by the superintendent, [and something] that needs his feedback, his input, or his support, he has to enter that into the system as well. And it's closed only when it is mutually agreed by both sides.

This speaks to the importance of structured communication which enables management to verify that the communication onboard is happening in the correct format and with the desired frequency. It also highlights how this practice supports integrity of managers by making it necessary for them to sign off on the feedback and respond.

Within the bounds of onboard meetings, the discussion topics and style of meeting are also a determining factor in how the culture is transmitted to the crew; they are literally a display of the culture that the company wishes to promote. For example, by holding meetings that provide an open arena for comments and feedback, a company shows that it values its employees' perspectives, which moves to promote **Two-way trust**.

(Marine superintendent of tanker company) The senior officers or the senior superintendents and the head of departments actually speak to the lower ranks, [they] question a lower rank and say you give us your suggestions, you tell us what is wrong, you tell us what we need to do to change. What are your problems, be it family problems, or be a problem on ship? Whatever it may be.

(Interviewer) And they feel comfortable to speak... sitting with their entire crew?

(Marine superintendent) [...] Correct. And their captain is there as well [...] it's like an open culture [...] it's complete transparency on either side.

As mentioned in section 4.1.1.7., the sharing of information also works towards **Two-way trust**, and links to the subtheme **Honest communication**.

4.1.2.2. Requesting Feedback

Requesting feedback was shown in the data to have a strong positive correlation to cultural alignment: out of the 23 subthemes discovered, it was fourth highest in occurrence (see Figure 3). This subtheme encompasses (1) structured processes for policy updating which take into account comments from seafarers, (2) soliciting, recording and sharing best practices from seafarers, and (3) general conversations between ship and shore that focus on questioning and listening.

Structured and ongoing consideration of employees' opinions requires constant engagement, which in turn leads to reinforcement of culture due to the frequency of the communication and, perhaps more importantly, the nature of the communication being centered around 'the way we do things'.

(Captain of tanker vessel) The policy remains [the] same but there are some fine tunings at times. Those are promulgated through the company [...] amendment to procedures and sharing and learning [is] integrated onboard and ultimately it becomes a whole package. Requesting feedback from crew also encompasses capturing knowledge that exists onboard. This leads back to **Problem-solving together**, which, as explained in section 4.1.1.5, strengthens employees' connection to the organization by making them feel like they are fundamental to the company's success and an indispensable part of it, rather than just 'someone who works here.'

(Vice president general manager of ferry company) A deckhand [was] interviewed by me in terms of how to train a new deckhand [...] he was there for 41 years. There's no way you can teach this stuff. And I said "[...] this is from your head [...] this is everything that you know about being a deckhand here in an organized format [...] It's what you do." And [...] it really clicked for him. And, you know, there was that [...] legitimization of all of his efforts over the years. It was chronicled right there in front of him, and it was his words.

Conversations focused on questioning and listening by leaders were mentioned by many of the interviewees as an important aspect of building **Two-way trust**. These types of conversations also work to build a culture that is less top-down, but continually germinated and renewed by engaging employees on all levels of the organization in dialogues that are carefully directed by leadership. This enables employees to contribute to and enhance the culture, rather than seeing the culture as something that is dictated to them, which in turn helps them to accept and promulgate it.

(Captain of container vessel) [When] we get the team onboard, we try to define what is a good workplace. [For example], can I as a captain come and tell you "I want you to do this." Is that acceptable? Is it not acceptable? [We] try to exemplify some situations that maybe I have seen, or others have seen onboard. And then people would say, "Yes, that would be acceptable to say," but if I said something else, maybe they would say, "Mmm, no, we don't

think this is [acceptable] sort of, you know, awkward..." And then based on these questions [...] the team try to define [...] a group of "Do", and a group of "Don't" and maybe a group of "Don't really know". And this sort of dialogue has, well, turned out, at least for most people I sail with, to be sort of quite constructive [...] To try to create a better understanding of how people perceive situations. I think [with] this, we try to define our own culture.

4.1.2.3. Honest Communication

Honest communication with employees is an integral part of building **Two-way trust**, shown in section 4.1.1.7 to be fundamental to cultural alignment. To believe that an organization has one's best interests in mind requires a lot of faith, and this takes time and effort to build up. Therefore, unwavering honesty on management's part is vital to show employees that the company can be trusted to both stand behind their statements and to behave altruistically. In all the interviews that drew attention to honesty leading to trust, the dedication to **Honest communication** was also strongly underscored:

(Vice president general manager of ferry company) If you don't know somebody, you're less trusting of them [...] So, I don't have a problem, you know, engaging with employees and [...] being vulnerable that way [...] We in management have to put ourselves out there, we can't wait for employees to make themselves vulnerable or show their benevolence.

Honest communication most often appeared in the data as the importance of explaining to seafarers the reasoning behind decisions made on shore and providing them background information that is crucial to their belief and trust in the direction that arises from the company.

(Marine superintendent in tanker company) The ship side don't exactly know what issues we face [on the shore side]. In case they want a spare part or something [...] urgently [...] it's then when we tell them, you know, there are certain restrictions and lead times that we have [...] We can have a look [at] policy changes and all, it's not so easy to just do it [when only] one ship is concerned, it has to be an overall broad idea. So [management's] point of view is always put forward to them and it's like a mutual consent.

4.1.2.4. Communication With Entire Crew

Not all the interviewees saw ship-shore communication with the entire crew as necessary, instead focusing on the importance of communicating with and supporting the senior officers onboard and helping culture filter down to the crew that way. However, some interviewees expressed that a very important part of aligning culture between ship and shore in their organizations is purposefully reaching out to, and facilitating conversations with, for example, the oilers, deckhands, or cooks. In this way, the subthemes **Low power-distance**, **Requesting feedback**, and **Honest communication** are bolstered, shown in sections 4.1.1.3., 4.1.2.2., and 4.1.2.3.,

respectively, to have positive correlations with cultural alignment between ship and shore.

(Captain of container ship) Everybody likes to talk about [...] their own situation, and by listening to people's particular situation and so on, maybe you can, as a leader from the shore gain [understanding about a] more general issue that could be applicable for a lot of people.

Often this kind of communication is facilitated by shore staff visiting the ships, or ship staff visiting the office, and it is further encouraged by making time for informal communication during these visits. This underpins the importance of the subthemes **Physical visits between ship and shore** and **Informal communication**.

(Marine superintendent in tanker company) The best part is the top bosses, talk to [...] the lower ranks [...] Rather than [shore management] talking to the master, [whom] they of course talk [to] every day [...] we want the younger generations or the lower ranks onboard to come up and speak to us, we are finding a lot of good responses on that.

The subtheme **Communication with entire crew** is not only about inquiring about the general situation of those onboard but includes communication and feedback about policies. In this case, newer DIBE policies are reviewed by all employees:

(Marine superintendent in tanker company) All these [DIBE] policies came into [the] picture where the equality and work cultures were put into force [...] So, the ship's full team [...] put in their points of view on where [these] policies need to change [...] Then we actually go through each policy, review it, make the required changes, and then publish it to all the ships, highlighting that [change]. So primarily it's not just a decision shore-based, it is considered also the ship's point of view.

This allows all employees to be given the chance to have a say about policies that affect their work onboard, and as mentioned in section 4.1.2.2. **Requesting Feedback**, this has a positive effect on cultural alignment via (1) ensuring policies are written to work-as-done, and (2) encouraging personal embodiment of the company culture through all levels of the organization.

4.1.2.5. Updated Communication Technology

Six out of seven of the interviewees referred to **Updated communication technology** as a positive mechanism for cultural alignment between ship and shore. This appeared as alternatives to email, such as online video conferencing, connectivity platforms such as MS Teams, and internet texting services such as WhatsApp. These 'alternatives to email' support both subthemes **Regular communication** and **Informal communication**. See sections 4.1.2.1 and 4.1.2.7, respectively, for an explanation of how these subthemes positively affect cultural alignment.

The reliability of the aforementioned 'alternatives to email' hinge on providing sufficient

bandwidth to ships. Many interviewees alluded to increased bandwidth affording the opportunity for more video calls, which in turn helps to align culture as the face-to-face aspect promotes a more holistic communication style.

(CEO of ship management company) It's becoming rather common to have video conferences between the shore teams and the CEO and the senior management team onboard. So... that adds to the sort of communication, and understanding, and appreciation of what happens on both sides.

Updated communication technology (e.g., instant text-messaging via internet) also increases the opportunity for 24/7, timely communication, that is supported by official pathways such as email. The following shows the benefits of having multiple, round-the-clock communication methods to support **Regular communication**:

(Marine superintendent in tanker company) We are gradually now moving on to the social platforms [...] where the messaging system is instant. So, we say if you have something really urgent, because emails are not always monitored [...] Of course, that has to be followed with the email system to get it official. And we it's almost like we work on a 24-hour round-the-clock because [the office in eastern Asia] is on a plus eight GMT. I work in [western Asia], that's a plus five and a half hours. So, when [the office in eastern Asia] is closed, I am up also to look into any urgent messages. And when I'm almost shutting down, then we have an office in [the USA] where they take over the night part of it.

Another piece of the subtheme **Updated communication technology** is supplying the ships with the hardware to make this kind of communication possible (e.g., cameras, microphones, and Wi-Fi repeaters). Emerging technology was also mentioned (e.g., low earth orbiting satellites) as something that continues to increase connectivity between ship and shore and thereby help to align cultures via increasing two-way understanding:

(CEO of ship management company) I think [increasing bandwidth to ships via low earth orbiting satellites] is going to genuinely change the way we engage with one another between ship and shore. Because now [ships that have it] can have video calls with whoever they want. Anytime they can have [...] Microsoft Teams, they can work on stuff that isn't email or this [enterprise resource planning] system, but it's much more flexible [...] And through that flexibility [and] communication, you get an increased alignment between the ship and shore teams, because it is a challenge [...] to make sure that you see somehow eye-to-eye, because you have different information, that means you draw different conclusions, and those can [...] sometimes be opposing, and then you have to find ways to [mitigate that]. Interestingly, **Updated communication technology** facilitating ship-to-ship conversations

was mentioned in a few of the interviews as being positively correlated with aligning culture, in that the horizontal sharing of information and conversations about issues between peers helps people to feel a deeper connection to the company (similarly to the reasoning behind the subtheme **Problem-solving together** being linked to cultural alignment, as explained in section 4.1.1.5).

(CEO of ship management company) [As bandwidth to ships increases] it'll be the norm that you [...] have a video meeting [...] and you're solving something [...] not just between shore and ship, but between a number of ships and [...] senior management team[s]. It's going to change the dynamics of how [...] people onboard ships feel part of the company. Because I do think that it's easy to feel very isolated today and very sort of as an appendix to what's happening [...] and you don't really see why [it's happening] because you don't understand the business drivers behind it.

4.1.2.6. Physical Visits Between Ship and Shore

Regardless of the access to improved communication technology, it was a common consensus amongst the interviewees that meeting in-person between ship and shore employees is an aspect of cultural alignment that should not be overlooked. The most significant part of these in-person visits is that they make possible time for **Informal communication**, shown in section 4.1.2.7 to play an important part in cultural alignment.

(Marine superintendent in tanker company) We collect the shore staff who have never been onboard ships [...] take them onboard, show them the culture, show them how the ships are actually operating, [they] have a look through, meet all the crew, talk to them, have dinner, lunch onboard, and you know, communicate [...] Otherwise, basically, it's just a phone call, so [by coming onboard] they get to put a name to the face.

Physical visits between ship and shore also serve to facilitate **Communication with entire crew**; its positive correlation to ship-shore alignment is explained in section 4.1.2.4.

The importance of 'life at sea' being understood by shore staff was mentioned by many of the interviewees as a 'non-negotiable' for cultural alignment, and how it can only be fully appreciated by visiting or sailing on the ships: "[Shore staff] get to sail onboard for few days to see this side of the life [at sea] and I guess then they understand better the challenges which ship people [face], and the hardship that they face," (Captain of tanker vessel).

The regularity of physical meetings between ship and shore was also emphasized by many of the interviewees, which ties back into the importance of **Regular communication** for cultural alignment (see section 4.1.2.1).

(Vice president general manager of ferry company) I try to get out to the vessels on a weekly basis when we're in operations... the employees are busy with customers, so it really has to

be informal; it has to be in the margins [and] there has to be a bit of a frequency [to it] where, you know, it's not a 'flash in the pan'.

The symbolic portrayal of **Low power-distance** via senior management physically visiting the ships can also be powerful for aligning a company culture:

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) [By coming out to the ships, the CEO] actually shows, "Yes, I do care about our seafarers," and that the ships are not just about, you know, money and KPIs [...]

(Interviewer) Do you think that that helps people [onboard] adopt the [company] culture?

(Senior marine specialist) Yeah, because they actually [...] see us more as 'one' [when the CEO] comes to us on our turf [...] And I think it's a really, really strong signal to send, [that] he's actually willing to take half an hour out for something like that [and] it's really, really valuable for actually adopting [and] bringing out the culture and saying, "This is my vision for the company." Yes, you only reach around 20 persons in one go. But let's slowly get moving—Rome wasn't built in a day.

Details on how **Low power-distance** benefits cultural alignment are identified in section 4.1.1.3.

4.1.2.7. Informal Communication

Informal communication was mentioned in six out of the seven interviews as playing a significant part in cultural alignment. As mentioned in section 4.1.2.1, **Regular communication** breeds familiarity and builds trust, and making time for **Informal communication** within regular communication practices speeds the process: "The less formal it is, the more successful it is, you know, having a coffee with one employee or a couple of employees is probably more productive than a town hall. Because those two employees might be my first followers," (vice president general manager of ferry company).

This also shows how **Informal communication** can be a powerful strategy for change management via building trust and understanding. Attentiveness to **Change management practices** is an important aspect of aligning culture, as explained in section 4.1.3.2.

It was mentioned by a few of the interviewees that making time for informal conversations with employees is necessary for maintaining a **Low power-distance** which strengthens **Two-way trust** as mentioned in section 4.1.1.3.

(CEO of ship management company) We build management teams that... also hang out outside of work. I mean, they always say people who play together, stay together, right? So, it's important to us that we have that kind of relation with each other where we will play the cricket one day [...] go hiking mountains next day, have dinners together, and go for movie

nights and at the same time we work together in different settings, but that's the kind of company that I think we very consciously aim to be, right?

This illustrates how **Informal communication** is linked to **Employee retention**, which is shown to have considerable effects on cultural alignment in section 4.1.3.3. In addition, this quote highlights the significance of the continual work (e.g., **Long-term thinking**) that goes into maintaining an aligned culture (further explained in section 4.1.1.8.).

Additionally, the importance of **Informal communication** as socialization onboard was spoken about by three of the interviewees, in that it supports the mental health of seafarers, which is part of the subtheme **People-first values** (positively linked to cultural alignment, as described in section 4.1.1.1).

(Marine Superintendent in tanker company) Now with digitalization, everyone wants to, you know, be by themselves in the cabins, [which is] actually widening the gap amongst them. So that's where we came out with all these initiatives, [to] get the guys together [and] socialize more, have more activities onboard. Come out with a good happy ship.

4.1.3. Company Structure/Practices

The main theme **Company structure/practices** accounts for 15% of the discussed strategies related to cultural alignment (see Figure 2). **Company structure/practices** includes organizational strategies and human resources practices, and contains the subthemes **Cross-pollination**, **Change management practices**, **Employee retention** and **Thorough pre-hire assessment**.

4.1.3.1. Cross-Pollination

The subtheme **Cross-pollination** includes (1) ex-seafarers working in management ashore, (2) seafarers working ashore in temporary positions or (3) limiting seafarers' time on one ship. Although the main theme **Company structure/practices** comprised only a small part (15%) of the total strategies related to **R.1.** (see Figure 2), **Cross-pollination** was the most important subtheme within this main theme, forming almost half (43%) of discussed subthemes in **Company structure/practices**. Additionally, it was third-most discussed when weighed against the 23 subthemes relating to **R.1.** (see Figure 3). These points indicate that according to this data, **Cross-pollination** is a key influence on cultural alignment between ship and shore.

All interviewees noted the benefits of having ex-seafarers working ashore in positions that are the point of contact for ships, such as Marine Superintendent or Vessel Manager. It was a consensus amongst the interviewees that ship-shore communication is eased when the shore management communicating with the ship has an intimate knowledge of seafaring culture that can only be possessed by former seafarers. Reasons for this were noted as the language used at sea, the atypical work hours, and the overall experience of being a seafarer and the hardships that come

along with it.

(CEO of ship management company) Perhaps the biggest sort of, bond, between shore and sea is the fact that all of us who work in management on the shore side, we come from a seagoing background [...] I think it's exceptionally important for the extended management team to understand how the culture is onboard [...] how the days are, what the work consists of.

Therefore, employing ex-seafarers in the office enables the shore organization in general to have a better understanding of life at sea. Having seafarers work ashore on temporary projects also works to this end in that they provide a unique and valuable perspective to shore side, which, as above, both eases communications between ship and shore and gives insight into seafarer management and their specific needs.

In this way, ex-seafarers working ashore supports both subthemes **Honest communication** and **People-first values** (see sections 4.1.2.3 and 4.1.1.1. for an explanation of how these are positively correlated with cultural alignment). Additionally, if/when they return to a seagoing position, it eases matters for the shore side when communicating with this person, as their understanding of 'how things work' on shore is deepened.

(Marine superintendent in tanker company) Someone who's gone back to sea... [they] know what's happening on [shore side], the suggestions coming out are at a different level altogether, rather than [...] the frivolous ones that come out [from someone who has not worked on shore]. The maturity level of the suggestions [...] are well advanced. [...] They know the regulations and the restrictions that we face [and it makes] a big difference.

Additionally, because they bring with them knowledge of shore-side customs and values, they can act as somewhat of an 'ambassador', with fuller comprehension of both sides of the picture. This enables the returning seafarer to offer explanations to fellow seafarers to fill gaps in knowledge about, or understanding of, what is happening in the office.

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) When you come [back to sea after working ashore], you know, the things which people often complain about, "They're stupid in the office, they don't understand..." You can actually explain to them, "The reason why they're doing this is..." And that really helps to in order to bond ship and shore together.

This alludes to the idea that providing reasoning behind decisions made by the shore side increases **Two-way trust** (see section 4.1.1.7 for how this bolsters ship-shore alignment).

Many of the interviewees also noted the benefits of having not only ex-seafarers working ashore, but ex-seafarers who come from the company's own ships, in that they have an even greater two-way understanding of the ships' 'modus operandi,' and are already integrated into the culture

of the company. These interviewees remarked that it is considered part of company policy to provide shore work for their seafarers if they so desired, citing the cultural and communication benefits of retaining their former seafarers: “[having our former seafarers in management positions] makes it easier for them to make sure that the same things are being implemented, the policies are being followed [on our ships]. Very rarely do we [have someone in direct contact with the ships] who's come from outside [the company],” (Captain of LNG vessel). This is exemplified in section 4.1.3.3 **Employee retention**, which establishes that increasing the length of employees’ tenures within a company helps to promote cultural alignment.

(CEO of ship management company) The whole [management] system is built on these ex-seafarers... But not only are they ex-[seafarers], they are also [from our ships]. So, they’ve not only sailed—they’ve sailed in our culture [...] And I think that's a very big part of it [...] So pretty much everyone in leadership positions or 90%, I'd say, come from a journey of cadets or a junior or senior officer into a shore-based position as a vessel manager, then a fleet manager, then amending director than a CEO or whatever it is they end up as, but it's all [...] grown out of the fleet. I think that's the first thing that's really, really important.

Also mentioned in the interviews was limiting seafarers’ time on one ship. The reasoning behind this is threefold. Firstly, moving people between ships helps with knowledge transfer in that people take useful information about ‘what works’ with them. Secondly, it negates complacency:

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) If I'm too long on [a] ship, for example, [I] might tend to go blind, I mean, I will see the same mistake or same error over and over again, because it's always been like that, you know, after a few years. So, I kind of accept things which I shouldn't accept, where[as] if I came on another ship, I might notice it, or someone else [could] come along [and notice it].

Thirdly, limiting time on ships prevents the establishment of perceived ‘ownership’ of the vessels which can greatly hinder cultural alignment when paired with lack of trust in leadership ashore (this appears as a barrier that is elaborated on in section 4.2.2.2. **Lack of trust/understanding**).

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) We do have an official limit to how long can you actually stay attached to a ship [...] Well, you have to get attached to a ship, because [...] you need to take responsibility, but simply not too much; you cannot say “It’s my ship,” [...] Each ship [used to] have their own little king onboard who couldn't care less, he would do exactly as he felt like [...] we don't have those small kings anymore.

4.1.3.2. Change Management Practices

Change management practices are strategies that enable cultural or structural shifts to take root and endure. Their influence on ship-shore culture is of considerable importance as they are the tools that facilitate its alignment.

Change management practices with regards to cultural alignment appear as: (1) disseminating organizational learning, (2) policy amendment coupled with requesting feedback, (3) consistent and repetitive messaging, and (4) supporting leadership onboard.

As previously mentioned in section 4.1.1.6 **Constant Improvement**, continuous organizational learning (from both mistakes and successes) and the dissemination of this learning is positively correlated with cultural alignment, in that frequently publishing new concepts or insights reinforce the organization's 'way of doing things'.

Updating or creating new policies while requesting feedback from seafarers has a similar effect in that it shines a spotlight on the culture via consistent and repetitive messaging and provides a way to influence the narrative onboard ships as mentioned in section 4.1.2.1. **Regular Communication**. This is also linked to the subtheme **Requesting feedback**, shown in section 4.1.2.2. to support cultural alignment.

Many of the interviewees specified that management's support for senior officers onboard is a vital part of cultural alignment between ship and shore. In providing this support, management ashore build trust with the senior officers, which then filters down to the crew (**Two-way trust** is positively correlated with cultural alignment as explained in section 4.1.1.7.).

(Captain of tanker vessel) The top four [senior officers'] involvement [onboard] is very important. For [culture] to filter down to the base level [...] It will change slowly, but to get full 100% [cultural alignment] onboard, these top four play a very important role [...] So [the shore side] always [must give the senior officers] support.

Dissemination of organizational cultural changes by shore-based management (e.g., shipboard training, new requirements, changes to policies, etc.) must be done with some foresight that reinforces this support for the senior officers onboard, as they oversee implementation. For example, the amount or complexity of the requests being sent in a certain period and the schedule of the ship must be considered.

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) We [try] not to send out everything at once [...] or within a very short period. [We] try to coordinate [...] so we don't send something out telling people to go to the left and then someone tells them to go to the right and then people will just sit and look confused and think we're stupid.

In turn, the senior officers have a responsibility to ensure the culture reaches the entire

crew onboard via holistic onboard communication and passing on those consistent and clear messages from shore. In this case, the captain notes the importance of reinforcing to crew the company's commitment to **People-first values**, which is the most significant positive influence of cultural alignment in this data (section 4.1.1.1).

(Captain of LNG vessel) As a master, you have to filter down [the company values] to the rest of your crew as well [...] it's up to the master [or] the chief engineer to instill that level of trust in [their] subordinates that, you know, "Yes, the company is there for you," [Because the master is] the one between them and the company—there's nobody in between. [The crew] don't have the one-to-one with [the shore side]. So, a lot depends on the company, and the [senior officers], [and] how much they filter down.

Other aspects of change management must be considered, such as hardware or connectivity that may be required for accessing the data, or training that may be required for the senior officers to be able to knowledgably apply the changes or in turn train their crew. In other words, documents cannot simply be sent out to the ships and expected to take hold.

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) When a project or big [change] is rolled out, if there's any material needed, posters, or special computer, [they are] actually being sent out to the ships [...] there's always a lot [more] information [that is sent along, for example], some speakers notes [...] so whoever has to [present] it, [doesn't] just stand there and look at a fancy PowerPoint, [and think], "I have no idea what's going on." So no, of course we don't just send something out saying, "Hey, please fix [this]," [...] you will [...] lose the engagement for sure [...] They need to get the support, [and] they need [...] the hardware.

4.1.3.3. Employee Retention

In every interview, **Employee retention** was mentioned as playing a major role in cultural alignment: the longer people stay with the company, the more they embody the company's culture and promote it. In the interviews this was spoken of as a mutually-reinforcing relationship with **People-first values** and **Two-way trust**—people who trust the company and feel that the company culture benefits them tend to stay with the company a long time and find it natural to foster the company's way of doing things.

(Senior marine specialist in a shipping company) When people have been here for a couple of years, I think they do adopt [the culture], and of course we build that bond on to the next generations. So now people, they are feeling part of a family [...]

(Interviewer) So how do you make sure your employees stay for a long time?

(Senior Marine Specialist) [It's] something as simple as ensuring that people actually get paid, [and] a very high focus from the crewing side to ensure people are actually getting

home on time according to the contract.

Focus on **Employee retention** also leads to seafarers working ashore, via the organization accommodating employees who no longer want to, or are no longer able to, work at sea. Seafarers working in temporary or permanent positions in the office is strongly correlated with cultural alignment as explained in section 4.1.3.1. **Cross-pollination**.

Regular communication, in tandem with **People-first values**, works to retain employees in that it reinforces the notion that the company will continue to support employees in the long-term:

(Interviewer) Why is it that you want to communicate with [your seafarers] when they're on vacation?

(Marine superintendent in ship management company) To say, "Okay, we are there for you," [if they] have a problem [...] on ship or [...] at home, could be medical related, could be anything [...] They have got insurance policies from the company and everything, [but] just to keep that constant touch and the human relations going [...] That's what we're looking at—retention [...] We just want to have that loyalty.

The effect of this holistic support leading to **Employee retention** was also confirmed from the seafarers' perspectives:

(Captain of tanker vessel) If [...] I'm getting trapped in [a] certain situation. I know [the] office is going to back me up and I have full support from them, and I can reach them anytime. That makes me [want] to come back to the same company, where you are taken care of, because this place, at sea, is different. It's not ashore, and here you need support.

4.1.3.4. Thorough Pre-hire Assessment

Having a **Thorough pre-hire assessment** process was said to play a small role in cultural alignment via (1) ensuring people fit the role and therefore stay with the company longer (**Employee retention** leads to ship-shore alignment as explained in section 4.1.3.3), (2) making employees feel proud and accomplished to be a part of the company and therefore happy to 'take on' the culture, and (3) ensuring that people hired are adaptable to the company culture. Interestingly, according to the data, it is not an advantage to try to hire people that already have similar values as the company—it is more important to hire people that have the capacity to be integrated:

(Marine superintendent in tanker company) The hiring process [...] they have got a rigid, strict schedule to follow [...] they look into the psychological and the competency part of the crew... they may not be 100% [aligned] with our cultures and our motives that we would like them to have. But the point is, when they come onboard, that's where we develop them.

4.1.4. Training

Training was the least-significant main theme that emerged in the data with regards to **R.1**.

It is comprised of the subthemes **In-house training/conferences**, **Soft skills training**, **Helping new members align**, and **Investing in employees early**.

4.1.4.1. In-House Training/Conferences

Although the main theme **Training** is relatively insignificant when compared with the other main themes, according to the data, the subtheme **In-house training/conferences** was shown to have substantial impact on cultural alignment between ship and shore. This subtheme appeared fifth out of the 23 subthemes in terms of occurrence with regards to **R.1.** (see Figure 3).

Building on section 4.1.3.2. **Change management practices**, wherein management's support for senior officers onboard is shown as an important part of achieving cultural alignment, holding regular conferences for senior officers is an aspect of this support. These conferences present opportunities to support organizational learning and transmittal of values with the goal of aligning organizational culture from the top-down.

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) [Our chairperson] held a fantastic speech [at a high-level conference], about values and [what] he believes, and [the company's] history [...] how he thinks we should be [...] You have, let's say, 2000 leaders listening to this [...] So the leaders there, went off-site and they basically held the same [...] conference[s] for [senior managers]. So just escalating down. If you do that all over the [organization], it will just slowly spread like rings in the well.

A few of the interviewees also noted that there are cultural benefits of having all employees regardless of rank attend these conferences (subject to their schedule and location), namely, reinforcing the idea that the company is there to support employees (**People-first values** and **Two-way trust**, explained in sections 4.1.1.1 and 4.1.1.7, respectively, to work towards cultural alignment).

(Vice president general manager of ferry company) [We're having] a four-day long learning fair for employees [...] And we're bringing in as many employees as we can [...] It's trying to demonstrate the benevolence that I feel towards the employees, and we want employees to recognize that the company is there to support them [...] so that they can then help us achieve our goals. Because at the end of the day, we're not going to do it on our own— simple as that.

Other interviewees from larger companies noted that having the lower-ranked employees at conferences would not serve any productive purpose as the information being discussed is concerning higher-level issues such as budgeting, instead focusing on inspiring senior officers, who then go back to their ships and engage their crews. In addition, in larger companies, the cost of including even one more level of seafarers (e.g., mid-level officers such as 2nd engineers or 2nd

mates) would be prohibitive (see section 4.2.2.1 for more on **Lack of resources** as a barrier to ship-shore alignment).

Some of the companies interviewed made investments into a 'pipeline,' in that they recruit and train from an early level in people's careers, using **Long-term thinking** to solidify the company's culture in their lowest ranks. By practicing benevolence and investing in these employees, the company instills loyalty, linked to **Employee retention** and promotion of culture within the company, as explained in section 4.1.3.3.

(CEO of ship management company) I think that the fact that we [train] them [...] at our own school, and it's all about [our company] from day one, everything they read, [...] the whole philosophy is sort of what [culture] our company is imbued with, and they breathe and live that in that first year, and I think that makes a big difference when they go out to sea. So, I sense that there's a very high degree of pride in working for [our company] in the industry. And that helps in a way, create a special esprit-de-corps, a special camaraderie in the group, which will help cement the culture and also bridge the divide between ships and shore.

In-house training was also spoken of in a more general fashion, in that training provided by the company is beneficial to alignment of culture when it is provided by the company itself rather than a generic training centre. It was noted that in this way, cultural aspects can be included as part of any training that takes place, or at the very least an in-house instructor will have awareness enough not to negate company culture. Another way to use in-house training as a way to support cultural alignment is in working with training centres to design specialized courses that take into account the company's 'way of doing things.' In-house trainings are also seen as an important arena for **Informal communication** to take place between employees, which has strong links to cultural alignment as explained in section 4.1.2.7.

4.1.4.2. Soft Skills Training

Soft skills training appeared in the data as leadership training or training associated with DIBE policies. This type of training is linked to cultural alignment in that it educates on prescribed cultural changes. Again, training is a good opportunity for **Informal communication** (which supports cultural alignment as mentioned in section 4.1.2.7.), and soft skills training in particular provides this opportunity due to its nature revolving around discussion and reflection.

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) When you start to do some of these [diversity and inclusion] exercises and meetings [...] initially, some people [say] "Ah, this is stupid and blah, blah, blah, come on, we need to go and work," but actually once it gets started and [...] when the top two senior management start to open up and share some examples they tried themselves [...] people tend to do it themselves, and from what I can hear is that they [...]

feel more connected as a crew [...] They will also [feel like they can] reflect on the company because then they feel like they are being taken seriously. We do want them to feel at ease, and be able to relax, and have a good job, and all of these things, and feel safe [...] not just physically but also mentally. And I think that's very important [that] they can see we're taking [their wellbeing] seriously, because they are spending a lot of time [onboard].

This elucidates how soft skills training is connected to **People-first values** by reinforcing the benevolence of the organization and thereby strengthening the ship-shore bond (see section 4.1.1.1.). Additionally, these training sessions lead to improved communication skills (which play a major role in cultural alignment as shown in section 4.1.2. **Communication**).

4.1.4.3. Helping New Members Align

Helping new members align benefits ship-shore alignment by ensuring that barriers to alignment of culture in the form of new employees are not allowed to persist in the long term, by encouraging and helping them to 'believe in the system:'

(Captain of tanker vessel) In the beginning any newcomer might find it little bit different because of [not being] used to [the culture], but since this company's values have been selected and you want to adapt to it, it becomes quite easy [...] over [a] period of time.

(Interviewer) What's the thing that helps [a newcomer] the most to adapt?

(Captain) [...] The support from other team members towards him or her, if [it is his or her] first time obviously [he/she] is taken care of [and] allowed time to 'gel' into the system. And those people that support [the new crew member] have to have a belief in it and trust in it [...] And that is how it has been working—believing in the system and supporting and helping each other.

This also goes hand-in-hand with the subtheme **Flexibility within culture** (see section 4.1.1.4. for how this abets cultural alignment) and thereby awareness of the fact that new employees may take some time to adjust. In addition, maintaining **Regular communication** is an important part of **Helping new members align**, by providing clear and consistent messaging (elaborated on in section 4.1.2.1.).

4.1.4.4. Investing in Employees Early

Investing in employees early is associated with cultural alignment in that devoting resources to employees at the beginning of their careers increases their loyalty and time with the company and is another aspect of showing benevolence.

(CEO of ship management company) The sort of pre-sea school that we have there, which is also very unique to [our company]. I don't know any other asset management company or ship owner who's made that kind of deep investment in pre-sea training, and it makes an

enormous difference [for cultural alignment].

Therefore, **Investing in employees early** is a component of **Long-term thinking** and **Employee retention** (see sections 4.1.1.8 and 4.1.3.3, respectively, for an explanation of how these subthemes support cultural alignment).

4.2. Themes in R.2. Barriers

In the group **R.2. Barriers**, three main themes emerged: **Culture differences**, **Company practices**, and **Communication**; their rate of occurrence is shown in Figure 4.

The main theme **Culture differences** accounts for more than half (63%) of the barriers to aligning culture between ship and shore that were mentioned during the interviews. **Company practices** was the next-most significant main theme related to **R.2.** at 32%, followed by the least-occurring main theme, **Communication** at only 5%.

Figure 4

Occurrence of main themes in R.2., barriers to alignment between ship and shore

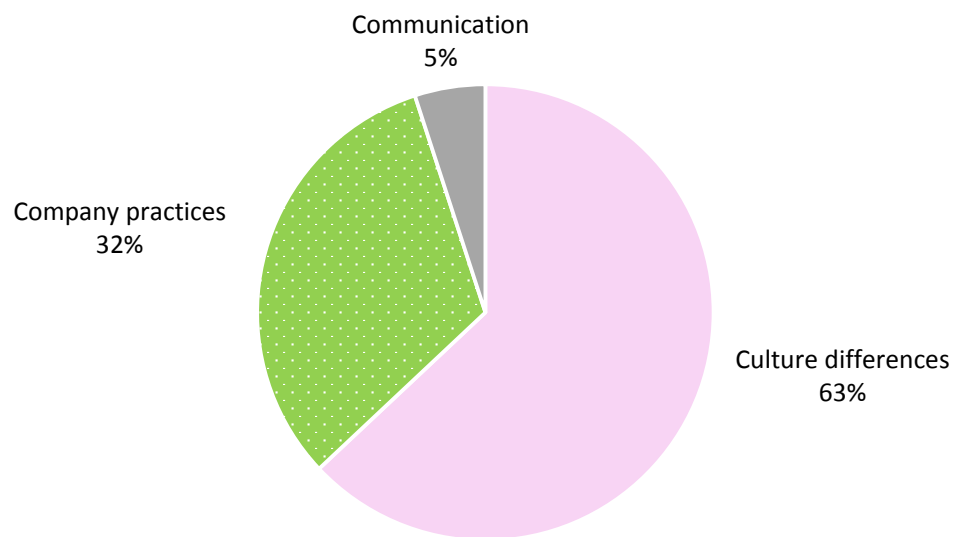
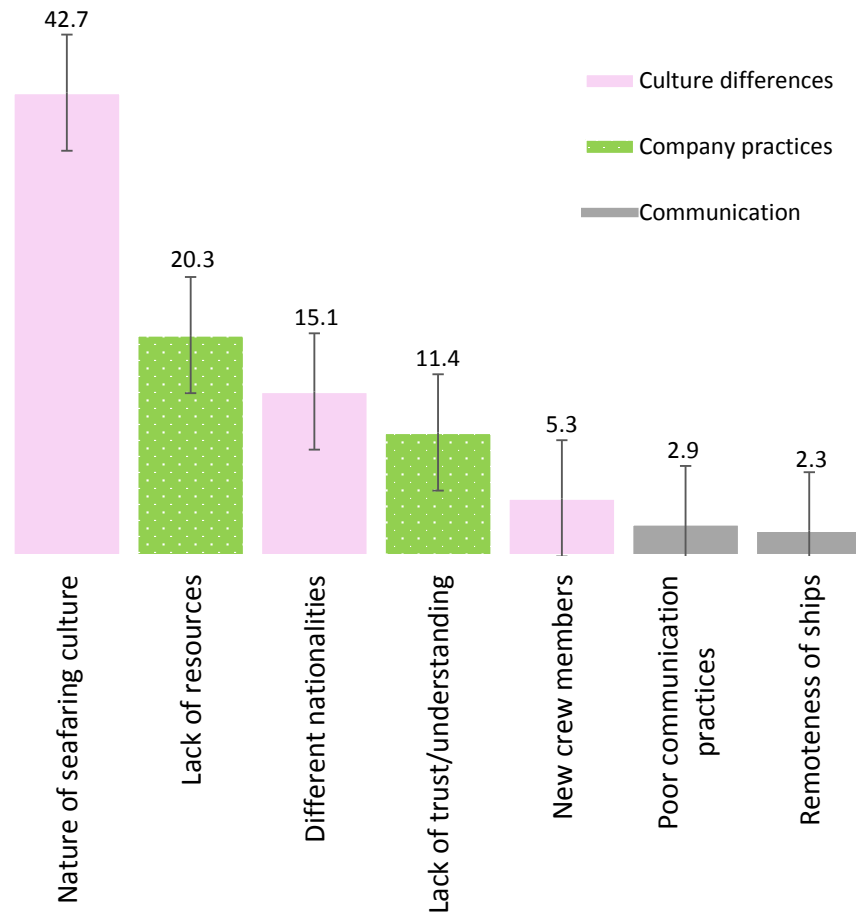


Figure 5 illustrates the occurrence of each subtheme related to **R.2. Barriers**. It shows that out of the seven subthemes that emerged while discussing barriers, **Nature of seafaring culture** appeared most frequently, more than twice as often as the next-most discussed subtheme, **Lack of resources**. Figure 5 also shows the significance of the main theme **Culture differences** in general and the relative insignificance of the main theme **Communication** as a barrier to cultural alignment.

Figure 5

Occurrence of subthemes in group R.2., barriers to alignment between ship and shore



Note. Error bars show standard errors.

As with the approach used in **R.1.**, in the next sections thematic analysis is carried out on the data pertaining to **R.2.** An introduction to each main theme is presented. Details provided by the subthemes are then focused on with regards to their relevance to **R.2.** Furthermore, significant embedded and/or chronological relationships between subthemes that appeared during the coding process are presented and analyzed.

4.2.1. Culture Differences

According to the data, **Culture differences** is the most-frequently occurring main theme regarding barriers to ship-shore cultural alignment (see Figure 4). The subtheme **Nature of seafaring culture** is most significant within the main theme **Culture differences** and is the predominant subtheme pertaining to **R.2.** in general (see Figure 5). **Culture differences** also contains the subthemes **New crew members** and **Different nationalities**.

4.2.1.1. Nature of Seafaring Culture

The subtheme **Nature of seafaring culture** made up 43% of the barriers spoken about in the

interviews and is by far the most significant subtheme relating to **R.2**. It occurs more than twice as often as the next-most occurring subtheme, **Lack of resources** (see Figure 5). **Nature of seafaring culture** includes: (1) old-school ways of thinking, (2) opposing cultures between ship/shore and (3) resistance to change. The interviewees remarked on the **Nature of seafaring culture** in ways that highlighted the complexity of it, sometimes touching on all three of these characteristics without indicating cause and effect. Therefore, the data shows these aspects of seafaring culture to be intertwined with each other and linked in a manner that makes it hard to determine causality.

There was a large consensus amongst the interviewees that the traditionally hierarchical way of seafaring (old-school thinking) is a significant barrier to ship-shore alignment, when trying to promote a less-hierarchical, lower power-distance culture. Some of the interviewees linked this to the physical distance between ship and shore, in that the societal influence that is present on shore has less effect on shipboard culture (which links in the subtheme **Remoteness of ships**).

(CEO of ship management company) I always found it was a very big challenge [...] because ships are so remote, and autonomous [...] the big trends in society catch on much later onboard ships [...] So, it becomes a little bit sort of an old-school place, a ship, and some of the high power-distance ways of operating from [many] years ago, they seem to perpetuate in [...] an onboard structure, in a different way than how we learn to adapt [to] different trends ashore [where] that hierarchy breaks down and becomes much more project-oriented [...] It is difficult sometimes to manage that different way of thinking between shore and sea.

This also shows how hierarchical seafaring culture is linked to opposing cultures between ship and shore (in organizations that have a less-hierarchical culture). The history and longevity of the seafaring industry was mentioned often in that the longer a culture exists, the harder it is to change, and when it is opposing to the culture of the organization this widens the gap between ship and shore.

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) If you have the same persons on roughly the same handful of ships, [over a long] period, it will be [...] "My ship, not yours, you don't come and tell me what to do. I've been here for too long." So, I think that's a major part of the problem.

Resistance to change as part of the subtheme **Nature of seafaring culture** was referred to by many of the interviewees as a major barrier to ship-shore alignment, indicating that changes require considerable time and effort to take hold on ships, which speaks to another barrier to ship-shore alignment: **Lack of resources** (elaborated on in section 4.2.2.1).

(Captain of container ship) I think the biggest challenge is that [...] a lot of seafarers they

don't like the way things are right now, but they don't like changes as well [...] in this environment here at sea, you know, changes take longer compared to shore-based organization because there's a lot of traction there's a lot of, "Ah, we did it like this last time," and therefore it might take longer sometimes to die.

Opposing cultures between ship and shore also appeared as resistance to changing or updating of values and policies. A few of the interviewees noted that implementing new policies (or applying policies that were not previously enforced) that oppose some people's ideas of 'how culture should be' aboard their vessel presents a challenge.

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) The biggest challenge is probably those who say, "I couldn't care less about what's coming out from the company" [But] it's not a big issue [...] because as soon as someone in [the office] finds out [a] particular captain, chief engineer, [who]ever it is, refuses to [...] implement the [diversity and inclusion] policy, for example, [they] will come in for a chat being told, "You need to align, this is how we do [things], we cannot accept [you not aligning]..." And now, there's so many of these so much focus on leadership right now [...] we should get everybody involved in this and understand the importance of it. And those who don't want to [...] we are actually willing to say, "Thank you very much... we can live without your assistance."

The resistance to change exemplified in the above ties in the subtheme **Lack of trust/understanding** (explained as a barrier to cultural alignment in 4.2.2.2).

4.2.1.2. Different Nationalities

The subtheme **Different nationalities** speaks to the diverse national cultures that exist on ships and how these cultures can oppose both each other onboard and the organization's culture. It appeared as the third-most significant out of the seven subthemes regarding **R.2**.

This emerged in some interviews as the barriers that are created by predominately hierarchical national cultures when an organization wishes to promote a less-hierarchical culture:

(CEO of ship management company) The biggest barrier is probably the rather steep power-distance that you have onboard ships, which makes it difficult [...] slightly because of it being shipping but also slightly because I'm dealing mostly with [national] cultures [that are] much more hierarchical than where I come from [...] And I find that those hierarchies are difficult to break down. [In those cultures] a master is almost a god [...] And he's been feared and, and he's been revered, he's supposed to know everything [...] Nobody should be a god. And nobody knows everything.

Barriers to aligning culture also appeared in the data as differing communication and working styles of different nationalities, in that techniques that work to 'break the ice' for one

person may not work for another, or that communication norms may be misconstrued. However, organizations can find ways to stay true to their core values while taking into account the national cultures of its employees, by allowing for some flexibility (as shown in the subtheme **Flexibility within culture**, section 4.1.1.4).

Though many of the interviewees noted that different nationalities can be a barrier to cultural alignment, many also noted that there are ways around this by maintaining open communication, clear and consistent messaging, and supporting each other to reinforce trust in a benevolent culture.

(Captain of LNG vessel) [Having different nationalities onboard] makes it difficult [to maintain the culture], but not impossible. We have ships with [...] Indian officers, Filipino, Chinese, Ukrainian too [...] Even if they are [of] different nationalities, they are still part of the [company] family [...] Maybe a slight language barrier, [but] everybody knows what the company's policies are, what is expected of you, irrespective of your nationality.

4.2.1.3. New Crew Members

New crew members is not a significant subtheme with regards to **R.2.**, appearing fifth out the seven subthemes in terms of occurrence (see Figure 5). However, some interviewees mentioned that the inability of a particular person to adapt is a barrier to cultural alignment:

(Captain of tanker vessel) The culture has got a human value [...] If [a person] does not want to adapt to the system, then that particular person becomes a barrier [...] Then either this person is misfit to this organization, or [they have to] adapt and change to accept the [company's] style of working.

Also mentioned with regards to new crew members was the time it takes for them to 'gel' into the company culture. This speaks to the importance of **Employee retention** in terms of low turnover to maintain a stable workforce and thereby a more stable culture.

(Marine superintendent in tanker company) Getting [a new crew member] to actually 'gel' with [our] culture [...] at the initial stage, it does become difficult [...] in the first few tenures that they onboard, we do find a change in the cultures but gradually it [...] comes back to the [company] culture [...] That's why we want to talk to the staff on a regular basis with our conference calls.

This shows the importance of maintaining **Regular communication** as a strategy for bringing cultures in line when taking on new crew members.

4.2.2. Company Practices

Company practices is the second-most significant main theme relating to **R.2.** (see Figure 4). This term encompasses anything that appeared in the data (pertaining to **R.2.**) that had to do with

how an organization is managed or structured (e.g., management style, fund allocation, change management practices, etc.). It consists of two subthemes: **Lack of resources** and **Lack of trust/understanding**.

4.2.2.1. Lack of Resources

This appeared in the data respectively as (1) limited time for change management, (2) lack of funds for physical visits between ship and shore, such as conferences and (3) lack of change management skills both onboard and on shore.

Lack of resources is the second-most occurring subtheme related to **R.2.**, at 23% (see Figure 5). It speaks to the availability of time, funds, and skills to apply to strategies for cultural alignment between ship and shore.

Some interviewees noted that time demands onboard limit the availability of crew for change management exercises such as DIBE training or participation in committees, and this hinders the success of such initiatives (see sections 4.1.1.1 **People-first values** and 4.1.1.5 **Problem-solving together** for an explanation of how DIBE training and participation in committees strengthens the ship-shore cultural alignment). Furthermore, the nature of seafaring work is taxing and there is sometimes little motivation to participate in 'extra work' that is not perceived as vital to the working ship: "depending on the... [ship's] schedule... sometimes it's too tight and people won't be able to participate or you know, [if they] ignore [change management exercises]... they have more time for resting [...]" (Captain of tanker vessel).

Even if the desire to participate exists, the costs for conferences or ship-shore visits can be prohibitive. This presents a barrier as it limits the opportunity for **Informal communication**, **Physical visits between ship and shore**, and **In-house training/conferences** which are shown to have a positive effect on ship-shore alignment as clarified in sections 4.1.2.6, 4.1.2.7 and 4.1.4.1, respectively.

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) People [...] really want to come [to the] port and just visit the ship for a couple of hours, talk to the crew, walk around to see what is the ship actually. The challenge is actually that you cannot justify sending persons down [...] just for two hours to [...] all the ships.

It was also alluded to in the interviews that initiatives from the shore side may not be managed in an optimal way: the intentions are there to improve the ship-shore alignment, but in practice, trying to align and fit them in with all the normal work of running a ship can be difficult.

(Senior marine specialist in shipping company) There [are] so many initiatives coming out, all the good intentions. But if you all of a sudden have 10 things coming out in a week [to your ship], just where [do you] start? [They] have to prioritize, [...] they also need to run the ship,

they all need to go into port or whatever it is [...] So, it could be a challenge that sometimes it's simply an overload of changes.

The data shows, therefore, that where **Lack of resources** exists, many of the factors that promote cultural alignment fall by the wayside.

4.2.2.2. Lack of Trust/Understanding

Lack of trust/understanding appeared in the data as (1) a lack of trust between ship and shore and (2) a lack of understanding for change management processes.

Two-way trust is shown in the data to have strong ties to ship-shore alignment (section 4.1.1.7). Lack of trust therefore presents a barrier in that: (1) a culture will not be as easily adopted if employees don't feel supported by the company, (2) if they don't believe that the company acts benevolently towards them, or (3) if they can't trust management to be forthright and honest. "Specifically, where the difficulties would arise [in cultural alignment between ship and shore, is] if your ship staff, doesn't have faith in the shore staff. It starts with that," (Captain of LNG vessel).

The idea of trust also applies in the other direction, in management's trust in employees on ships, for example, the belief that seafarers can provide valuable input to the organization's policies. Lack of trust from shore-side was also expressed as the 'ego' of the organization preventing **Problem-solving together** and **Requesting feedback**, which ensure policies are applicable to and structured *around* work at sea; not only *dictated to* those at sea. This also speaks to how a **Low-power distance** works to close the gap between ship and shore. "One of the biggest barriers is [...] being able to reduce the ego sufficiently, you know, to say, 'I don't know, let's talk about it,' as opposed to, 'This is how we're going to do it,'" (Vice president general manager of ferry company).

Additionally, there can be a lack of 'urgency' for activities that promote ship-shore alignment (see also: **Change management practices**, section 4.1.3.2.) This, paired with the high job demands of seafaring and the resources that are required for these types of activities can push them to the backburner. Therefore, imparting a sense of importance to change management processes is a pivotal aspect of cultural alignment, which starts with building employees' belief in the benevolence of the organization.

(Vice president general manager of ferry company) The resources and time to put to something like [a company-wide] change management exercise are significant. And there's that perception [...] typically, that it's important work, but it's not urgent work, [people think] "we've been doing fine all along, [without change management]." But we burned a ship! So maybe [...] the important work, it's trying to develop the urgency [for change management] with the stakeholders, so that you can get that quality input from the [crews during the process]. So, the [end result is] reflective of real life [...] So, the barrier [...] is

really, about the relationship between the employee and whoever's [...] trying to get the initiative done.

4.2.3. Communication

The main theme of **Communication** as a barrier to ship-shore alignment was rather insignificant in the data, at only 5% occurrence with regards to **R.2.** (see Figure 4).

This stands in juxtaposition to the importance of the main theme **Communication** in the data related to **R.1.** (strategies for aligning culture between ship and shore). It emerged as a group of two subthemes: **Poor communication practices** and **Remoteness of ships.**

4.2.3.1. Poor Communication Practices

Poor communication practices were mentioned briefly in a few of the interviews as a barrier to ship-shore alignment, at only 2.9% occurrence relative to all subthemes associated with **R.2.** (see Figure 5). However, when poor communication was spoken of as barrier in the interviews, it was interwoven with overarching issues, such as lack of trust, support, or leadership skills:

(Vice president general manager of ferry company) Their communications, careful communications or not [...] often are the catalyst for things that then fester and grow in the workplace and end up on my desk. So, I have to address there is a gap in leadership, through no fault of their own, [they] haven't had any training, haven't had any coaching or mentoring to speak of.

The interviewees saw holistic communication as a strategy for cultural alignment and used these practices, therefore (possibly) did not recognize poor communication practices as a particularly great barrier:

(Captain of container ship) I can only talk about my company because it's the only company I ever worked in, [but] I think we're getting better at this out here at sea as well. And I think that, together, with our shore-based organization have created [...] a more understanding way of changing stuff together. I like that we have these, sort of, constructive dialogues. We have these [...] details in place that sort of care for maybe 85 percent of most situations and then well, some of the rest we will need to figure out as we go.

4.2.3.2. Remoteness of Ships

Remoteness of ships certainly comes into play in the frequency and availability of communication but was not shown to have a great deal of bearing on the alignment of culture in this data, at only 2.3 % (see Figure 5). Though the distance between ship and shore was said to have a negative effect on many of the subthemes shown to support cultural alignment (e.g., **Physical visits between ship and shore, In-house training/conferences, Regular communication** and **Informal communication**), it was spoken of as less of a barrier and more of an immovable characteristic of

work on ships that can be overcome with communication technology and commitment to holistic communication practices.

(CEO of ship management company) [Low-earth-orbiting satellites are] going to accelerate the sort of cultural alignment between ship and shore and also catching up on that sort of old-school [...] where ships seem to be behind the curve, because they are living in a little bit of an isolated bubble away from the big trends of the world.

This data shows that although the remoteness of a ship can have a bearing on how well the culture is transmitted in both directions, it is a problem solved if the proper resources are in place to provide regular and structured communication via reliable communication methods and holistic communication practices.

5. Discussion

This thesis aims to find strategies for, and barriers to, cultural alignment between ship and shore. The results of the research show that (1) to align culture between ship and shore, an organization must adopt a culture based on people-first values, holistic communication, low power-distance, and two-way trust; and (2) the main barrier to ship-shore alignment is a culture that is based on hierarchy, patriarchy, autocracy, and disjointed communication. Together these points exhibit the crux of the issue: that *seafaring culture itself prevents alignment between ship and shore*. In other words, cultural alignment cannot be achieved if seafaring culture is allowed to remain in its current state. The results therefore highlight the tremendously problematic nature of seafaring culture.

5.1. Reducing the Anxiety Caused by Seafaring

Schein (1984) says that to change an element of culture, one needs to get to the bottom of the anxiety or problem that is behind its creation. In discovering this, one can then either (1) reduce the anxiety that created the behavior or (2) provide another solution to the problem, thereby providing psychological safety whilst guiding people towards a different way of doing things. Often these factors are intertwined as reasons for a particular behavior, however behaviors that arise as a result of anxiety are inherently harder to change.

Using Schein's (1984) framework for understanding the origin of cultural elements, it can be deduced that the hard-to-change aspects of seafaring culture have appeared due to its many problematic and anxiety-causing characteristics. The sea is one of the least forgiving environments for humans to exist in. Seafarers are isolated and disconnected from their families and unable to take care of their loved ones. Medical care can be days away. Power games and a culture of silence render people powerless to change a harmful or potentially dangerous situation.

These and other issues inherent to seafaring have created troublesome aspects of seafaring culture: behavior emerges to reduce anxiety linked to, or to solve a problem caused by, an aspect of work at sea. As long as the behavior reduces anxiety or continues to solve the problem it will be perpetually repeated. The higher the environmental stakes are, the less chance there is that people will deviate from a behavior. Hence the typical seafaring "this is how we've always done it" attitude.

The perpetuation of rigid seafaring cultural rules is a good example of this process in action. While at sea, one must be constantly aware of the fact that one is not on land, and the normal rules of life do not apply. The dangerous and isolated nature of life at sea necessitates alignment of the crew: multiple simultaneous actions by a group of people are required for survival (e.g., controlling the rudder while running the engines). To be *continually reminded* of these facts by the unbending cultural rules (e.g., adhering to 'proper' terminology and respecting engrained traditions above all

else) is to better one's chances of survival. In other words, the necessity of knowing 'what it is to work on a ship' has evolved to be emphasized, so there is no alternative but to align with seafaring culture because (historically) it is linked to preserving the crew's lives.

The research shows hierarchy, patriarchy, autocracy, and disjointed communication (all central aspects of seafaring culture) prevent ship-shore cultural alignment. The deduction, therefore, is that these aspects of seafaring culture can be overcome by reducing the anxiety and problems inherent to seafaring. This is achieved by creating a culture based on people-first values, holistic communication, low power-distance, and two-way trust. Because these aspects of culture work to reduce the anxiety and problems of seafaring life, they therefore make it possible to change (or align) the culture onboard ships.

For example, 'support for families' was a major part of the subtheme 'people-first values', which is shown in this data to be pivotal to cultural alignment. 'Support for families' may not be intuitively provided by shipping companies, however the data shows that it should not be overlooked as a part of cultural alignment between ship and shore. The data and theory presented allow for the deduction that supporting the family of a seafarer removes a large amount of the stress of being a seafarer (i.e., to believe that your family will be taken care of should some situation arise while you are out at sea), and that this leads to cultural alignment by helping the seafarer to overcome a lack of trust, and creating belief in the benevolence of the organization. Trust and loyalty in turn encourage the seafarer to provide information and knowledge, which both increases the efficiency of the company and helps to reinforce and build a beneficial culture. This trust and loyalty also have consequences for employee retention which is shown in the data to play a major role in cultural alignment.

This example illustrates how methods that work towards cultural alignment are intertwined and, in many ways, cannot exist uniquely. They create a complex framework based on communication, support and trust that works to reduce the anxiety of seafaring life.

5.2. Building a Culture That Fits Seafaring Work

The hierarchical ways of managing large groups of people that emerged in the industrial revolution are no longer relevant to the human experience. The structure of work is becoming increasingly more complex, and managers must rely on their whole team to supply information and knowledge. To facilitate this, employees must be provided with psychological safety, and encouraged to question and provide insight (Schein, 1984, 2006). The seafaring profession is no different; it also experiences increasing complexity and requirements for more knowledge to be possessed by every seafarer (Fei, 2011).

Reliance on the intellectual capital of *all* the levels of an organization calls for a modernization of organizational culture, one that is built on more of a ‘transformational’ leadership style (inspiration and intellectual stimulation) rather than ‘transactional’ leadership (order and structure) (Avolio et al., 1999). The notion of a changing world driving the need for a different kind of organization has been well-substantiated (Alvesson, 2002, p. 14; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010; Corritore et al., 2020; Schein, 1976, 1986b, 1986a, 1993, 1996a; Whyte, 1993, pp. 1–3). Shore-based industries, including the shore-based contingents of maritime organizations, have largely been following this trajectory. However, as mentioned previously, in part due to the anxiety associated with going to sea, the culture on many ships still embodies a predominantly hierarchical, patriarchal, authoritarian, and masculine structure (Belcher, 2003; Bielic et al., 2017; Fernandez & Krootjes, 2007; Grasmeier, 2020a; Kirkby, 2017; Kitada, 2010; Sampson, 2021b, 2021a; Thomas, 2006). The widening cultural gap between ship and shore is therefore indisputable.

Moving towards a culture based on people-first values, holistic communication, low power-distance, and two-way trust will make it possible to both capitalize on the knowledge of seafarers and increase the efficiency of operations. A low power-distance facilitates both input from seafarers and holistic communication, which in turn will strengthen people-first values by ensuring the needs of seafarers are being met. This reinforces trust which will continue to encourage a low power-distance and input from the ‘front lines’. The importance of trust, open communication and support for employees is well-substantiated in other research (Pauksztat, Grech, et al., 2022; Pauksztat, Salin, et al., 2022; Sampson et al., 2019; Tsai, 2011).

This is not a one-stop fix. As noted in the previous section, these processes are complex and intertwined and hinge on placing very high importance on *maintenance* of the systems that keep people-first values at the forefront. Resources must be allocated, and departments must be created for this purpose. These systems must support holistic communication (i.e., prioritizing physical presence, honesty, requesting feedback, and informal interaction), and be committed to promoting a mutual understanding of the situation between sea and shore (including awareness of the value of cross-pollination²). The organization must be fully committed to reducing its ego and recognizing the value of its seafarers as individuals.

5.3. Method Discussion

According to Stenbacka (2001), the quality of a qualitative study can be substantiated by the validity and reliability, generalizability and carefulness of the qualitative research. For the validity aspect, she notes that:

The understanding of the phenomenon is valid if the informant is part of the problem area and if he/she is given the opportunity to speak freely according to his/her own knowledge

structures. Validity is therefore achieved when using the method of non-forcing interviews with strategically well-chosen informants.

The interviewees in this study, as experienced captains and shore-based managers, were well-situated to provide insight into the “problem area.” In addition, the interviews were semi-structured, to allow the interviewees to “speak freely” on the subject at hand and to minimize interjected bias from the interviewer.

Reliability in qualitative research is provided by a comprehensive description of the data collection and results analysis (Sykes, 1991). This is provided in section 3 of this thesis, Methodology.

Stenbacka (2001) notes that generalizability, similarly, is achieved in qualitative studies via careful selection of the participants to ensure their suitability. This allows for some semblance of generalizability in qualitative research that is not otherwise able to use large samples of populations (as would be done in quantitative research). In this research, therefore, the generalizability comes from the 140+ collective years that the interviewees have worked as seafarers.

Finally, carefulness relates to the interviewer’s own process of recording the methods used for analysis and not straying from those in the process of analyzing, while being conscientious, remaining unprejudiced and not forcing the empirical material into a certain mold. In this thesis the author recorded carefully the methods used and used these recorded methods in the same way for the entire data analysis. The process was therefore visible to the author as it was taking place and enabled continual reflection. This recording of the methods used and reflection on the process hopefully also make it visible to the reader of the study (Stenbacka, 2001).

It should be noted that:

(1) Six out of the seven interviewees were employees of large private organizations in industries that were lucrative enough to apply significant resources to initiatives for crew wellbeing and support. In smaller companies or different industries (e.g., government, science, fishing) this might not have been the case, therefore different strategies and barriers may have been highlighted in cases where the same levels of resources were not available.

(2) Though not all the company headquarters of interviewees were based in the ‘western’ world, the leadership in all the companies was either European or North American. Had the leadership of the companies been Asian, Middle Eastern or South American the perceptions of cultural alignment, strategies and barriers may have been different.

(3) All interviewees were captains, or former captains, and most had been with the same company for the majority of their careers. This provided measured and thoughtful perspectives however the results may have been more varied had seafarers in the beginning of their careers and from all ranks on board been interviewed.

(4) The companies interviewed had mainly transformational leadership styles ashore (focus on inspiration, coordination, communication, and cooperation). Therefore, the results do not show whether a transformational company culture actually transmits more efficiently to ships than a high power-distance, transactional leadership style (based on processes and control, and requires a strict management structure). They only show that aspects of transformational leadership help to align culture between ship and shore in companies that have a transformational leadership style ashore.

(5) Most of the companies interviewed did not seem to have substantial difficulty with ship-shore alignment therefore the information gathered on strategies and barriers may have been different in a company that found cultural alignment to be more problematic.

(6) Schein's theory of organizational culture may not perfectly fit into seafaring culture, as seafarers are not part of an 'organization'. The notion of where to draw the line when discussing 'organizational culture' has been touched on by Schein and other organizational psychologists and has been substantiated from both sides of the fence (Hofstede et al., 1990; Schein, 1996c; Schein & Schein, 2016, pp. 13–14). However, for this thesis, seafaring culture is examined through the lens of organizational culture as it fits into Edgar and Peter Schein's (2016, pp. 13–14) requirements for a global organizational culture:

If culture is a product of joint learning leading to shared assumptions about how to perform and relate internally [...] If there is strong socialization during the education and training period and if the beliefs and values learned during this time remain stable as taken-for-granted assumptions even though the person may not be in a group of occupational peers, then clearly those occupations have cultures [...] these cultures are global to the extent that members are trained in the same way to the same skill set and values.

Mats Alvesson (2011, pp. 190–191), however, notes the importance of understanding the complexity of culture and not leaning too heavily on its definition as a concrete entity:

Organizational cultures are then best understood not as unitary wholes or as stable sets of subcultures but as mixtures of cultural manifestations of different levels and kinds [...]

People are connected to different degrees with organization, suborganizational unit, profession, gender, class, ethnic group, nation, etc.; cultures overlap in an organizational setting and are rarely manifested in 'pure' form.

The dilemma, therefore, of delineating 'organizational culture', shines light on the need for further research into the nature of seafaring culture and the possible opportunities for it to be examined through a different lens.

(7) Ethnographic bias was also considered in writing this thesis. The author of this study left seagoing work precisely because of the problematic culture on ships, its steadfast nature, and the

inability of shore staff to support seafarers in improving their own situations at sea. It is of course possible that the results were influenced by the author's preconceptions. However, ethnographic bias seems to not be present in any significant sense, as the results of the study were not known prior to its conduction and some of the conclusions were surprising to the author. For example, the notion of training not playing a large role in aligning culture and improving leadership on board, or the remoteness of ships not being as large a factor in cultural alignment as one may have imagined.

The above notes show the opportunities that exist for the study to be repeated with different demographics, in different sectors of the maritime industry, in different areas of the world, and with different theory substantiating the results, in order to provide a fuller picture of the current situation with regards to the alignment between ship and shore.

6. Conclusion

The most significant barrier to aligning culture between ship and shore is the onboard culture itself. This is substantiated by the answers to both research questions herein: (1) the strategies shown to support alignment negate traditional seafaring culture and (2) the barriers shown to prevent alignment are the basic building blocks of traditional seafaring culture.

The research therefore shows that to achieve cultural alignment, both ship and shore must not only *understand* each other, they must *see* each other and *listen* to each other, without pause. A trust-based culture that recognizes the value of seafarers and is benevolent towards them will take root more readily than a hierarchical one, however, the supplanting will not come without the resources, direction, and constant nurturing of the company to ensure it is true to its people-first values that are at the base of building that strong two-way trust.

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