

What makes people feel included at sea? What makes them feel that they are treated fairly, respectfully, are valued?

Among many things such as the organization's policies and practices, and team member behaviors it mostly comes down to leaders. What leaders say and do makes a huge difference as to whether an individual reports feeling included. The more people feel included the more they speak up, go the extra mile and collaborate.

As companies understand the benefits of diversity and re-examine their diversity and inclusion initiatives, they are recognizing that a change in approach may be in order. That change is most likely to happen when it is championed at the top. It has to start at the top with leaders who embody the inclusive leadership approach.

Inclusive leadership is emerging as a unique and critical capability helping organizations adapt to diverse ideas and talent. **Inclusion** means that everyone in the diverse mix feels involved, valued, respected, treated fairly, and embedded in your culture.

A clear message is echoed through engagement surveys, maritime forums and research that the maritime sector needs to show its commitment to being diverse and inclusive. Whilst there are many ways this can be done ashore, it can be more challenging to get this message across onboard. Practical steps are being taken by organizations.

In August 2020, Anglo Eastern and WISTA International with the support of the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and International Seafarers Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN), released a public online survey to gain a comprehensive analysis of the situation on gender-based discrimination in the maritime sector. It brought to light various incidents of gender discrimination. A total of 1128 women, representing 78 nationalities responded to the survey. The findings of this survey are a necessary wake-up call regarding gender equity, and serve as a reminder of the importance of transparency and collaboration in tackling the shipping's most pressing challenges.

Inspired by narrations and experiences of women seafarers, the second edition of the Gender Diversity Booklet was launched in August 2022. The booklet is intended for all seafarers; it offers guidance on addressing these challenges and building an inclusive culture where diverse individuals are respected and valued. This initiative is part of an ongoing effort to bring about a shift in the individual mindset, promote gender sensitization, and help raise the profile of women in all parts of the maritime sector. In this booklet, the content substantiates guidance with drafting company policies that facilitate psychological safety for women seafarers, enabling an atmosphere for equality, diversity and **inclusivity**. Click here to access the booklet, which was unveiled at last month's Maritime SheEO conference: <https://bit.ly/3UPEXQd>

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What can we do to foster inclusion at sea?

Inclusion requires **active, intentional, and ongoing** efforts to promote the full participation and sense of belonging.

- **Deepen your self-awareness** – Develop your personal understanding. This means asking for feedback, admitting to your own biases, reflecting on your own upbringing, talking about your own emotions and experiences. If you're comfortable with yourself that confidence will reverberate through all other acts of inclusive leadership. From self-awareness comes social awareness. When people lack social awareness, they have trouble communicating, or tend to say the wrong things at the wrong times. As you pay attention to what's going on around you, use the information you gather to build a culture of inclusion. Simple acts of inclusivity can help build a culture of respect in your organization. It also includes more strategic initiatives such as developing awareness-raising campaigns that increase knowledge of and dispel outdated perceptions of the industry.
- **Walk the Talk** - Leaders need to be willing to step back and assess the systems, processes, and values that drive the current culture. Senior leadership must be committed to taking ownership of the role they will play in creating and aligning new systems that will embed equity, diversity, and inclusion into the workplace culture change process.

- Review systems and practices related to recruitment, hiring and promoting talent
 - Examine employee development practices and policies – how work gets done and shape employee experience and look for areas where bias creeps in.
 - Set targets to increase the number of women onboard. More engagement with industry leaders is required to change how they work on recruitment and retention strategies.
 - Track a woman seafarer's progress to the next rank and provide opportunities for promotion if she is eligible to the next rank. (who has access to on-the-job learning, examine training and development practices) what assumptions are being made about individuals current capability and future potential? Are there different standards applied based on gender?
 - Provide a mix of opportunities for women, both sailing and short projects ashore to ensure year-round employment.
- **Elevate Equity** - Before we even consider how to recruit a more diverse workforce, and how to ensure talented individuals from different backgrounds are fully included, we as an organization need to consider **what different people need to be successful**. And to do that, you need to understand *equity*. Equity is providing all people with fair and contextually appropriate opportunities and resources that are required to attain their full potential. To make progress on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), leaders first need to acknowledge societal inequities and recognize that their organization *isn't* a level playing field. It is about adopting specific measures to enhance the recruitment and retention of women in the industry such as ensuring the provision of female-friendly facilities onboard ships. It involves looking into women's specific health requirements, menstrual health and hygiene support are catered for onboard. Provision of ergonomically suitable PPE that meets the needs of all seafarers.
 - **Build Psychological Safety** - Psychological safety is a shared belief held by members of a team that others on the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish them for speaking up (Center for Creative Leadership, 2022). A lack of psychological safety at work has major repercussions. When people don't feel comfortable there seems to be dangerous silence. The seafarers may feel uncomfortable talking about the possible errors in the system and may lack initiatives. When people are not fully committed, the organization has lost an opportunity to leverage the strengths of all its talent.
 - **Better culture starts with better conversations** - Improve the quality of your organization's everyday conversations. To foster a culture of inclusion, people at every organizational level need to be able to have effective conversations. Foster direct communication about EDI to break down silos and communication barriers.
 - **Develop a network of champions** - People (women) who are not like their majority of shipmates, don't have equitable access to 'champions' who can steer them towards valuable experiences and support them through challenges. As a result their career progress stall. Organizations can implement a coaching culture by developing the coaching skills of their employees and by creating a network of champions to enable the development, contributions and career growth of all male and female employees. Senior leaders (champions) can be effective advocates who actively work to advance the career of their team members.

The need of the hour is to collaborate, put various initiatives into action and accelerate what we can do, both as individuals and collectively, to continue to drive gender balance and cope with the challenges we face head on.