

A NEW PERSONNEL APPRAISAL SYSTEM FOR THE MARITIME INDUSTRY

by
Bengt Schager M. Sc.
Maritime Psychologist
Marine Profile Sweden AB

In recent years there has been a growing awareness among shipowners of the need for a good and workable appraisal system adapted for the Maritime Industry. Many shipowners use their own home-made Performance Appraisal Forms or Job Evaluation Forms, but quite few seem to be really satisfied with how they work.

Marine Profile has constructed an Appraisal System specifically for shipowners which not only guides the appraiser but works in two ways: It provides a clean structure to the appraiser's evaluations, and it gives feedback that allows the appraiser to adjust any personal bias on the appraisal pattern.

People working in shore-based organizations have a situation that is organizationally different from that of seafarers. In shore-based organizations, people are usually employed by their future boss and will afterwards often work and function more or less directly under his/her supervision. This means that a superior gets almost day-to-day feedback on his/her recruitments. Another important characteristic ashore is that a superior has an evident interest in guiding and supporting subordinates and in helping them to succeed. The one who recruits or promotes thus takes a personal responsibility for the decision. Mistakes when recruiting and promoting may otherwise be perceived as mistakes by the superior.

The organizational difference for shipboard personnel is that they normally are not employed by their own future boss. They are employed by human resource personnel who perhaps never meet them again. After signing on, a seafarer in general will work onboard many ships and under several superiors who not necessarily feel responsible for either their recruitment or promotion because they were not involved. The normal day-to-day feedback to the people responsible for employment and promotion decisions will not work in the Maritime Industry unless one consistently uses some sort of an appraisal system. Such a system is a tool in overcoming the difficulties in conveying information over long distances and in sharing the responsibility, between ship and shore, for an individual's employment, development and professional career.

A reliable and well-calibrated appraisal system has several important advantages for a

shipowner. It forms a valuable source of information about shipboard employees and can be a good and reliable tool for making decisions about terminating or continuing employment. It can also serve as a basis for decisions concerning promotion and in identifying suitable individuals in position for promotion. It could furthermore work as a formal feedback system from onboard management to shore management or the human resource department about the outcome of the company's employment and recruitment strategy.

An appraisal system can also help the management to decide on training and other personnel development efforts. Last but not least, it will involve the onboard management in the ongoing efforts to improve safety and the standard of seagoing personnel.

By means of an appraisal system, the shipboard management will share and take their part of responsibilities for employment and promotions. Furthermore, it will make it easier for ship and shore management to cooperate for improved quality and it will enhance the shipboard management's ability to undertake normal managerial responsibilities for their subordinates.

The more common disadvantages of today's conventional appraisal systems seem to be that some systems are too general and have scoring categories that are too vague. Other systems may use items that are difficult to assess or to form an opinion about. Other not uncommon disadvantages are that the appraiser does not always use the appraisal system properly. An appraisee (the individual who is appraised) might get too positive an appraisal or an appraisal containing very little information, mainly because the appraiser is too "defensive". (On a 5-degree scale, appraisees might for example receive fours on all items, ticked off in a routine-like manner.)

Appraisers often feel uncomfortable giving low scores which might lead to a difficult discussion with someone they hope not to see again. In some instances the shore management might even receive a very good written appraisal about an individual but the good marks are later contradicted by a telephone call from the appraiser, stating that he doesn't want to see the particular person back onboard again. In such instances, of course, the onboard management has not succeeded to undertake normal and reasonable management responsibilities.

An appraisal system should be designed for individual follow-up and development, and not primarily for comparative measurement, administrative simplicity, numerical analysis or statistics. A good system should be looked upon as a vehicle for professional advice from the onboard management to the shore management as regards individual seafarer's capacity, development and potential.

For good use, the appraisal system should be integrated within a broader framework designed for recruiting, developing and retaining personnel. It is probably wise to look upon an appraisal system as a means only and not as an end in itself.

The Marine Profile Appraisal System

Marine Profile Appraisal system is designed to resolve most of the known difficulties and to facilitate responsible and professional cooperation between ship and shore. It is also adapted so as to facilitate fair, objective, consistent and balanced appraisals.

The system consists of appraisal forms and an instruction booklet. Each appraisal form has space for relevant personal data, space for the appraiser's written explanations or other comments, comments about sobriety as well as 24 headings for appraisal. The appraisal form can be individualized and adapted to any shipowner's organizational needs. It can be e-mailed in a coded form and also be supplied digitally.

The instruction booklet contains guidelines for scoring and definitions of the headings and is intended for the appraiser.

Some Examples from the Appraisal Form

The sobriety scale is used to establish an individual's drinking habits and has two alternatives:

1. Acceptable and compliant with company policy.
2. Not acceptable and incompatible with company policy.

The other 24 headings are selected to illustrate personal traits, interpersonal style, professional capacities, safety-mindedness, attitudes and knowledge.

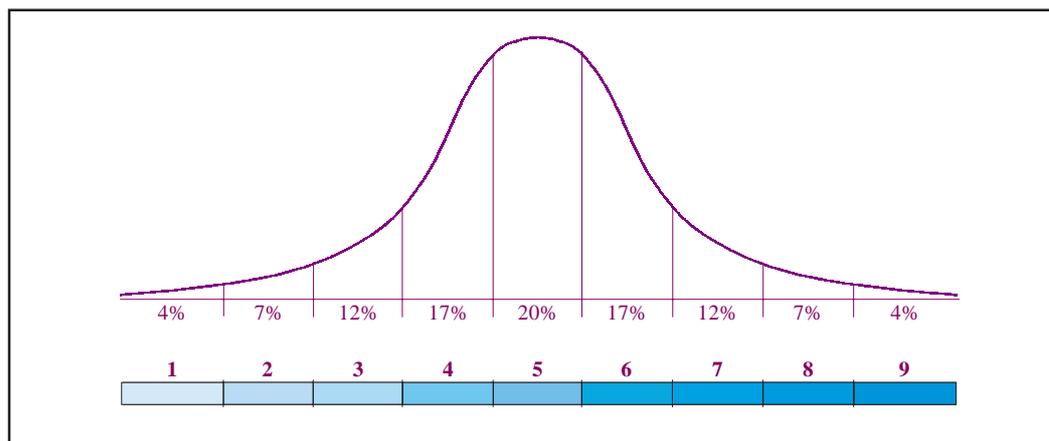
The headings are:

Practical Skills	Theoretical Knowledge
Planning	Sense of Order
Safety Awareness	Seriousness
Judgement	Vigilance
Loyalty	Reliability
Cooperation	Sociability
Intercultural Skills	Communicative Skills
Leadership Skills	Stress Tolerance
Energy	Motivation
Initiative	Maturity
Teachability	Receptivity
Self-Knowledge	Personal Appearance

Each heading is followed by a 9-degree scale, the so-called Stanine Scale, chosen because of its reference to the Normal Probability Distribution Scale.

The Normal Probability Distribution Scale

The Normal Probability Distribution Scale is widely used and scientifically accepted as a tool in measuring human capacities. The scale is universal and used in the appraisal system as a guidance for the appraiser. The scale and how it is calculated needs some explanation:



The Normal Probability Distribution Scale (the bell-shaped Gaussian curve) with the normal distribution percentage and the corresponding 9-degree Stanine Scale

If any single human capacity were measured for a sufficient number of people, the individuals would be distributed according to a Normal Probability Distribution Scale. This “bell-shaped” or Gaussian curve (also displayed on top of the appraisal form) indicates that most people will wind up in the middle where we find the level of the measured capacity that might be called “average”, whereas fewer people will end up in the extremes at either end.

The configuration of the curve is equally valid when, for example, measuring the weight of 30-year-old males as when measuring stress resistance or sociability among seafarers. Most people have average or “normal” values and tend to cluster in the middle and those who deviate tend to be fewer the further out at either end they are placed. According to the scale, 54% of all people will fall into categories 4, 5 or 6, for almost anything measured.

The Normal Distribution Probability Scale is used in the Marine Profile Appraisal System as a calibration and guidance for the appraiser. The scale indicates what is common, average and what is to be expected, as well as what is uncommonly bad or good in comparison to an “average” professional of the same kind. If an appraiser wants to give a 9 to a particular individual, the appraiser is made aware that he is thereby placing the appraised person among the best 4% in that category.

Standardized Appraisal

Using the Normal Distribution Probability Scale as a base for the scoring system also makes it possible to compile appraisal forms from the same appraiser and to identify and

give feedback about his/her general scoring principles.

After a few appraisals it is possible to establish whether a particular appraiser is generally too low or too high in his scoring. This could indicate either too positive or too negative an attitude on the part of the appraiser. (An alternative explanation would of course indicate on the positive end, that the appraiser has had the fortune to consistently manage people who overperform or, in the negative end, the misfortune to repeatedly manage those who underperform.) The appraisal system is therefore designed to facilitate standardised and disciplined scoring practices and to safeguard against biased or changing individual scoring principles.

Selected Indexes

The appraisal system is furthermore designed to allow for compilation of selected scores. This makes it possible to create a number of indexes or “shortcuts” which highlight important personal capacities. By combining scores with coefficients, it is possible to compile a Professional Capacity Index, Leadership Capacity Index, Social Capacity Index and Development Capacity Index.

The Development Capacity Index, for example, is calculated by combining such items as Receptivity, Teachability, Self-Knowledge, Motivation and Professional Seriousness.

The Instruction Booklet

The Instruction Booklet covers explanations of each heading, what to look for, how to identify a certain trait and how to score. Low, average and high scores are defined, as is the Normal Distribution Probability Scale.

To give the reader an idea about how the appraiser is guided, here are some extracts from the booklet:

Scoring Principles

Average score

An average score (5) means a sufficient and approved standard in level with reasonable expectations towards a professional person according to his/her position and age. Average is by definition fairly acceptable but implies that the appraised person does not stand out in any particular sense. An average score means that the person or capacity is suitable for and in line with expectations for the position in question.

About 20 percent of any appraised category of professionals have and should be given an average score (5).

High score

A high score (above 5) means that the individual is better than the sufficient and approved standard in a certain capacity in comparison with reasonable expectations towards a professional person according to the position and age in question. High scores stand out positively and are signs of superior achievement.

Very high score

A very high score denotes sustained outstanding performance or capacity, which is clearly above what can be expected.

Only about 4 percent of any appraised category of professionals has, and should be given, the highest score.

Low score

A low score (lower than 5) means a standard less than sufficient and approved according to the position and age in question. Low score is by definition not positive. Low score means that the individual is less than fully acceptable and needs improvement in the particular area. A low score for a certain capacity means that the outcome or result causes minor disturbances or need for corrective measures or monitoring now and then.

Very low score

A very low score denotes a marked shortcoming and an evident disadvantage which causes frequent problems either for the individual him-/herself or for others around him/her. Lower scoring than average is a result of various degrees of substandard quality while very low is inadequate and constitutes a rare but serious shortcoming.

Only about 4 percent of any appraised category of professionals has, and should be given, the lowest score.

Guidelines from selected items in the Instruction Booklet**Planning**

Planning denotes an individual's capacity and willingness to plan his activities and to act and work methodically, efficiently, structured and accurately. Planning also implies capacity and willingness for preparation, economical efficiency, good timing as well as anticipation and readiness for alternative measures. Capacity and willingness for planning is an aid for controlling situations and avoiding surprising events. Planning is not contradictory to flexibility.

A high capacity and willingness to Plan reveals itself in good anticipation, lack of problems, lack of surprises, good time-keeping, lack of mistakes and ambiguity, good administrative order, high safety margins, efficient utilisation of personnel and other resources and as cost efficiency.

A low capacity or low willingness for Planning reveals itself in problems with preparations, efficiency, time-keeping, safety, administrative matters, keeping of promises, keeping costs, and utilisation of resources. Lack of planning also reveals itself as a need for supervision and

checking by others and as problems with superiors and peers.

Sense of Order

Sense of Order denotes an individual's capacity for tidiness, order and thoroughness in his work. It implies how well an individual accepts and carries out his duties. It has to do with cleanliness, finding and returning tools and other equipment, the style of performing administrative tasks, handling of money, maintenance, checking of equipment, giving instructions, reporting back and making preparations.

A high Sense of Order reveals itself in an absence of mistakes, very high acceptance of own duties and cleanliness. Individuals with a high sense of order often discover and correct others' mistakes and cover up for others' shortcomings. They do not need supervision or corrections and they are punctual. Orderly individuals have a low tolerance of messiness and dirt.

A low Sense of Order shows in a high degree of mistakes, forgetfulness, incomplete performance of tasks, high tolerance of dirty and messy situations, carelessness, negligence, sloppiness or disorder. Individuals with a low sense of order often need supervision and correction. They often try to cover up or blame others for their own negligence and mistakes and are good at finding excuses. Others often complain and have to cover up for them.

Safety Awareness

Safety Awareness denotes an individual's level of respect for safety issues and knowledge about and adherence to safety regulations, instructions and good practice. An individual's day-to-day perception of risks, exposure to and handling of risks as well as consequences also denotes the level of safety awareness. So do the assessment of own resources vis-à-vis situational demands, participation, level of involvement, seriousness and accuracy in exercises and drills, overall situational awareness, precautions, preventive measures and avoidance of uncertainty.

High Safety Awareness is denoted by interest and knowledge in safety matters and strict adherence to rules and instructions, and by a keen interest and high involvement in exercises and drills, a high perception of situational demands, a readiness to involve superiors at an early stage in ambiguous, uncertain, difficult and uncontrollable situations, an overall readiness to involve others, to take advice and to work with high safety margins. An individual with high Safety Awareness has respect for nature, the unknown, dangerous forces, including gases and liquids and is particular in instructing and monitoring others and in preparations and precautions. Such individuals are also ready to spontaneously intervene and to instruct or correct others.

Low Safety Awareness is denoted by a lack of knowledge or adherence to instructions and regulations, too high a perception of own resources or bad assessment of situational demands. Repetitive occurrence of accidental situations and loss of situational control may indicate low Safety Awareness as well as complacent behaviour, indifferent attitudes or poor assessment

of consequences. Individuals with low Safety Awareness tend to have faith in others, in chance or in luck, and place responsibilities elsewhere. They may also be reluctant to engage themselves in exercises and drills. Another sign is a tendency to verbally diminish risks, to overestimate their own experience and a need to impress others.

Vigilance

Vigilance has to do with perception, focus and concentration. The level of sharp-sightedness, alertness, watchfulness and the capacity to read and understand a situation are important characteristics of Vigilance. The quality of attitudes, i.e. a critical attitude, is also often significant. Vigilance also appears in the ability for simultaneous perception, monitoring and the capacity to detect new information.

A high level of Vigilance is evident when an individual is concentrated, focused, not easily disturbed, very alert and is active in seeking and checking information from available sources. A mild level of suspiciousness and a somewhat critical and sharp-eyed attitude are also characteristic. Individuals with a high level of Vigilance usually have things under control, possess low tolerance for ambiguity and are efficient in reading a situation.

A low level of Vigilance is apparent when an individual is inattentive, fails to detect new information and fails to seek relevant information. It is also evident in situations when an individual is taken by surprise, acts late, lacks sufficient time and misses information. People with a low level of Vigilance also tend to forget things, fail to detect mistakes and might also be absent-minded, easily distraught, easily fatigued or easily influenced.

Loyalty

Loyalty shows in an individual's attitude towards the shipowner, the management, the ship, the organization and also towards other individuals onboard. Loyalty often shows in how an individual handles resources, cares about equipment, executes his duties and is able to embrace and stick to social norms, as well as how an individual identifies himself as being a company person or not.

High level of Loyalty is evident when an individual feels and behaves as a representative of the shipowner or the company, when a person places him-/herself in a broader context and is willing to make some individual sacrifices or go out of his/her way for the benefit of the totality and to put the organization before him-/herself. High loyalty also appears as readiness to carry out orders and to put things right, to care for equipment and as respect and readiness to stand up for policies and the shipowner. An individual with a high level of loyalty has durable and stable norms.

Low level of Loyalty shows when an individual places himself and his individual interests first, when initiative is taken reluctantly, and when an individual readily accuses others or the company for various reasons. It also shows when equipment is not cared for or when an individual is indifferent to costs and savings or others' comfort and well being, and when an individual easily breaks rules, policies and social norms. An individual with a low level of

Loyalty has weak standards and norms or has norms that are unstable and easily modified depending on the situational context or individual aims.

The Training

When appraisers are requested to give their professional judgements, their appraisals might be somewhat subjectively coloured and influenced by the quality of their relationship with the person being appraised. A dose of subjectivity is probably inevitable but can be kept under control and be counteracted by training. Therefore the personnel responsible for making and receiving appraisals shall have basic training in how to assess important character and behavioural traits, how to use the appraisal form and how to communicate and give feedback to the appraisee.

This training is preferably scheduled during an ordinary senior officers' seminar and takes less than a day. While onboard, the appraisers should be able to use the appraisal forms according to the instructions in the instruction booklet and give feedback in line with their training.