

MARINE CO-ORDINATION NEW RESPONSIBILITIES: NEW COMPETENCIES

TODAY'S OFFSHORE WORKING ENVIRONMENT IS AN EXTREMELY BUSY PLACE WHERE MONEY CAN BE MADE OR LOST QUICKLY.

To help maximise profitability, Green Marine Solutions (GMS) has redefined the tough modern demands now made of a key project team member who can save millions of pounds at sea – the marine co-ordinator (MC).

By upgrading the MC's basic wind industry role, they are showing operators how to make major gains from new technology, cost-structures and online communication. In parallel, they are also launching the UK's first dedicated training course for professional MC development.

RADICAL CHANGE

The MC's core job is changing swiftly. Traditional skills are fast becoming redundant. New competencies are needed.

MC's have two distinct roles. On large construction projects, groups of MC's - with different but complementary skills – often work as a single integrated team to bring specialist vessels, highly-qualified technicians and time- and cost-sensitive tasks together successfully.

However, as completed projects move on into the operational phase, these shared responsibilities often fall very quickly onto a single set of shoulders.

GMS' goal is to ensure that all MC's can be equipped with very broad shoulders!

ALONE ... AND NOT ALONE

Construction is a hectic time with big budgets and ample resources and skilled people on site. MC teams are correspondingly large.

During operation and production, everything changes. Budgets shrink. Profitability is much more important. A single MC can easily feel that he or she is now working alone.

However, MC's are not alone, even when working remotely across many different sites. In today's digitally-connected world of work, many different data sources and authoritative advice can be instantaneously available to back an MC's own judgement.

REAL-TIME OPERATIONAL ASSET MANAGEMENT (ROAM)

Well-selected and carefully trained MC's can now have cost-effective access to real-time project data, analysis and online co-ordination tools. GMS has developed its unique ROAM (Real-time Operational Asset Management) system to break new ground in this area.

Systems such as ROAM give a constantly updated picture of the position and working status of key assets many miles, or kilometres, apart. But MC's must be trained to make the most of these aids.

MC's – wherever they work – also need to be able to talk instantly to other co-ordination experts who can bring experiences and expertise from related areas to add to their 'firepower'.

This is why GMS MC's are in constant touch with home base and a broad panel of other marine experts within the company. It is unusual for MC's recruited from agencies to have this external support.

NEW COMPETENCIES

However, these strategic changes have not yet filtered down to many parts of the wind industry. As a result, valuable commercial bonuses are being lost.

By tradition, almost all marine co-ordination tenders still request a CV that includes Master Mariner qualifications. This senior requirement targets candidates from a broad range of professional backgrounds – oil & gas, fishing, deep sea, or crew transfer vessel skippers.

The wind farm operators' dilemma is knowing how well a particular candidate's accumulated experience is matched to the ability to make complex decisions wisely and quickly on fast-moving projects.

LARGE FLEETS

Offshore construction sites can potentially involve up to 30 construction vessels. Each needs accurate time scheduling, plus a detailed understanding of operational limitations. If things go wrong, cost-effective contingency plans are essential. Health & safety is paramount. Vessels often work in time-sensitive charter windows. Weather can be highly-unpredictable.

It is vital for MC's to have a firm mental and digital 'fix' or 'situational awareness' on all combinations and possibilities.

The challenges are even more complex when large fleets and many different sub-contractors are spread far apart across, say, a 120 turbine deep-water offshore site. The inevitable conclusion is that the era of time-served seafarers, equipped with little more than a radio and remote computer link, is being overtaken by the sheer complexity of the modern task matrix.

Seafarer experience is often based on the linear command of ships and crew members using written procedures within subscribed boundaries. There may be no real relationship between past experience and wind industry challenges. This can be a problem where, for example, advanced logistical or specialised marine skills are needed. New competencies are essential.

GMS SOLUTION

GMS has amended and updated the definition of a modern MC to include a multiplicity of maritime and logistics skills linked directly to real offshore wind industry conditions.

For example, Coastguard professionals co-ordinate complex rescue and recovery operations in adverse conditions. GMS has a policy of recruiting this transferable skill-set into its own MC teams.

TAKING THE LEAD

Alex Harrison is a former Coastguard Officer and now leads GMS' marine co-ordination programme on operational projects. He has also helped to design the new course and the launch of a new MC training academy

TRAINED TO THINK AHEAD

"Coastguard officers are trained to prioritise tasks quickly as routine, important and emergency," he explains. *"They gather information rapidly from numerous sources, filter it and decide on action while constantly reviewing and re-evaluating the situation. The ability to foresee problems is vital."*

"For example, in a search and rescue mission I would see that a helicopter only has two hours of flying endurance and automatically be thinking ahead what I can do next."

"The skill is about developing mitigation plans and transfers very readily to the commercial environment with construction vessels," he adds.

GMS' bespoke MC course focuses on operational communications, emergency response, chart work, general maritime, meteorology, seamanship, plus IMO. IMDG and SOLAS.

Importantly, it also includes a special marine co-ordination module which looks at contemporary skills that MCs must be kept right up-to-date to do their job properly.

"Often it's about filling essential knowledge and skills gaps. Many candidates already have excellent partial skill-sets. The course is designed to ensure all-round competencies," concluded Alex.

Green Marine Solutions

