

Pilots, conductors and first violinists



Captain Richard Wild MSc FRIN MNI, Senior and Examining Pilot Harwich Haven Authority
+44 7784 973 575
richardjwild@gmail.com

- The master-pilot relationship is reliant on trust
- Bridge team management is the responsibility of the master
- Human factors of pilotage must be understood

When the pilot arrives on the bridge of a ship, it is like a new first violinist performing unrehearsed with an unknown orchestra but at a familiar venue. The conductor and the first violinist need to establish a good working relationship after little more than a handshake. Similarly, the bridge team must work closely with the pilot after the briefest of introductions.



This article discusses the integration of the pilot within the bridge team and the relationship between the master and the pilot.

There are many different leadership styles, and occasionally personality types can contrast. To add further complications, the pilot can have a different status depending on the country concerned. In some countries, the pilot is an adviser, in others he has charge of the ship. In most countries, the pilot must be given the conduct of the ship in order to do his job. All these issues can influence the bridge team.

Successfully working with the team

Regardless of leadership style, culture or status, the management of the bridge team remains the responsibility of the master. However, the pilot can influence how the bridge team interacts and operates through his own style. Simple strategies can be used at both management and operator level, such as consulting with the master about the passage plan or asking for guidance from the officer of the watch.

Avoiding incidents

Most acts of pilotage are routine and, in the majority of cases, the pilot can operate even without integration within the team. However, if an incident does occur, any error by the pilot will be rapidly exposed. It is therefore important that the bridge team work with the pilot to ensure there is no complacency and to avoid the chain of events that may cause an incident.

To ensure that an avoidable incident does not occur, the pilot must

consider a number of 'sins', or key human factors, as identified by Dr. Katherine Devitt¹:

- Failure to consider language and culture
- Failure to consider fatigue
- Failure to establish trust and rapport
- Failure to communicate effectively
- Failure to monitor and be prepared to challenge.

While these factors are equally important, the fundamental requirement is to ensure that there is open communication to establish a shared passage plan. If the pilot does not invite the master to discuss his proposed plan, the master must ask. If the master and pilot are not reading the same music score, there will be no effective monitoring, which may lead to late interventions or a failure to intervene at all. And if there are no interventions, there is no 'second check' to stop the error chain.

This 'checklist' of human factors should be incorporated into training, and the master-pilot exchange documentation and briefings. Bridge teams should be assessed to verify that what is supposed to happen does happen; like the orchestra, the performance has to be perfect every time.

¹ Dr. Katherine Devitt BA MSc PhD.
The Nautical Institute, Seaways
September 2013.