

SAFETY DELTA ™

Among Us

TIPS AND TRICKS

SAFETY DELTA NEWSLETTER - MAY 2023

Navigating cultural diversity and mental health

Can cultural diversity create connection instead of isolation?

Dear reader,

I'm Bjarke Jakobsen, Master Mariner and co-founder of Green-Jakobsen, the company that created Safety Delta.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, so in this issue of Among Us, I want to talk about a crucial aspect that can either create bonds or cause social isolation and impact the mental health of seafarers:

Cultural differences.

Join me as we sail into the depths of cultural diversity and how to turn it into a force that binds rather than divides.



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The finger that caused a cultural stir

When I was still working on board, I once pointed a finger at a Filipino cook to get his attention.

I wanted to thank him for sending my taste buds dancing with his version of our popular Danish meatballs, Frikadeller. Oh, how they tasted exactly like the ones my mother prepared when I was a kid!

But good as my intention was, I sensed that the Cook felt rather uncomfortable. And I didn't know why.

I later learned that unlike for us Danes, pointing a finger at someone is a no-go for Filipinos.

Realising my mistake, I apologised, and thankfully, he accepted it.

Now, this is one of the thousands of stories of cultural dynamics and communication barriers on board.

Some stories end up positively. But some don't.

In some cases, the differences have a bigger impact than the one I told you about here and can evolve into conflict, harassment and bullying, social isolation ... or even suicide.

So how do we deal with culture's complexities?

The first step is to develop cultural awareness

For starters, let's swap our judgement hat for a curiosity helmet.

Let's ask questions to understand a behaviour so that we avoid making assumptions based on limited information or biases.

Cultural awareness makes us more open-minded, adaptable, and appreciative of the diversity around us.

Now, let's explore a cultural aspect that often brings misunderstandings and conflicts - **communication**.

To learn about how people from different cultures communicate, use the following comparisons as a guide. These are based on Erin Meyer's Culture Map scales.

COMMUNICATING



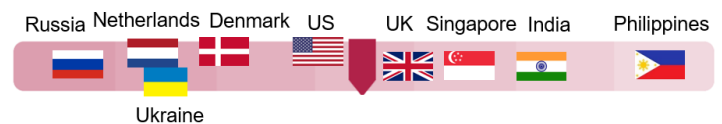
LOW CONTEXT

- **Direct**, literal, and simple
- More **verbal** and less non-verbal communication

HIGH CONTEXT

- **Indirect**, read between the lines, and formal
- High in **non-verbal** cues / body language

EXPRESSING DISAGREEMENT



CONFRONTATIONAL

- Disagreement is **positive** for the team
- Challenging someone's opinion is **natural** and **not seen as an attack**

NON-CONFRONTATIONAL

- Disagreement is **negative** for the team
- Challenging someone's opinion is **seen as an attack**

GIVING FEEDBACK



DIRECT NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

- Honest and frank
- Uses **upgraders** (e.g., absolutely, too)

INDIRECT NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

- Subtle and diplomatic
- Uses **downgraders** (e.g., kind of, a little)

Our cultural traits may differ, but our basic values are by and large the same. So when we have the privilege of working with people from other cultures, we can either be frustrated ... or we can embrace them as inspiration on alternative ways we can live our life.

A healthy mind in a healthy body: Adopting a holistic approach to well-being

Aside from managing cultural diversity to help prevent social isolation, we need to adopt a holistic approach to well-being that focuses not only on the physical but also on the mental aspect.

We need to have, as the Romans say, “a healthy mind in a healthy body.”

The International Seafarers’ Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN) published a guideline called BACES, which aims to promote positive mental health.



Safety Delta Learning Library (SDLL) tip:

Now that you’re aware of these cultural tendencies, you can use the ‘Pause-Think-Adjust’ model to improve your communication. Check out the *Communicating Across Cultures brief* to learn about this tool.

Unlock a world of connection and learning

When we take the time to understand and embrace our differences, we break barriers, bridge gaps, and cultivate an inclusive environment.

But that’s not all - we also tap into an incredible source of learning.

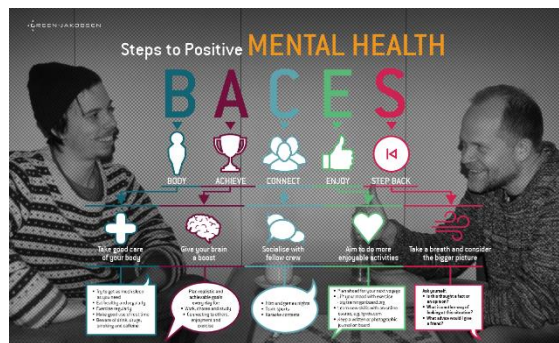
Ah, the wonders of cultural diversity! It’s like uncovering a hidden treasure - we discover fresh ideas and innovative solutions because everyone brings a unique set of knowledge and skills.

We also get to learn more about ourselves and how we are perceived by others.



SDLL tip:

Check out the **BACES poster** inside the **Mental Health Awareness** subject.



Taken from Steps to Positive Mental Health: Good Mental Health Guide for Seafarers, part of ISWAN’s Seafarers’ Health Information Programme (SHIP)



To the shore-based staff: You can proactively support the seafarers' mental health by conducting regular check-ins, offering mental health trainings, and establishing peer support groups.

Life at sea is not just about navigating the vast oceans. It's also about navigating the vast melting pot of cultures.

Add to it the unique conditions on board (separation from loved ones, limited opportunities to relax or socialise) - it's a lot to handle!

So if you or someone you know is struggling with mental health concerns, please don't hesitate to seek help.

Remember, you are not alone, and there is strength in reaching out.

Wishing you meaningful connections and a resilient spirit,

Bjarke Jakobsen

P.S. We're all ears and eager to hear from you!

If you have questions or thoughts to share about this or any of our upcoming Among Us newsletters, please don't hold back.

Hit the reply button, and we promise to keep everything confidential and respond to you. Yes, we've got a team of real people here (no bots hiding behind screens) who would love to hear from you! 😊

Client anniversary

