

# Lessons learned from the pandemic, hopes for a better future

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That the maritime industry is subject to constant change, whether in response to legislative requirements, market forces, technology or other drivers, is a fact well proven and accepted. This past year, the Covid-19 pandemic brought major challenges for all of us forcing changes across the entire society and sea transport was a sector much affected. At the same time, a sector crucial for delivering much-needed goods and materials around the globe, shipping reacted fast and resource-

fully to the challenges and kept the world economy running as smoothly as possible.

One vital component of maritime transport is the human element serving onboard; and a prerequisite for its efficiency is undoubtedly quality maritime education and continuous, appropriate training.

Within a year, maritime training has been forced to change as the pandemic meant that seafarers were unable to acquire further knowledge or develop their competence and skills in training academies and institutions ashore due to travel restrictions. Companies could not run their in-house training either.

The “unsung heroes”, the seafarers, had to fast adapt to new modes of learning amidst the stressful situations they faced such as uncertainties about port access, re-supply, crew changeovers and repatriation.

The other unsung part of the story is the speed with which training providers have switched to remote learning and transformed their teaching material into modes that could be offered online. E-learning resources have become increasingly available for a wider range of subjects and simulator training has transitioned to the cloud. Collaborations between simulation technology providers and e-learning resource suppliers see the merging of digital technologies to offer simulator and remote training combined. Exciting new horizons open

for learning through interactive, immersive, game-like simulation that could be available even on mobile devices!

Mariners can certainly benefit from taking e-learning courses and even more from “studying” in an integrated virtual classroom specific topics such as navigational safety, i.e. collision avoidance, engine room subjects, safety and environmental compliance and even soft skills such as leadership. Lessons can be brought to life via screen sharing, video streaming and virtual whiteboards making the process of learning ever more attractive to the younger generation, who is already adept in technology.

Some skeptics voice concern about too much simulation and over reliance on technology that can lead to lack of situational awareness, of the sense of reality. Especially for the new generation of seafarers, who when having the ocean in front of them instead of a small screen can actually be confused as they tend to trust more the equipment than their own eyes or the knowledge they have.

But whatever the worrisome thoughts of some, digital platforms, virtual classrooms - combining even drone technology - and other, I believe, are here to stay beyond today's situation of travel-constrained seafarers. Even though e-learning had been part of refresher training for some years now, the new modes of remote learning will eventually become a larger part of training, substituting conventional teaching, as we know it.

This is actually the trend in prominent educational institutions such as my alma mater in the US, where they initiated the Learn from Anywhere (LfA) program, a new hybrid teaching format giving a choice of attending in-person classes and taking others remotely.

Digitalization is entering more and more in the operations of ships, ports and maritime organizations and in the area of training it brings a lot of opportunities ahead. Both the company and the individual officer or crew member can benefit from innovative and forward-looking training in the pursuit of safer, environmentally friendlier and more efficient ships.

As we envision ways that remote learning becomes a permanent part of training culture in shipping, a great opportunity arises also for diversity and inclusion, equitable participation of women in the maritime profession through easier access to continuous education for self-development and career building.

As we build quality of the future, innovative training, leading to quality of competent seafarers, let's not miss the opportu-

nity of bridging the gap between male and female professionals in the dynamic maritime industry.

An industry faced with challenges that will require new strategies, tactics and skills as well as the best human resources ever.

Lessons learned during the pandemic can be applied now to the designing of education, training and mentoring, so as to identify ways in which to improve and broaden the skills and capabilities of the current and next generation of seafarers. It may be a combination of face to face and online, with lecturers sharing their experience and expertise and as technolo-

gies will continue to evolve, it is to the industry's profit to adopt innovative ways to use the technology for teaching.

For the 2021 “Day of the Seafarer”, which we are soon celebrating on June 25th, the International Maritime Organization-IMO is conducting a campaign calling for “*a fair future for seafarers*”. To give substance to the issue, let's all pay a tribute to the men and women to whom we are indebted for their role and sacrifices during the past year, by providing them the best of educational resources and equal, fair access to high quality, state-of-the-art training. In a post-pandemic world, we owe them at least that.

## RINA - Global Marine Training Centre

by Dr. Stefanos Chatzinikolaou, Senior Manager, Global Marine Training Centre

### Connectivity as a resilient measure to the global health crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic is having, for a second consecutive year, an enormous impact on humanity. Connectivity and online communication have been globally applied as vital resilience measures for the continuity of life and business. Online collaboration is now available through remote operations, meetings, webinars, trainings, and other events that keep professionals engaged and allow the global economy to carry on. What the health crisis has illustrated, is that many of these online communication models are quite effective, hence they are expected to remain as equal alternatives to the physical presence in the workplace.

In the maritime transport sector, a large portion of operations continued during the crisis, and the main difficulties observed, were due to the discontinuance of operations in the sister transport sector of aviation and the lockdown measures in different countries. Without aviation, the ships moving around the world cannot be easily reached and the essential crew changeover patterns cannot be always met, whereas the restrictions in ports and terminals, force many of the inspection/surveys activities to be either operated remotely or postponed. In RINA, with the IT infrastructure provided, and the agile work model already in place and consolidated, the continuance of all operations of the company was secured, despite having extended application of home working to all employees.

### Education and training in the pandemic

The global health crisis has an evident impact on educational and training activities. Schools, academies, universities, and professional training institutions have been forced

to postpone the educational programs requiring physical presence, a measure historically taken only during war.

With the plethora of online initiatives that have been introduced to support education and training, the effectiveness of online learning is an area of concern. The physical presence in traditional classrooms always allows for a productive interaction between trainers and trainees. This interaction is essential in the case of pedagogical education (i.e. schools, universities, academies) where the student enters the classroom with a dependent learning style and the teacher is seen as the primary source of inspiration, knowledge, ideas, and examples. In effect, the methods used in pedagogical education are mostly passive (e.g. lectures), the learning is content oriented, and the teacher has the leading role as influencer. While transferring pedagogical education online was largely practised in all levels of education during the pandemic, the efficacy of the learning process has not been always as required, the main reason being the limited contribution of the student to the learning experience, and the limited influence of the teacher caused by the remote interaction.



In vocational education (i.e. professional training), the trainee enters the classroom with a more independent style,