Closing Open Water:

-a study on modern communication and social life at sea

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ABSTRACT

Living interchangeably in two different worlds, onboard at work and ashore with family, is an eminent reality in seafaring. Three forces drive the development of the seafarers' situation; technological development in terms of Internet onboard and TV/DVD availability, shortened turnaround times at port and the evanescence of the social arena associated with alcohol. Social isolation from society has been replaced by isolation internally onboard. Social stimulation onboard has been replaced by remote interaction. The main purpose of this report is to investigate how increased social interaction affects the relation to life ashore and social life onboard. I have followed two crews on cargo vessels during a week. The theoretical approach emanates from role theory focusing on expectations and transitions. The study provides a theoretical extension by introducing the concepts of *micro* and *macro* transitions, adding a dimension of time and environmental context as base for describing transitions. Findings reveal a complex role system and a set of coping mechanisms to life in two interchanging worlds.

THE ISOLATION

Seafarers are working far away from society. Seafaring includes cyclical work patterns out at sea followed by time on leave. These cycles may stretch from one week on and one week off, up to longer periods as one year at sea and a month on leave (Bailey and Thomas, 2009). Isolation emerges as a significant issue for seafarers' friends and families (Thomas, 2003). The intermittent absence creates difficulties to maintain and develop friendships or hobbies ashore resulting in a

sense of isolation at home (Thomas, 2003). The Shiptalk[1] survey found the isolation from friends and family as the most stressful aspect of being at sea (Brown and Brown, 2007). The seafarers themselves are not the only ones to struggle with isolation. The separation also affects the wives, requiring adjustment both to the life alone when the seafarer is out at sea and adjusting at return to set for reunion (Bailey and Thomas, 2009). In order to sustain the household from day to day, new knowledge and skills must be developed (Sampson, 2005; Bailey and Thomas, 2006). The switch of roles takes an effort, from being an independent woman running the household to being a dependent partner to the husband when he returns (Thomas, 2003) requiring readjusting to the life ashore. Thus, the period of *transition* between life onboard and life ashore is of particular importance. However, even if the returning session may be problematic, it is still glorified to the extent of a mini honeymoon. Furthermore, the most requested change by seafarers is shorter trips, as a mean to break isolation and the problems that the traditional seafaring lifestyle entails, enabling a closer relationship to families on land (Thomas, 2003).

THE THREE DRIVING FORCES

There are three main driving forces pushing the development of seafaring profession in the recent years. They are *turnaround time* in port, *technological development* and *alcohol tolerance* onboard. These factors are important key elements to the current situation we have today. Serving as a foundation to the development of social life onboard and in particular, the relationship to shore will be described briefly.

Kahveci (1998) shows that the average turnaround time has decreased ninefold for vessels at the port of Sandhavnen over the last 30 years. In combination with reduced manning levels at port, the crew onboard receives additional tasks consuming time previously possible to use for tours ashore thus leaving less time to sample the local culture in terms of environment and meeting people. Kahveci

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[1]Series of studies discussing the present situation and future possibilities to retain people in the seafaring business.

(1998) concludes that this development is reinforcing the isolation from society and diminishing the quality of life for seafarers. Recent developments of ISPS[2] regulation have even further restricted the possibilities to go ashore and leave the harbor area. The negative consequences are developed in the SIRC[3] study where it is put forward that shore leave has great effect on the mental and physical well-being (Kahveci, 2007). Interaction with other people than the few ones onboard and being exposed to new impressions from the surroundings, including news about what is happening in the world, is a natural benefit from leaving the ship. Other benefits include release of stress stemming from constant problem solving at sea and the much valued communication to home and families (Kahveci, 2007).

The possibilities of communication from vessels to shore have improved significantly over the last decades. Previously, letters have long been the most commonly used media, sending and receiving occasionally at port. Landline phone calls when reaching port have been rather expensive, but highly valued. The ability to communicate on a more frequent and less pressurized fashion becomes essential to keeping relationships close and vivid (Bailiey and Thomas, 2009). Most important when preserving relationships with beloved ones is the closeness of communication, meaning frequency and range. The most prominent advantage of using phone calls is its perceived intimacy, after the recent years' drop in pricing per minute enabling more frequent interaction (Bailey and Thomas, 2009). However, there is also a drawback in having intimate contact, as noted by Thomas (2003), some respondents feel the life at sea becomes too mixed with the life ashore, which rather implies increased stress.

Davies and Parfett (1998) conclude that technologies would first emerge for land use. Computers enter the ships at the pioneer shipping companies around 1998, mainly used to keep track of mail from management sustaining an overview of the maintenance systems onboard. At this point, the first personal crew

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[2] The International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS Code) is a comprehensive set of measures to enhance the security of ships and port facilities, developed in response to the perceived threats to ships and port facilities in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the United States.
[3] Seafarers International Research Centre has made a large survey sent to 415,000 respondents from 20 nationalities complemented by performing in-depth interviews.

mail inboxes are arranged (Holmgren, 2010). The cost can reach an immense 50 SEK to merely check if there are any new mails, not reading them. In 2000, further requirements on documentation from IMO[4] drive the development of paperwork that needs regular updates. Instead of using paperwork the reasoning leads to a standardized system over distance. Changes in schedule or routes can be seriously delayed as the vessels only fetch data 3-4 times a day (Holmgren, 2010). Establishing a closer relationship between management ashore and vessels become an economical benefit. It is essential to note that the argument driving the development towards fixed price and constantly connected broadband systems lies in the interest of managers ashore understanding the possibility to move for example salary systems from land, directly out to boats in order to rationalize. Then seafarers can take personal advantage of the new technology's spare capacity (Holmgren, 2010). In 2002 the Inmarsat-F standard is revised, usage is no longer debited by byte[5] but replaced by paying per time online, the first step towards fixed broadband connection. Nordström (2003) find that only 3 out of 121 vessels feature possibilities for using personal computers to send and receive emails at this time. Internet access, implied communication to browsing the web and using online services is the most demanded asset onboard ranked by seafarers in the Shiptalk survey, by 70,7% (Brown and Brown, 2007). However, only a mere 16% report actual access to services online at this time. Around 2008 social forums such as Facebook and Linked-in become available and usable onboard. Handling finances while at sea becomes possible along with significantly cheaper and more frequent communication to shore (Holmgren, 2010). Skype becomes possible to run on the vessels, reducing prices of long distance calls to zero, enabling a closer interaction with the life ashore. The HKF 2009 survey shows a vast development of accessibility in terms of Internet and communication possibilities. 73% of the respondents now bring their own computer, 84% have access to Internet onboard for private use (Hederström, 2009). Technological development also entails TV/DVD devices and their availability onboard. Since the days when TV was introduced onboard, it has

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[4] International Maritime Organization
[5] Size of digital information

commonly been placed in the dayroom, serving as a source for social gathering with common entertainment, leaving topics to talk about and openings for jokes. However, recently the development of TV/DVD equipment onboard enters the private cabins. This has provided additional possibilities for choosing individually what entertainment to engage in, which also features the drawback of decreasing common social ground onboard.

Traditionally, alcohol has been seen as a social catalyst, facilitating interaction and thus social stimulation. However, the main contribution is its quality of gathering people together. Two aligning forces are in action lying behind this paradigm shift in the seafaring profession. First, previously there have been fewer options in terms of social stimulation onboard. There has been little variation concerning leisure related options, other than socializing or reading in solitude. Thus, even if gathering for a drink has not been the first preferred choice, it has been a social arena and a source for stimulation. Second, there has been alcohol's effect as a social catalyst, releasing tensions and easing social interaction. The drinks after dinner have served as a natural point of gathering which has had the function of a social platform and teambuilding arena for the crew to build upon. However, the negative effects of alcohol onboard cannot be denied, resulting in confrontations and fights and even possible safety risks. In this study, there is a unified voice telling that the drawbacks surpass the advantages of allowing alcohol on a daily basis.

PROBLEM FORMULATION

This study concerns the vast development in seafarers' social conditions onboard in terms of communication and shore leave possibilities. These changes in conditions stem from the three main drivers described; turnaround times, technological development and changing the social gathering points onboard by private TVs and by prohibiting alcohol. Linking the development of seafarers' conditions during free time and the known stress of isolation from family and friends to the parallel progress of Internet technology is of huge interest and the selected topic for this report.

Role theory will be used as main theoretical framework to illustrate the development in social interaction onboard and the relationship to shore. Role theory is embracing the differences in how roles are enacted depending upon *expectations* from the immediate surrounding. As the interchanging environment where seafarers are living and working are very different and traditionally separated in time and space, there are different sets of expectations upon them. Role theory also handles *transitions* between different role systems and roles that are highly relevant in the case of seafarers. Particularly with recent development of communication where the two previously separated worlds are approaching, role theory is well suited to illustrate the development and the current situation's advantages as well as struggles.

The purpose of the report is to demonstrate technology's impact upon social role systems and the particular case of seafarers. Thus, the following research question has been formulated:

- What consequences on the seafarers' relationships, on board and to life ashore, followed after the introduction of very cheap communication facilities and TV/DVD equipment?

The report aims at giving an understanding of the effects resulting from close and very cheap communication to family and friends upon the social life onboard and the transitions from being onboard to life ashore and vice versa. Concerning practical relevance, the report adds to the knowledge concerning social life onboard, in particular to the effects of technological advancements upon seafarers' life situation onboard and the relation to life ashore. The report will show findings with relevant implications to human resource management strategies as the importance of technological development and the quick adaptation by seafarers is demonstrated. Tales of how the Internet connection is used indicates present and future needs relevant for technology developers. Providers of services for seafarers are learning from the new habits in regards to TV/DVD use.

In regards to theoretical relevance, the previous studies in the field of seafaring have included social isolation and its effects upon seafarers and the relation to their families ashore (Sampson, 2005; Bailey and Thomas, 2006; Thomas,

2003). The interest for technology has been studied on different surveys and availability of the facilities (Brown and Brown, 2007; Kahvechi, 2007; Nordström, 2003; Hederström, 2009). However, there have not been any studies about the social consequences onboard of having TV and Internet connectivity in personal cabins, nor of the relationship to life ashore with access to very cheap communication devices.

Role theory has commonly been applied in 'helping professions' such as education and health care (Rheiner, 1982; Hardy and Conway, 1988; Payne, 1988; Taylor et al., 1985), and family counseling; (Marks and MacDermid, 1996; Mui, 1992), and in social science (Rizzo et al., 1970; Sandoff and Widell, 2009; Turner, 1990; Toffler, 1981). No previous studies have been made on seafarers using role theory, which is interesting due to the traditional nature of living in two interchangeable worlds, separated in both time and space. The contribution of this study to the role theory discourse lies in the development of *micro* and *macro* transitions that build upon previous works but incorporates the factors of physical location of the enactor and location of the expectations upon role behavior.

The reader will be taken through a methodology discussion. The setting onboard is introduced, followed by socialization processes and expectations upon seafarers. Transitions between the worlds onboard and ashore will be developed. A theoretical discussion about role theory and the development of *micro* and *macro* transitions will lead onto the analysis of mechanisms separating the worlds and how communication is conducted. Expectations from the different worlds and transitions between the worlds will be discussed. Finally, concluding remarks and implications.

METHODOLOGY

The material in this study has been collected in different phases. Initially a background research concerning social isolation onboard was conducted in order to obtain an overview of the field and the situation the seafarers are facing. The historical development of communication at sea during the past recent years is described in the study to illustrate the pace of advancements and the actuality of the

study. Four interviews have been conducted with Swedish seaman service[6], Victoria Institute[7] and a representative from SEKO[8]. A field voyage was performed, lasting for seven days on two vessels. Each ship featured a crew of between 15-20 individuals. Informal talks lasting up to a few hours at the bridge during evening and nighttime gave opportunities to further dig into the setting without the pressure and stress that may follow from interviews. Interviewees were randomly selected and booked in advance to conduct interviews. During the trip a total of twenty-seven persons, twenty-five men and two women, were interviewed following an interview guide that was developed prior to the voyage, including a pilot interview that was revisited and improved during the course of the study. However, no major changes had been made since the first interviews onboard, and the themes of the interview remained intact. The respondents were not guided into a strict question format. The conversations followed naturally, including topics of family, expectations, transitions and social life onboard. Interviews were performed both on duty and off duty, with permission from senior officers. Off duty interviews were carried out in the assigned cabin. Interviews where the interviewee happened to be on duty were mostly performed in calm situations, where neither distractions nor critical elements were present. This is of importance to the study as the respondents' reflection of their behavior requires more than a simple description of practice, but also a thought regarding their emotions. Limitations in opportunities to join the crew at work due to safety and availability was unfortunate. However, a large amount of time was spent on the bridge, where several officers frequently were on duty or on short visits to chat. Spending time on the bridge enabled me to get a sense of the atmosphere by socializing with the people and to be accepted in the environment, both actively participating in conversations and observing. Notes and thoughts were taken whenever possible and arranged on a daily basis. Twenty interviews have been conducted in Swedish. Seven were conducted in English, of Pilipino and Polish nationalities. The distribution was approximately equal between

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[6] Welfare organization providing services to Seafarers in Sweden department of Swedish Maritime Administration

[7] Non-profit IT-research institute focusing on transport information

[8] Seafarers Union

the two crews that were followed during the period of one week. The distribution between officers and men was comparable as well. Quotes have been translated to English whenever needed, and adjusted to comprehensibility. The interviews are coded by "O" for officer and "C" for crew, "S" for Swedish, "Phi" for Pilipino and P for Polish nationality.

Potential problems has emerged from a rather paradoxical situation. Conducting research upon conflicting roles in incumbents' role systems will force the respondent to return to a state of mind in each of the investigated roles, or better contexts where the roles are enacted. In the particular case of seafarers, the roles are largely enacted at a physical location that serves as a fundamental difference in contexts, such as onboard or at home. When posing questions regarding the situation at home, a demand upon the respondent is ensued to mentally exit the current setting and enter the context at home. During a few of the interviews the respondents reached a reflexive state of mind, where their own behavior was discovered by themselves while telling about their experiences. The data has been arranged and grouped in order to see patterns and establish categories. The analysis has then been developed from the most interesting emerging aspects from the findings, using role theory as theoretical framework to illustrate the complex situations the seafarers are facing.

The situation onboard

The following section is divided into segments discussing the socialization processes onboard and expectations from different stakeholders. Then the communication and interaction with life ashore is discussed, ended by a description of the transitions between the world at work and the world at home.

Two vessels are target for this study. They are cargo freighters of about 200m lengths and a DWT[9] of about 12000ts. Each vessel features a crew of 15-20 individuals. The organization and work structure onboard the two vessels are similar. Responsible for everything above the engine department including loading

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[9] Deadweight tonnage, weight unit commonly used to measure size of ships

and offloading of the vessel, is the 2nd mate and handful of deckhands on the deck side. On the machinist side the chief engineer is responsible for the propulsion of the vessel, supported by 1st engineer and 2nd engineer. All is supervised by a captain.

The vessels are built in a manner where the officers' cabins and bridge are located at the top deck, followed by a deck of crewmates' cabins. The next deck feature dayrooms and gym, finally deck 1 feature mess and kitchen brigade. The time around the meals is when the most people onboard meet. Commonly people meet twice every day around meals. One by one the crew joins the meal. Everyone entering the room is greeted by at least someone in the room. There is no waste of time. Few meals last longer than 10 minutes. There are rarely even a few minutes of "socializing" after finishing eating. Conversations are filling the room occasionally, but clearly the focus is upon eating and then leaving for other tasks. The consequences for the social entanglement are not beneficial, further reinforcing the feeling of an "empty ship" after dinnertime, when most people returns to their cabins. The daily routines are very similar from day to day, with meals served at the same hours, duties at the same hours almost every day. Comparing to the situation at home;

> *"It is a lot more structured here than at home, because we have specific dates of arrivals, deadlines and the daily rhythm onboard." C S*

SOCIALIZATION PROCESSES

Overall onboard there is a gentle and relaxed atmosphere. Yet, these people have not chosen who they will spend half their year and potentially half their working life with. There is a mechanism to push the social mass to a level where everyone "fits". In order to build a functional social mass with sustained social cohesiveness to a reasonable extent it may be wise to start slow in the socialization process. Some choose not to be as talkative, embracing a low profile in the social arena.

> *"We step on each other a little bit all the time you know." O S*

> *"I usually take it easy in the beginning. Not talk too much, to see who is who." C S*

In such environments evidently there is a great demand for communication to the outside world, outside the social isolation onboard.

> *"Without communication, you are just inside the elevator alone. Without news it will be tough on anyone." C P*

> *"You cannot be a standalone equipment, we are human. We need some social interaction." O Phi*

During my time onboard, observing, I do not hear any conversations at all regarding recent news ashore, nor what has been broadcasted on TV and Internet newspapers. The everyday small talk is mostly concerned with improvements in the benefits of being onboard, if the officers did everything right, if there are small adjustments that needs to be made, during work hours. A topic constantly returning is the functionality of Internet and TV channels. Often Internet speed is target for complaints. On the second vessel visited, Internet accessibility has been unpredictable for a longer period of time, resulting in a common moan about it failing when needed. Around the boat there is a light atmosphere with some jokes around, even in what appeared to be very attention intensive moments, such as when arriving to port, or in critical situations at sea. At any given moment there are openings for jokes. Most jokes circle around old time stories of what had happened on vacations ashore. Rarely there are stories from other boats or work related. The local jargon is very vivid, featuring jokes that would not be as funny outside this particular social setting. The culture onboard allows for a wide range of jokes. However, when the workdays are finished, people avoid talking about work.

> *"The main subject of the small chitchat every day, I'd say we usually talk about memories from the past that everyone can relate to. Other than that, we are working and then we are only talking about work, and work…" C S*

EXPECTATIONS

Expectations from different stakeholders are present in the everyday environment of seafarers. Three major stakeholders have been identified and will be developed. Firstly from the position onboard entailing certain tasks, secondly from the crew on a social basis, and thirdly from home. In regards to expectations from different

ranks the major strand to be identified is the management-oriented strand. The transformation from the traditional seafarer occupation have throughout the interviews been described as from being a "life style" to being a rather maintenance oriented or even administrative type of profession. Stories are told of being away for long periods of time and being self supplied with skills to fix everything that could happen onboard. On these routes traveled by the studied ships, the time between ports is running on a schedule and it is easy to make plans for maintenance of the rather advanced nature. Consequently the profession is turning less autonomous and more into an administrative transportation job. Supported by descriptions of their work as:

> *"From the office, that the ship should be kept operational as smoothly and free from problem as possible, to the smallest possible cost." O S*

However the expectations are not always clear to senior ranks. Expectations from management and other instances may become hard to grasp. Training appears to lag behind, yet expectations rise.

> *"Sometimes we are expected to do really odd stuff, you doubt this is really part of your responsibilities." O S*

> *"It's hopeless to expect us to do all this without any economic education." O S*

> *"We should really have an education in leadership, right now, it comes down to who you are as a person. I take elements from managers I've experienced before, that works for me." O S*

The senior ranks in particular experience expectations from the crew regarding their behavior, mainly about leadership. The social expectations, from the crew upon the officers are present in the officers' stories.

> *"You need to get the guys going. If you don't sing you self, who's going to, you know?" O S*

> *"We eat together, and hang around during the free time and working together too. [..] If we go ashore, of course I'm no longer a team leader. But as long as you are onboard you are an officer and ready if something would happen." O S*

FAMILY INCLUDED

A distinction is required between men with established family relations and men without. Men with established families and a settled life do not generally keep contact on a regular basis with many other people outside their family. Often they claim they have closer communication to friends while on vacation, but not at sea. Thanks to the length of turns being no longer than 4 weeks; it is generally argued that it is a lot easier to keep a social life at home. Some argue that if problems arise in your network of friends, rarely it escalates or disappears during such a short period. The crew mentions communication before other interests or occupations when having time off duty. When asked how the crew spends their free time, the importance of family emerges. For those who have a family waiting for them at home, this is the main source to gain energy to withstand the long periods of time away. Typically the main priority for a family man, to keep in contact, is to call his wife and check that the family is doing well. Family is a source of energy. There are testimonies from the time when there were no Internet and no free Skype, and where the routes did not allow for personal cell phones to reach land. It was too expensive to keep calling to the same extent as is being done today.

> *"Yeah, it was more difficult in the past, when the kids were small you know. Every time I came home, I was like "oops!" you've grown now!" O Phi*

> *"It is a big difference since the 90's. We didn't have fresh news from home. Every time we had communication, it was very important. I'm much more part of my family now than I was before." C Phi*

> *"We spent 10 euro on 1 hr talk. We talked 10-15mins, and you need to prepare, we are not the rich man so we not spend too much. We cannot speak too much." O Phi*

The video conversations featured in the Skype software are highly appreciated, especially for the international seafarers who are away on a six month or longer contract at a time.

> *"I think about them, what is happening to them. I'm a family man. Mostly I call my wife everyday you know. Skype, and Internet I can see my kids." O Phi.*

Most often, expectations on men with settled family life are practically oriented. The family man is often asked to deal with obstacles that have happened during the period away, renovations and being a relief in the household during the time at home.

> *"They expect me to be home, because I'm gone for a month, they just want me to be home [...] to have a parent at home." O S*

> *"Today I think it would be difficult if you didn't have this type of communication, not keeping in touch during 4 weeks or even longer, if you have kids and family.. I think we need good communication to keep people working at sea today." C S*

When family is involved into the picture of expectations, obviously there is an emotional involvement greater than the practical one, of being a partner and/or father. Keeping a relationship is difficult while being separated a large part of the time. The physical distance and difference in time perception as time fly by causes problems.

> *"It is hard to have a woman, a relation. I'm divorced and the current lady is also disappointed. You need a strong woman who has the ability to keep up and do own things. Otherwise it won't work." O S*

> *"I had a girlfriend when I left, but now she said we have two different lives, and that we didn't talk. Now I don't have girlfriend no more. I completely got into the work and did not realize so much time went by..." C S*

Communication with loved ones is not necessarily performed on will, but also occurs as a planned event. This is partly explained by routines onboard, where specific times available are matching the time zone differences, and when free time is left. The content as in quality of talk in the conversations is of importance to the seafarers will to keep close communication.

> *"We use to be quite conscious when we talk. Not like, "I just want to hear your voice", it is more conscious. Sure, there is a feeling of longing involved to talk, but it feels a bit like a conscious event when we call and we talk" O S*

Comparing the respondents' previous experiences of communication, with letters and long distance calls from ports across the world with long periods of time with no direct connection, to the frequent interaction over telephone, text messages and

Internet, the content of the conversations is at large the same. The most important aspect of keeping in touch is checking the status of how things are going. Having information regularly on what happens at home keeps away worries. Asking if there is a difference in what is talked about whenever given the occasion to talk; in general there is no change.

> *"The most important thing for anyone is to check on their family, that they are doing good. Once a month if that is all there is, twice everyday if that is possible." C S*

Family may not always approve of the chosen life situation, being problems with absenteeism and a too demanding situation in the life left behind ashore. From stories of broken relationships and the requirements on a seafarer's woman, a picture of a very handy and independent woman emerges as the wife to a seafarer. Complaints are not uncommon.

> *"It is not often we talk about it, but I know it is strong for her. She wishes I had a job ashore. [..] She wants more help at home." C S*

From the seafarers' perspective, the absenteeism while away entails a lack of ability to help out or "be there" whenever family or friends are facing hardships has a harsh impact upon seafarers. Many testimonies of difficult times onboard circled around problems at home.

> *"Yes… you are crushed… it is like sitting in.. …in prison. You cannot get out. You are here." O S*

> *"It is of course very irritating. You feel completely powerless. " O S*

FAMILY EXCLUDED

Men without a settled family life, living alone, rarely experience the same expectations from life ashore as men with established families. Yet in general, they are staying in touch with a greater number of people, but not as frequent as the family men. Some have argued it is even a relief to not have any contact with life ashore.

> *"Before I didn't have a family, and the turns were a lot longer. Then you didn't need any communication. Everyone was onboard for half a year. It was another community." O S*

"You cannot think too much about home. It is a lot easier to work if you close it down. And if you don't talk as much with home. It was way better on longer turns and routes." C S

Interestingly and generally, the younger generations have contact with a greater number of persons ashore on a regular basis than the older crew onboard. They often claim they are using Facebook and other IM[10] services. Some would have newly settled family conditions, or be in the progress. By using social medias a larger amount of connections to friends can be kept vivid during the time away. To some it is of crucial importance to keep in touch with life ashore, and what is happening among friends and in society at large.

"We have internet onboard, it is a great advantage. Otherwise I would have had zero contact to friends, if not calling to each and everyone.. I doubt that would happen. Or sending letters.. [..] To me it is like a lifeline." C S

Expectations from society often turn to be mentioned as practical obstacles in everyday life, such as being a functional citizen and paying bills. Friends and hobby organizational engagements require attention.

"There are no expectations what so ever on me when I'm home. I am alone. I do whatever I want, being a citizen paying taxes and bills would classify as expectations I guess." C S

The frequency of communication sessions to life ashore divides the respondents into two groups. Those who believe there are no limitations and no drawback in having very frequent contact, at any given moment. These are typically the men with families ashore. The other group is those who attempt to consciously delimit the conversation. There have been experiences when people at home had been too engaged in communicating, resulting in reluctant behavior of the seafarers. The resistance shows in terms of being happy to not have coverage on the cell phone, meaning there is a legit excuse to not be reachable. Other reasons include funding, sleeping pattern, quality of topics and work hours.

"Yes I definitely think you can talk too often with those at home. To me, it is necessary to shut off." C S

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[10] Instant Messaging

> *"I've tried to explain that we cannot talk every day. [..] I don't want to ask every single day what it is like, then the usual questions, and then during the conversation end up realizing we've only talked about completely nonsense stuff. It doesn't happen that much out here, and neither at home. 2-3 minutes once a week. That is it." C S*

> *"There is no way you can talk too often or much. As long as you work when you should. You can never talk too much with family." O Phi*

Keeping a close contact with family with several interactions per week, or even multiple phone calls on a daily basis is having effects on the news value of the information.

> *"Yes, we only speak once a week. The thing people are doing, every day sending emails and Skype. That I can't handle. Not so often, better to have a thorough talk. It is just nonsense talks. I can't handle it, talking on the phone everyday without nothing to say." O S*

> *"After 12 years of marriage it is less interesting to hear what happened at home. Not like in the beginning." C P*

There are different coping mechanisms from the family side, for instance arrangements for not being bothered at sea by problems they cannot handle in any way.

> *"I think my wife, if there is really some problem at home, she keep it to herself. She don't want me to bother in my job. That's what my wife do. Then when she solved the issue, she tells me it is okay. [..] It makes me feel better." O Phi*

> *"I know many people telling their families to not call them when they are out here if they cannot do anything. There is no use to tell. All that happens is you are getting depressed onboard. …sure it is frustrating." O S*

CONNECTION TO SHORE

Communication does not only entail family conversations. Following what is happening in society and in the social world at home is another benefit, which is not necessarily twoway communication. Taking part in the news feeds and instant development in society is enabled through Internet. Previously the news feeds to boats have been limited, but now they have opened up to get daily news from the local and world spanning newspapers online pages. Now fresh news reaches the vessels instantly.

> *"I think some people needs news feeds and happenings in general to gain a sense of control over their life, in control of the situation. [..] I don't care, they can do whatever they want, I wouldn't care. I'll get into it when I come home." C S*

Demands on capacity are high and at times the available bandwidth on the boat is not sufficient. Complaints are raised when the usually functional system is offline. During the time spent onboard there has been persistent unpredictable online and offline times. A clear frustration is present in many conversations heard.

> *"We have Skype all the time. So much it is too crowded on Skype, then it is emails. Video picture is not so good. Depends on the time, because here everyone is using internet so much." C Phi.*

> *"It is really frustrating when you want to talk to someone and you get disconnected all the time." C S*

> *"A good beginning would be for them to fix the damn TV channels.." C S*

A source for socialization onboard, a place to meet and hangout is the dayrooms TV sofa, gathering around and relaxing in a passive yet social session. TV has been around for several years onboard vessels. However, the available channels have been restricted. Since 2002 cheap devices for picking up regular satellite TV have become available (Holmgren, 2010). TV has the past two years migrated from being a social waterhole in the dayroom to being a facility available in most cabins. Crew members bring their own personal TV and on occasion the crew fund has been used to finance. In the investigated vessels most cabins featured a TV and DVD player. The situation has led to less social gatherings onboard. The comfort is improved as everyone may choose what to watch. However there are mixed opinions. There are consequences that nearly everyone mentions in some way:

> *"Some periods there are a few that go down there [dayroom] and hang around. Other periods there are less. The biggest criminal in this matter, is that everyone has computer and TV in their cabin." O S*

> *"When we had turns of 3-4 months it was a lot different community onboard. With technology it has changed. [...] You can do really well without making friends onboard. Without committing to anyone, because you can discuss with those at home. The fellowship onboard was A LOT better before." O S*

Swedish seaman service provides the vessel with recent cinema movies on DVD's, a highly appreciated feature allowing for individual choice of movies instead of having one movie that everyone watches together. At one vessel the DVD's are stored at the bridge, there is often someone coming up and looking for a new movie to watch. However, uniting around a movie of choice is not unproblematic.

> *"If you have a taste in movies that is deviant from the others, then it is a source for conflict. I've experienced that. So I'm happy with my own DVD." C S*

TRANSITIONS

During the interviews many describe a very strong distinction between the life at home and the life at sea, to the extent of two separated worlds. The description of two different worlds is usually made up of factors such as amount of family life, chosen activities compared to predefined tasks.

> *"When you are onboard, then it is free time and work. That is one. There is no such thing as family life. When you are at home it is only family life.. ..It is like two completely separated worlds." O S*

Positions onboard entailing tasks of managerial nature prove to generate difficulties in separating their roles at work and at home.

> *"It is difficult. When my ex-wife was home she was the commander, and when I came home I started to do the same. It didn't work. Today I try to give advice to my kids in how to keep the house running, and if something is not done right I must tell them. But that is more in the shape of a father and not so much a commander." O S*

> *"I've been working in this rank for 25 years. Of course I get affected, I'm so used to quick decisions all the time. Some days there are many. I think I'm affected by that when I'm home. I get to bite my tongue as I want to decide at home too." O S*

Given there is a perceived difference between the two worlds and mechanism in place to function in both worlds, a transition is required. Many individually different rituals are performed, that in one sense or the other prepare for the swap. Different stages of transition have been identified and will be exemplified below. Preparations in relation to family as in spending more time together appears important, and leaving the household ready for a time absent, preparing finances and doing a final cleaning, becomes a ritual before leaving the place. De-dramatization of the good

bye process is handled slightly different among individuals; however, there is definitely a strong experience that have founded such behavioral coping mechanisms.

> *"The good bye ritual.. I try to make it as short as possible. It is hard the last night. The last night before I'm going out, I cannot really relax. The night is ruined, but you try to keep the mask. So that it appears to as usual. But it is always ruined. When I will leave, I just want to do it as quickly as possible. Kiss and goodbye to kids, then I'm gone." O S*

The first days onboard are still in the transition phase that consists of both adapting to the new environment and letting go of the previous context. Explanations from the respondents have been varied, but consistently there is reference to the previous context in which they enacted a role of choice.

> *"It takes a few days... before you can let go of home. It takes a lot longer time to let go of home than letting go of the job. You feel sorry for yourself a couple of days, then you accept it, and it turns into the regular life again." C S*

> *"You are still very much at home the first days. Often you've forgotten something, and you reflect upon that." O S*

The very last days onboard, when relief day is approaching, the transformation ritual from work nearing a time off duty begins and the longing for home is intensified.

> *"I think the last days onboard are the hardest. You know it is so close, yet it is so far away in some manner. You've been away for a long time but not thought about it. The last week or so, I get the feeling of standing in my hallway mentally." C S*

The transformation continues after leaving the ship in another phase before actually reaching home. The descriptions are very positive, like a new life starting, others are clear upon their personal stages.

> *"We are usually driving a car from relief port to home. I am in one phase at work, another phase in the car, and one phase just arriving at home. When I close the door and have a glass of wine or watch TV, all tensions release and I fall asleep." O S*

However, there are those who don't have any special rituals, or are unable to tell about them, describing the transition between the two worlds in very concise terms.

"I only turn the page. Since I've been around for many years. I leave the responsibilities and control to someone else. You leave the environment, but it stays within you." O S

Regardless of specific rituals in macro transitions, in micro transitions the mind flies to fantasies about other places or interests than the present. Daydreams include thoughts about the closest family and plans of what should be carried out when coming home, plans of vacations and hobbies.

"I'm thinking of what I could do at home, when I'm coming home. Future projects.. anything.. like repairing my car.. Living, future and situation... You bring you everyday life issues out." O S

Variations in intensity and disposition over the turn length seem to be on an individual basis. Regardless of how, the process of daydreaming show there is a connection to home that varies in intensity. Revealing the topics of daydreaming illustrates important aspects in the seafarers' lives. How the interaction with home takes place differs during the period of work, which makes daydreaming a part of the transitions process.

"The longer I'm away, the more I think about home. The closer to day of relief we get, I think even more about home, and what I'm going to do. Phone calls are more frequent.." O S

"It starts in the middle, or the last two months" [when homesick begins], C Phi

Concluding the findings, seafarers are experiencing two separated worlds that they are juggling expectations from. With improved TV and DVD facilities in combination with wireless Internet available everywhere, communication with families is now free and can happen to any preferable extent. Handling the absenteeism entailed by the profession turns out to have many individual solutions such as delimiting interaction with the world at home, or increasing it. Transitions are eased on the macro level, but may prove to cause interference in their world in the micro level due to frequent interactions. The social life onboard has become more individualized, with less need for cohesiveness compared to previously.

ROLES AND TRANSITIONS

Any human in a social context has a characteristic behavioral pattern or "role" in a setting (Biddle, 1986). The term *social role* includes attitudes and a strategy for coping with situations that occur in a given social situation. Turner (1990) emphasizes the social role as an important basis to identify and categorize people into groups, placing people in organizations and in society. Marks and MacDermid (1996) claim roles are organized in relation to each other. Notable is the separation between role and competency. Briggs (2005) accuses literature of often confusing the two concepts. In strongly hierarchical settings it is of importance to keep this distinction clear. Roles need to have a broader definition whilst competences have a specific definition.

According to Turner (1990) there are four basic types of roles. Firstly, there are the *basic roles*, such as gender and age roles which are founded in society. Secondly, there are *structural status roles* which are attached to a position or a status in an organizational setting. Thirdly, the *functional group roles* which are not attached to a particular position or group, but functions as recognized mediators. Fourthly, there are the *value roles* which embody certain values or value complex and could be compared to the "criminal" or the "saint". Basic roles are rarely enacted exclusively, but in combination with other roles. Thus change in the role system can be seen as interference in the compatibility among different roles in the system (Turner, 1990).

In the words of Solomon et al. (1985) role theory is based upon studies of roles as a dramaturgical metaphor. The roles are then functions that guide the individual's social behavior in a certain setting. Every action taken is an implicit choice to either continue the enactment or select a new self, acting another role to better suit the situation. Role theory presumes persons to be included in a social position, holding expectations about their own behavior and others (Biddle, 1986). Role expectations are constituted by privileges, obligations and duties of any individual in a social position, which are defined by the social structures and the surroundings (Solomon et al., 1985). Expectations by the surrounding members of the group are equally important. The immediate micro setting comprises

institutional forces such as social class, race, marriage and heterosexuality that effect expectations (Marks and MacDermid, 1996). Solomon et al. (1985) claims people often are defined by their service roles, where a profile is generated which is presumed to reflect the title. This may become a source of confusion.

The interaction in the socialization process is present between the organization and the owner of the role (Toffler, 1981). As such the social behavior is learned and then adapted to the position they occupy in the setting (Solomon et al., 1985). Toffler (1981) recites Kahn et al. (1964) theory of expectation-generated role stress stems from two sources. Firstly, role *ambiguity* which concerns unclarity and lack of information about expectations regarding activity and responsibility, or authority including behavioral norms of the role (Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970; Biddle, 1986). Secondly, role *conflict* addresses the situation where assumptions about the role are not mutually understood by both parties. Thus the communication succeeds but the perceptions of the role are not congruent or compatible (Rizzo et al., 1970; Biddle, 1986).

Addressing role stability, Turner (1990) presents *accommodation* that consists of internalized role conceptions, effectiveness and coercion in the system and possible alternative solutions. Concluding remarks notes that it is not likely to obtain any consensus as the process becomes a matter of accepting the good with the bad, as no other foreseeable way of organizing matters seems appropriate. Coercion in the system may largely be put out of order due to unequal power of parties that affect the process of settling the system.

Mui (1992) cites the scarcity hypothesis suggesting that lacking resources to fulfill role obligations creates role overload. In Mui (1992), Wallace and Noelker (1984) expand the required resources to sufficient time, energy and personal resources, all necessary to enable enactment of a role. The role system itself will not surface until there is a problem arising. Then a need for adjustment or fine-tuning of the system emerges (Marks and MacDermid, 1996). A different approach to role stability is described by Rizzo et al. (1970) who sees role *overload* as a phenomenon that occurs in situations where multiple roles are expected to be reproduced simultaneously, but instead produces psychological distress to the enactor. Such

distress may cause role *strain* as defined by Goode (1960), as any felt difficulty in carrying out a role. He argues this occurs only when the total role system is excessively demanding. Marks and MacDermid (1996) note that roles strain is not role-specific to its origin, but is a consequence of surrounding activities the individual needs to handle and navigate through. Thus it is an expansion of the affecting factors from not only internal relations but also evidently external relations to the role system. Rizzo et al., (1970) argues that change in the setting is a source of role ambiguity, overload and conflict. In the context of working life, research has generally supported that role overload, ambiguity and conflict are directly linked to decreased job satisfaction, which may increase the willingness to leave the organization (Pearce, 1981).

A balanced role system is crucial to keep people in harmony. Marks and MacDermid (1996) have found that people, who maintain a balance in their system of roles, will experience less role strain and depression in combination with higher self-esteem. Role balance is not only in regards to the behavioral patterns, but has a cognitive dimension featuring the capacity of organizing several selves (Marks and MacDermid, 1996). Due to systemic features of a role, upon change in a role follows change in other roles as a result not only from their interlinkage (Marks and MacDermid, 1996), but from the functional or representational relationship the roles have with each other (Turner, 1990). Marks and MacDermid (1996) develops a thought of the role orientation in regards to balance, arguing that persons with an orientation towards full attentiveness to everything they do have easier to cope with sudden obstacles, as soon as they find a routine to handle the new chaos. Such persons have easier access to their different roles and may benefit from having such obstacles. This contrasted with a person who is not role balanced, who would constantly experience a feeling of being hindered to dispatch other roles as a result of disrupted routines (Marks and MacDermid, 1996).

Traditionally the concept of *coping* in psychology describes the process of handling stressful situations (Sandoff and Widell, 2009). There are two distinctive different coping mechanisms described by Atkinson et al., (1993). First *problem-focused,* which aims to level the problem decreasing its significance. Second

emotion-focused, which aims to reject any interference from the problem through loading positive distractions moving focus away from the problem. This method is most common when problems appear to be uncontrollable.

Any system may be threatened by external events that may cause destabilization. Such conditions create an *impetus* or a force to adapt the roles to the new situation (Turner, 1990). Not necessarily a change depending upon the context, it may be favorable to remain in the present state for the time being because of mobilization of resistive forces. The difference between a stable system and an unstable system is then merely through the level of volatility in the context. However, the roles themselves develop. There are several mechanisms describing the change of a role. Roles may be established or dissolve. They may change quantitatively by addition or subtraction of duties or rights. Roles may contract or expand through gain or loss of power (Turner, 1990). As Turner (1990) notes, roles may change in a qualitatively manner as a result of substitution of elements or reinterpretation of its meaning. Thus they are fluid entities that may change in subtle manners internally. In the very micro perspective, Goffman (1961) suggests people are attaching and detaching to and from their roles over time, through momentary attachments and detachments. Transition from one setting to another may change the demands upon the enactment of the current role. Moving from one context to another, a role *transition* or role *reallocation* may occur (Turner, 1990).

Combining the ideas of Goffman (1961) and Turner (1990) an addition to the present role theory framework is at hand. The *attachment* process (Goffman, 1961) may occur at any given moment to meet expectations of the surrounding environment (Solomon et al., 1985). Thus a distinction is required *where* the *attachment* occurs, if the enactor is present in the environment where the role behavior is expected, or if the enactor is separated from the expectations by an alternative environment. The process of re*attachment* to a new role occurs either in affiliation to the expectations related to the role or separated from the expectations of the launched role, still facing expectations from the surrounding setting related to the previous enacted role. Transitions between roles including a physical relocation to an alternative environmental context will be referred to as *macro* transitions.

Transitions of the type where the enactor is required to launch a role relating to another role system and environment over distance will be referred to as *micro* transitions. However, if the enactment of a certain role is not kept within the generally accepted boundaries, it may not necessarily be seen as a new way of playing the role but could be regarded as *deviance* in the role behavior, which could turn increasingly likely in the case of *micro* transitions due to the risk of role *ambiguity* (Rizzo et al., 1970; Biddle, 1986). Furthermore, it is not to be considered dysfunctional until the role no longer appears to have the intended effect (Turner, 1990).

The strength of role theory lies in its capability to frame differences between contexts entailing expectations generated by the surroundings. The capability of discussing mechanisms of easing transitions between these worlds is important and a key element in the complex life of seafarers.

Analysis

Seafarers are often living in what is described as two completely different worlds. The analysis will depart from role theory and discuss expectations from different actors. The communication and coping mechanisms seafarers are using to juggle the two interchanging worlds and transitions between the worlds will be developed.

MECHANISM OF SEPARATION

Traditionally, keeping the order set between the two worlds has been forced through minimal interaction between the worlds during extended periods of time. Seafarers have taken advantage of the physical distance and lack of communication possibilities between the two worlds to keep themselves balanced, as resources have not been available for further interconnectivity. Combined with strongly organized routines onboard, the process of switching one role system off in favor of the new one is catalyzed (Marks and MacDermid, 1996). The desire to bring the two different worlds together in an organized and frequent manner varies depending upon family situation ashore. Seafarers with partners ashore are eager to take advantage of the new situation. Previous high fees for satellite phone calls and

lacking availability to cheaper land lines at port have had a delimiting effect upon the frequency and the length of communication sessions to families. The relation to kids in their childhood have been problematic as kids could take leaps in their development, surprising the seafarers who had been absent. Video conversations over Skype are enabled by the recent development in bandwidth of the satellite connection onboard. Having a visual of the family members and simultaneously hearing their voices entails a higher quality of communication as additional senses are stimulated. The world at home and the world at sea are now approaching each other, still free and unlimited with reservation of excessive use of the bandwidth.

"Mostly I call my wife everyday you know. Skype, and Internet, I can see my kids" O Phi.

The cost of communication has been a constraining factor. The development of sloping costs for communication to families has clear effects upon frequency of interaction.

"Once a month if that is all there is, twice everyday if that is possible" C S

Considering the development of possible interaction between the world at sea and the world at home, it is remarkable how similar the topics are, compared to when there were a lot more restrictions in terms of time of each session and availability to have a session. The prominent drive to keep in touch is to check the well-being of the family. Regardless of frequency of interaction, this need has not changed upon the introduction of new communication facilities. It appears to be a basic need that needs to be fulfilled to keep in balance in the world at home, and is thus reflected in the role system (Marks and MacDermid, 1996). Striving to fulfill this need can be seen as a strong desire to embrace the expectations from the world at home by frequently *attaching* to the role of family father (Goffman, 1961). However, there are other benefits of frequent interaction, such as becoming an integrated part of the family any time of the year which is highly appreciated.

DELIMITATION OF INTERACTION

In scenery of today, onboard vessels with fixed price broadband connection there is virtually no limit to the possibilities for communicating with life ashore other than work hours. The respondents can be divided into two principal groups; the ones who take advantage of unlimited possibilities, and those who consciously delimit the link to life ashore. Both groups have found a mechanism to keep the role system stable (Rizzo et al., 1970). Embracing the new possibilities to achieve a family life, previously unattainable, is enabled through communication facilities or by consciously bringing the two worlds closer to each other, enabling one system of roles where all roles are closely interlinked and kept vivid. The hibernation of a set of roles at home is no longer required. The other mechanism to achieve a stable system is through delimitation of the interaction between the worlds, allowing for hibernation of the set of roles not needed for extended periods of time, resembling the past situation in seafaring. In the category of respondents who described their way of coping in this manner, they were not distinguishable in terms of age, experience or nationalities. Thus it can be concluded that it is not a question of generation or nationality, but a question of personal preference. Regardless, it is a chosen deliberate action in order to best cope with the situation at hand.

The flipside of keeping close contact to life ashore is the difficulty in keeping order in both worlds in parallel in the incumbent's role system. When using Skype where the two contexts meet, the *micro* transition is extended from only experiencing sound over telephone to having a visual and audible encounter with life at home, hence more energy is spent on transitions after calls. However, incorporating the differences in visuals by video conversation, the process of entering the other role system is facilitated (Marks and MacDermid, 1996).

The contradiction that divides the personal preference of either choosing to delimit communication or embracing communication may have its foundations in the need for social interaction and stimulation or in relation to family situation. In the past and on longer turns the seafarers were forced to fulfill their social needs onboard, there was simply no other option than filling the need onboard. Today, the needs of social interaction are clearly not satisfied from the setting onboard the boat

without news and communication from external sources. This is reinforced by the shown frustration upon technology failure. Then the need for bringing the world at home closer and interact with it to fulfill the social needs becomes a solution enabled by the recent technology development.

> *"Without communication, you are just inside the elevator alone. Without news it will be tough on anyone." C P*

> *"You can do really well without making friends onboard. Without committing to anyone, because you can discuss with those at home. The fellowship onboard was A LOT better before." O S*

Comparing the need for interaction with home or news from ashore men without families feel the most comfortable to delimit communication. Families create a strong bond incentive to interact with life ashore. There are arguments for even further separation of the worlds, enjoying the total difference of being on vacation and onboard. This indicates a will to not juggle several worlds and roles, but hoping for the position to concentrate upon one world for extended periods of time. Interaction between the worlds is set to a minimum, as a mean to strengthen the division between the worlds and minimize the need for launching the different roles required in the other world. Hence, juggling several roles is consuming energy and preferably kept at a minimum. In this quote the respondent refers to a time where communication was poorly available for extended periods on longer transoceanic routes and a luxury seldom used by deckhands.

> *"You cannot think too much about home. It is a lot easier to work if you close it down. And if you don't talk as much with home. It was way better on longer turns and routes." C S*

Following Kahn (1990) this is an aid in order to focus on the task, which indicates a strive towards less complexity. By closing down the world at home, the risk of role overload, ambiguity and conflict in the system is minimized which according to Pearce (1981) is linked to job satisfaction, which would explain the respondents argument. When trades are longer, less time is experienced ashore and the world onboard is not encountering as much interference resulting in increased satisfaction.

When family ashore is facing hardships it is difficult for the seafarers and a source for choosing to delimit interaction. In such cases it has proven to have the effects of shrinking the self-esteem from not being able to provide, resulting in a feeling of loneliness.

> *"Yes... you are crushed... it is like sitting in.. ...in prison. You cannot get out. You are here."*
> *O S*

The loneliness may become reinforced due to the less social climate onboard the vessel after introducing additional technological assets, resulting in not having the same social arena to gather strength and support from. The arena onboard may consider certain emotional behavior as *deviant* (Turner, 1990), since others may have the same issues in their personal life, but according to the norm and the social expectations (Goode, 1961) and for the sake of the crew moral overall, it is not spoken about. The unwillingness to break the norm of how to handle hardships may come from a fear of role *ambiguity* (Kahn et al., 1964) where the norms of how to handle the hardships onboard are conflicting to the preferred enactment of a care-giving role at home. Such conflict could be further illuminated by telephone interaction, where a *micro* transition happens. At this point the person enacts the role expected at home, yet over distance. Enacting a role expected in another environmental context may increase role ambiguity as expectations may conflict.

The feeling described in the quote takes reference in the inability to contribute to a solution as a result of lacking resources to be at home and help which Mui (1992) referred to as scarcity theory. A lowered self-esteem may follow as an indication of imbalance in the role system from not being able to support, and having difficulties to choose what role to enact in the conflicting situation (Marks and MacDermid, 1996).

Communication to home and loved ones may not be carried out in a spontaneous manner, but occur as a planned event. It is argued that poor quality of communication with regards to topics to talk about should lead to decreased frequency and length of communication. Not implying unwillingness to only hearing

the person's voice has the effect of delimiting the reach into the other world but still keeping in touch but not involving deeply into the role enacted at home.

> *"We use to be quite conscious when we talk. Not like, "I just want to hear your voice", it is more conscious. Sure, there is a feeling of longing involved to talk, but it feels a bit like a conscious event when we call and we talk." O S*

Such a restrictive strategy may be founded in a need for preserving the relationship to the partner at home, but minimizing interference from the world at home by keeping the time spent on enacting the role expected from the partner at home to an efficient minimum. By planning the event it becomes a ritual enabling an imaginative contextual switch that alleviates the threshold of the *micro* transition in *attaching* to the world at home, which is perceived as stressful to the extent that it is avoided on a casual basis. On the other hand, using a restricting strategy on the emotional level may not be mutually accepted by the partner ashore, and could then cause role *conflict* (Rizzo et al., 1970; Biddle, 1986) in the mutual system of roles in the family. However, such conflict could be caused internally if the loved ones do not approve of the situation the lifestyle entails to its surroundings.

> *"It is hard to have a woman, a relation. I'm divorced and the current lady is also disappointed. You need a strong woman who has the ability to keep up and do own things. Otherwise it won't work." O S*

As noted by (Sampson, 2005; Bailey and Thomas, 2006), practical abilities in taking care of a household is required to be developed. In cases where the partner at home lacks the ability or perceives the demands as excessive, the relationship is threatened. Difficulties in carrying out tasks may be a problem for the less practically oriented partners, resulting in role *strain* (Goode, 1961) that could potentially develop into a situation of role overload (Rizzo et al., 1970).

COPING THROUGH SILENCE

Silence is a coping mechanism that aims at keeping a picture as positive as possible for the part onboard, by delimiting negative news from ashore. The seafarers are then excluded from the issues of such a nature that they would be unable to help

coping with while at sea, which has the advantage of less complexity in their everyday at sea.

> *"I know many people telling their families to not call them when they are out here if they cannot do anything. There is no use to tell. All that happens is you are getting depressed onboard. ...sure it is frustrating." O S*

The source of the problem is the lacking resources to be able to attain physically the location and support directly (Mui,1992). Atkinson et al., (1993) presented *problem-focused* coping mechanisms in terms of limiting the interaction regarding problematic issues ashore. The importance of such events is leveled, decreasing the stress in the role system of the partner onboard. Whether or not to share problems ashore seems grounded in the following argument: If the caused damage to the partner at sea is superior to the relief of telling about the problems experienced by the partner at home. Thus there is an *emotion-focused* (Atkinson et al., 1993) argumentation from the part ashore, implied in having conversations that would focus on the rather positive aspects of life at home. Through not being able to help and support during hardships the seafarers are experiencing role *strain* (Goode, 1960). However, by consciously decreasing the numbers of problems to juggle for the seafarer onboard, the complexity of the enacted roles also diminishes and minimizes the risk for role *overload* (Rizzo et al., 1970) by not having to concentrate upon being a support at home but mainly gaining positive energy from the interaction with home. Constructing such a system benefits the seafarers at sea by minimizing *expectations* on their role and the responsibility to the partner at home (Biddle, 1986). However, in order to maintain or to build such a relationship to home, the expectations upon the partner at sea is required to be mutually understood and accepted by both parts in order to avoid role *conflict* (Rizzo et al., 1970; Biddle, 1970) and preserve the relationship.

EXPECTATIONS

Family at home is a strong stakeholder in the life of the seafarer due to the long periods of absenteeism, in some contracts the larger part of the time is spent at sea.

The expectations from families upon seafarers are typically in regards to their function in the family.

> *"They expect me to be home, because I'm gone for a month, they just want me to be home [...] to have a parent at home." O S*

The lack of a partner or a parent in the household is often in regards to their role of the *value* type and the symbolic value of being a parent (Turner, 1990). Expectations on men without families were rarely other than being a functional citizen and paying bills. Thus the expectations are rather on the macro level in society.

> *"There are no expectations what so ever on me when I'm home. I am alone. I do whatever I want. ...well, being a citizen paying taxes and bills would classify as expectations I guess." C S*

Expectations from management ashore upon the officers onboard are complicated in the sense that it is occupying different types of roles that Turner (1990) described. The expectations are firstly *structural status* oriented, as the officers are in a system of hierarchy onboard the ship entailing certain tasks. Secondly the roles are also *functional* to their nature, reinforced as they are dislocated from management ashore and yet mediators of the responsibility of maintaining the safety and operation of the ship to the company. Thus, the officers face a wide range of tasks they are expected to handle, from "really odd stuff", to demands in leadership or economics, tasks that would have been performed better with access to tools in terms of education. From the perspective of Mui (1992), lacking resources in this case holds for potential role overload. These experiences have come partly as a result from the development in technology enabling management ashore to keep closer contact and manage the vessels administration directly onboard instead of sending data for processing ashore. Thus demands upon senior ranks on the boats have increased resulting in a role development with an increased complexity of expectations from management. Hence roles have been affected by technology generating an addition of demands (Turner, 1990) which shows how role strain is not connected to the role system itself but to alternations in contextual factors (Marks and MacDermid, 1996). The situation that officers are facing is one of

higher role complexity than the average crewmate in the sense of the expectations of being leaders onboard during duty. This type of role would be classified as the *value* type (Turner, 1990) in the sense of being a role model and a father figure in the strongly hierarchical system onboard. The complexity increases as the arena for work is at large the same as the arena for the social activities when the day is finished. As people often define themselves by their service role (Solomon et al., 1985) there is a potential source for internal role strain (Goode, 1960). When leaving the vessel for free time ashore, the environmental context changed and the swap of roles was facilitated (Marks and MacDermid, 1996).

> *"If we go ashore, of course I'm no longer a team leader." O S*

As seen in this example, the confusion of an additional role, which would imply increased risk of role overload (Rizzo et al., 1970), is reduced by the contextual switch.

TRANSITIONS

Rituals precede the departure from home; in order to initiate the transition of roles preparations are made. The household is prepared by the leaving part in order to minimize the risk for failing expectations from family at home, and adjusting the household in order to facilitate their stay and by that, decreasing their own worries while away. Reducing worries is one crucial element of keeping harmony in the role system, which proves to be prioritized when transiting between roles. The behaviors of increasing routines by reviving the same rituals serve to ease the volatility in the role system (Turner, 1990) initiated by nearby change. Hence the imbalance in the role system caused by the contextual switch is relieved. The volatility is here caused by the cognitive stress of organizing several selves (Marks and MacDermid, 1996). Thus through creation of routines, the ability to handle new contexts and situations is improved, as access to different roles is simplified with routines (Marks and MacDermid, 1996). Another mechanism in place is to de-dramatize the process:

"The good bye ritual. I try to make it as short as possible. It is hard the last night. The last night before I'm going out, I cannot really relax. The night is ruined, but you try to keep the mask. So that it appears to as usual. But it is always ruined. When I will leave, I just want to do it as quickly as possible. Kiss and goodbye to kids, then I'm gone." O S

The description illustrates the need of simplifying the procedure and how thoughts about the upcoming time at work start to take shape a few days before departure, the transition starts with a micro transition that is consciously restricted through attempting to display a normal behavior the last days. The actual "good bye" is the first step of the *macro* transition in a physical sense and of rather more painful nature and thus shortened to a minimum. Upon arriving at the vessel and preparing to get into the routines onboard, the preceding vacation lingers still:

"It takes a few days… before you can let go of home. It takes a lot longer time to let go of home than letting go of the job. You feel sorry for yourself a couple of days, then you accept it, and it turns into the regular life again." C S

Daydreaming onboard is an interesting phenomenon, as the topics are at large the same for everyone, family if available, followed by hobbies. Even if respondents have claimed to prefer to delimit interaction to the world at home, this appears separated from the concept of daydreaming. The difference between actual interaction and daydreaming about the world at home is the non-existing need for enacting the role expected by those at home, turning daydreaming to a less stressful experience separated from *micro* transitions. Additionally daydreaming is often based upon relieving fantasies where support from strong pillars in life can be found rather than harsh reality. Daydreaming and the eagerness to reach home differ between individuals and over time. There is a background process launching the longing for home at different stages of the period away.

"The longer I'm away, the more I think about home. The closer to day of relief we get, I think even more about home, what I'm going to do. Phone calls are more frequent." O S

When leaving the vessel after a completed work turn there are different phases in the process of leaving the world onboard and readapting to the world ashore. Leaving the vessel itself is an *impetus* (Turner, 1990) that requires adaptation.

> *"We are usually driving a car from relief port to home. I am in one phase at work, another phase in the car, and one phase just arriving at home. When I close the door and have a glass of wine or watch TV, all tensions release and I fall asleep." O S*

Such phases illustrate the detachment processes (Goffman, 1961) of leaving the vessel, and upon completion while at home, tensions release and the *macro* transition is complete. Seafarers have experienced difficulties in readapting to the world at home, persisting with behavior displayed at sea.

> *"It is difficult. When my ex-wife was home she was the commander, and when I came home I started to do the same. It didn't work." O S*

In particular the senior officers are used to making quick decisions in their role at work in the strong hierarchy, but upon return to the household that has been administrated and ruled by the partner ashore there is a seedbed for conflict (Thomas, 2003). Thus the difference in expected behavior is perceived as larger for the officers. In such cases where the behavior is perceived as *deviant* (Turner, 1990) to the extent of inappropriate that the partner cannot accept it and reach a state of *accommodation* (Turner, 1990) ashore, a role *conflict* (Rizzo et al., 1970; Biddle, 1986) is present, as in the expectations about behavior are not mutually understood. In that situation, the relationship is at danger. The key to preserving the relationship during transitions is to be able to switch off the role adapted at sea, a task that is not easy to fulfill. The struggle becomes a trained and learnt behavior (Solomon et al., 1985) and clearly illustrated by:

> *"I've been working in this rank for 25 years. Of course I get affected, I'm so used to quick decisions all the time. Some days there are many. I think that affects me when I'm home. I get to bite my tongue as I want to decide at home too." O S*

Summarizing the findings from the analysis would highlight the individually different processes of reducing complexity in the role system in order to keep stability. Through controlling the level of interaction between the two worlds, further integration or separation is achieved. Contextual differences in environments are used by seafarers in order to catalyze the role separation in combination with routines which decrease volatility in the context.

CONCLUSIONS

Prior to the introduction of Internet featuring free communication, the isolation was related to the world ashore because of inexistent communication possibilities. The study contributes to the previous studies of seafarers' situation by building upon the three driving forces, technological advancement, shortened turnaround times and the result of prohibiting of alcohol onboard. These factors have set the scene for a change in the seafaring profession and lifestyle. The study effectively shows the relationship between technological advancements in terms of Internet access and TV/DVD availability, which previously has been an unexplored field. Today, the isolation is no longer in regards to society, but has turned to a social isolation internally onboard. The socialization and stimulation no longer needs to be fulfilled by the few men onboard but has been replaced by free Internet based communication to life ashore, combined with TV and DVD players in crew cabins providing less need to socialize together to relieve boredom.

Reactions to the development have generated two mutually exclusive coping mechanisms to the new situation of separation between the worlds onboard and ashore. Both processes aim at reducing the complexity in the role system. On the one hand, there is a process of integrating the two worlds as much as possible using the technology at hand, extending casual conversations. The positive effects of the new possibilities enable seafarers to become closer to their family and they may participate to a greater extent than before which then alleviates stress about family and absenteeism, a highly appreciated improvement from the seafarers' perspective. On the other hand, the opposite reaction is also present. Limiting the frequency of interaction between the worlds attempting to separate the role systems and decreasing complexity, for example by censoring problems ashore. Topics are adjusted in order to keep positive energy and not adding worries to the part onboard. Additionally, conversations are kept meaningful and conscious to keep up relevant info and interest, rather than casual non-sense conversations.

The use of role theory in this particular setting has proven highly interesting. The interchanging role systems provide ambiguities when reaching across the environmental contexts. Further development and findings in regards to

role theory include an introduction of different levels in transitions. *Micro* level transitions are highly interesting to continue developing as they occur in any situation where an alternative role system is enacted over distance. The concept of *macro* level transitions enables indication of different behavior in regards to physical location. A possible area for further research using *micro* and *macro* transitions is project intense organizations where the employees are mobile into several contexts and handling multiple stakeholders with different expectations upon their role and behavior. Another area to be explored is the quick transformations we do in everyday life, between the office and home, sending text messages or quick phone calls. The many business people constantly on the move and constantly communicating are very much possible targets for further studies.

The managerial implications include an understanding of the impact and pace of adaptation by seafarers to technological advancements onboard. The study shows the development of individualization onboard, holding for great interest in movie services from organizations ashore. Having Internet access is no longer a question of a luxury seldom used, but is adapted as an integrated feature in how social stimulation onboard functions. The question is how to cope with demands upon reliability of the technology and keeping pace with development of services and bandwidth ashore, in order to match the rising expectations from seafarers now increasingly internalizing Internet as a right onboard. Furthermore, the difference in social life onboard may have implications on work and morale, a field that needs to be addressed in the future.

The final conclusions entail improved communication possibilities causing individual coping processes to emerge. The aim is to reach a less complex system, either by separating or integrating the worlds further. *Micro* and *macro* transitions addition to the existing role theory is of high potential in many situations beyond the given case. Seafaring as profession is in the phase of changing its structure in social life onboard. A new era for seafaring is not approaching -it is already here.

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