



## Digitalisation to attract fresh talent

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*The digitalisation of the shipping sector could attract the new generation of talent that it will need to run its enhanced operations*

Delegates and speakers at the recent Singapore Maritime Week discussed – among other things – the need to attract young, promising talent to the shipping sector. Ideas around the issue varied, but one prominent theme was the fact that the industry, as it adopts digital operational strategies, could capitalise on digitalisation as a way of attracting younger candidates.

The Global Perspectives: Future of Shipping forum at the event in Singapore featured a panel comprising shipping industry veterans and their (younger) counterparts from the world of digital commerce. As Carl Schou, president of Wilhemsen Ship Management, noted during the forum, “An infusion of youth is necessary but today finding young talent to work on board ships is challenging, and will become even more so moving ahead unless we make it more exciting to them.”

The consensus view of the panel was that the shipping industry must invest more in digitalisation if it is to attract the younger staff that it will need to implement new systems in coming years. The skill set that will be needed by companies, the panel noted, is the ability to acquire and use data to create operational solutions. But it was also noted that young, tech-savvy candidates who have this skill set could be less likely to pursue a career in shipping than in other industries, as they may not be as interested in trade logistics as in, for instance, e-commerce or pure data-analysis roles.



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Kell Jay Lim, country head at Grab Singapore, pointed out that companies would do well to recognise that the younger generation has its own ideas about job satisfaction, and that industries that seek to attract and retain such talent should learn about those ideas and adapt to presenting the move toward digitalisation. As he put it during the panel discussion, “It is not the subject matter that they are interested in. It is the problems they are required to solve. An industry can be made sexy if you give them the right tasks, the right support groups and the right tools.”

The shipping industry has been slower than some others to embrace digitalisation, but recent moves by big companies like Maersk Tankers look set to change that, as digital adoption by bigger players will eventually draw others into the process as they work to keep pace with change.

The main benefits of embracing digital strategy are economic, but the key obstacle to implementation is cost. The creation of, for instance, full-fleet connectivity involves massive up-front expenditure and increased human resources. This is perhaps the key stumbling block that drives many companies to play a waiting game during which they watch their competitors’ approach to digitalisation.

The shipping industry’s awareness that digitalisation will become essential sooner or later is growing. The fact that a new class of professionals will have to be attracted to run digital operations may well become a key component in speeding up the embrace of data-driven business operation and optimisation.



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