Avery significant section of our Maritime industry still appears to be struggling to implement the ISM Code because of an inadequately functioning Safety Management System (SMS). There are, however, many examples of SMSs which can and do work. The reason why there is such a diverse range of experiences of ISM implementation is directly attributable to the way in which the individual SMS was designed and put into practice. Some of the common negative factors expressed by individuals involved in its implementation are:

•Too much paperwork

•Voluminous procedures manuals

• Irrelevant procedures

•Bought - off-the-shelf systems

•No feeling of involvement in the system

•Ticking boxes in checklists (without actually carrying out the required task)

• Not enough people/time to undertake all the extra work involved

• Inadequately trained/motivated people

•No support from the Company

•No perceived benefit compared with the input required

• ISM is just a paperwork exercise

It is not the fault of those people who expressed these negative attitudes that they feel the way they do. They are the unfortunate recipients of a concept which has been basically dumped on them with little or no preparation, training or involvement***. The SMS can only work if those who are involved in its implementation actually want it to work***
. This is at the heart of the very nature of management systems and is what differentiates them from prescriptive rules and regulations.

It is worth comparing some of the common factors which emerge from those Companies who appear to be operating very successful SMSs, with the above rather negative list:

• Leadership and commitment from the very top of the organisation**.**

• Paperwork reduced to manageable levels - including procedures manuals, checklists, reports etc.

• A sense of ownership/empowerment by those actually involved in the implementation process of the SMS - i.e. the personnel on board the ship.

• Continuity of employment of personnel both ashore and on board ship.

• Two way communication between ship and office - with mutual respect.

• Awareness of the importance to the individual and to the Company of managing safety.

It is out of these various attributes that a Company Culture, and in turn a Safety Culture, flowed as a natural consequence. When these various components are combined they are sufficient to produce a working environment in which people take responsibility for their own safety and contribute towards the safety of others and the Company as a whole. As a natural consequence of that shift in attitudes andvalues, accidents, incidents and consequently insurance claims, all start reducing. And,there is a much more efficient use of time which allows genuine efficiencies to be made with the consequence that less money is draining out of the Company.

Credits: Dr Phil Anderson