Cultural Awareness — study guide

A ship's crew is a mix of nationalities, languages and customs. Cultural awareness is what lets that mix work as a team. This guide covers self-awareness, what people of the same ethnicity may share, and the common ground every culture holds.[1]

Building self-awareness

To become more self-aware you should research your own background and culture, allow capacity for self-reflection and intervention, and recognise your personal biases, cultural incompetence or exclusive behaviour. Awareness of your own culture is the starting point for understanding someone else's.

Shared characteristics

People of the same ethnicity might share language or dialect, environmental characteristics, physical characteristics, and religion or customs. Every one of us has our own cultural identity and racial heritage, no matter where in the world we are from.

A common language

English is the international language of the sea: it is the working language used for navigation and communication afloat, which is why competence in English is a regulatory requirement.

Cultural universals

Certain features appear in every culture — the **cultural universals**: language, geography, and beliefs, values and rituals. Recognising these universals gives the crew shared reference points across differences.

Key facts to remember

- Self-awareness: research your own culture, make room for self-reflection, recognise your biases.
- Same ethnicity may share language/dialect, environmental and physical characteristics, religion/customs.
- Everyone has their own cultural identity and racial heritage.
- English is the international language of the sea.
- Cultural universals: language; geography; beliefs, values and rituals.

Sources

1. STCW Convention and Code and the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) — English as the working language of the sea.

2. Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (as amended) — the seafarer's working and living environment (including non-discrimination).

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