

'It's the age of the autonomous professional'



Het komende jaar gaat Robert van Noort in gesprek met CEO's die een eigen kijk hebben op leren en veranderen. Leiders die tegen de stroom in hun idee vormgeven en het geduld hebben om hun plan te zien groeien en uitkomen. Hij zoekt CEO's op in Afrika, India, Zuid-Amerika en Europa.

INTERVIEW

Robert van Noort

Voor het eerste interview in deze reeks, reisde hij af naar Mumbai in India, waar hij sprak met Shri Bharatan, oprichter en directeur van OMCI, een bedrijf dat bemanningen voor zeeschepen levert. Bharatan is een opmerkelijk leertraject gestart. De grote vaart trekt niet meer. De gemiddelde Indiër kan zijn geld gemakkelijker aan wal verdienen door in de IT of bij een callcenter te gaan werken. In tien jaar tijd is het aantal sollicitanten van 5.000 geslonken naar 500 per jaar. Tijd voor een andere manier van denken over werken op zee.

Mumbai, January 2008 - We are in the Leela office of OMCI, a modern building fully air conditioned. The contrast with what's going on in the street is shocking. People live next to the gutter, children without clothes begging for some money or food. Damaged roads, hooting rickshaw's; Mumbai with its 19 million inhabitants is

overcrowded. Shri Bharatan is a relaxed man, a sharp observer, eloquent and to the point. An entrepreneur who also wishes to contribute to Indian society.

Can you describe the current challenges of the market for OMCI?

'In India, the entire shipping industry is facing huge challenges to find qualified manpower, and in terms of the floats, there is a shortage of ships to meet the demands of the market.'

What is the difficulty of finding qualified manpower?

One would say that with more than 1,1 billion Indians it shouldn't be a big problem.

'I am mainly talking about the officer level. There are so many other easy ways in India to earn a living, for instance starting up your own IT-company or working for one of the many call centers. It takes ten to twelve years to become a captain. And when I talk about building a ship today: I can get

a ship in just three years. Then think of a huge order book, a booming economy, and more companies coming into India to employ people, so it's an onward problem. Also the popularity for the shipping profession as such has decreased. Just to mention: being away from home for a long period, the feeling of being isolated, the hierarchical structure, 24 hours on a vessel with the same people.'

Bharatan tells me that the whole shipping industry is facing this enormous problem. He is worried and he wants to think anti cyclic: not thinking in optimising current recruitment, training and compensation and benefits systems, but by creating a new way of thinking about the context and the very profession of the mariner.

So, for you recruitment and selection are key, next to training your people and retaining them.

'Well, yes and no. We do the normal things, advertising in the newspapers and so on. The youngsters we recruit are around 17

Over OMCI

OMCI of voluit: Orinoco Marine Consultancy India Pvt. Ltd. is in India een toonaangevend detachingsbedrijf voor bemanning van vrachtschepen. Kapitein Shri Bharatan richtte dit bedrijf op in Mumbai in 1996. OMCI is bekend om zijn gedurfde aanpak en nieuwe managementstijl. Het bedrijf staat te boek als een voorloper als het gaat om het implementeren en vasthouden van de hoge certificeringsstandaarden op het gebied van technisch onderhoud, efficiency, veiligheid en ship tracking. OMCI is een van de weinige Indiase organisaties die een geïntegreerde aanpak kent van bemanning, technisch onderhoud, operationele processen, HR-diensten en inkoop. Hierdoor is OMCI in korte tijd uitgegroeid tot een onderneming met 56 bemanningen en 3.500 matrozen en officieren. Recent heeft TORM, een Deense scheepvaartonderneming, OMCI overgenomen.



years old. We test them psychologically and measure their mechanical aptitude and reasoning skills. Out of 300 we finally select approximately 30 new employees. This is where my fundamental question comes in about living and working in the knowledge society, where youngsters have various options, especially in the Indian context. Where they can walk across the street and easily earn 15.000 rupees working in a call center, enjoying their social life. Why should someone really opt for this very demanding profession? This is my foremost question. We saw a tremendous decline in applications of 90% in ten years time. Then we came across the concept of the autonomous professional. We felt that there is a set of crucial values that makes people looking forward to a kind of a lifestyle of a seafarer. The second question is: is somebody born hardwired with these traits that he becomes a seafarer because of his construction, or can we develop a person into being a seafarer? We realised that we need to find out in the selection process for these youngsters why they like the way of living as a mariner and what we need to change in the environment on the ship in order to make it more attractive. We worked with the assumption that one can strengthen the abilities of the youngsters so that it becomes an attractive profession.'

For Bharatan this way of thinking was revolutionary. He started to find out what the consequences are for working and learning in a knowledge economy. The concept of the 'autonomous professional' enticed and motivated him to change the profile of the mariner and the way of training.

What does the concept of 'the autonomous professional' mean for you?

'I think a autonomous professional is a person who creates an environment he likes through his ability to take responsibility for his own actions. He enjoys doing that also in a hierarchical situation. We are talking about a match between the needs and interests of the professional and what needs to be done on the ship. This is a specific kind of match I am looking for.'

What is then the difference with the current seafarer?

'A simple answer: the situation now is

Initial situation concerning training and development

The interesting thing was that actually the training for new crew members and officers mainly took place on the shore, in the classroom. OMCI will gradually build training facilities on board, so that the new mariner 2020 can practise hands-on in a real work environment.

Current steps: on board training on specially equipped tankers

Since January 2008 OMCI has been training on board specially equipped vessels. Installing an extra training-deck on commercial vessels will enable OMCI to have on-sea-training for 15 to 20 cadets. Training bigger quantities of cadets is essential for OMCI to cope with the foreseen shortage of qualified officers.

In combining pre-job training methods with the on-the-job-environment, the learning of cadets will be significantly more effective and efficient. OMCI will have the opportunity to help their young officers to develop the right set of hard and soft skills, attitudes and behaviour.

Continuous research is planned on existing seafarers and long-term progression of the cadets who have just been selected. Other initiatives in organisational development will be taken to support the changes described above.

like: Do as you are told, whereas we want to create an environment in which the mariner says: I want to do what I like.'

To me this appears as quite provocative thinking for the current crew and senior officers. It sounds like creating spoilt children.

(laughter) 'It's the age of the autonomous professional and this is how I think it is going to be! But we changed that name into 'the new mariner 2020', because our senior officers associated the word 'autonomous' with anarchy.'

What are the essential qualities of 'the new mariner 2020'?

'We did a lot of interviews, observations and research in literature to come to the core of these qualities. I am proud that we really found qualities that are distinctive from the former way of looking and are specific for OMCI.

The new capabilities of this shipping professional are:

1. a sense of adventure;
2. being one's own best friend;
3. being happy with a low amount of external stimuli and social interaction;
4. an inherent curiosity about the world around us;
5. the hunger and appetite for learning.

These traits of the new mariner exist next to the more profession-based capabilities such as leadership, communication skills, and physical fitness and technical orientation.'

How do you train the new mariner 2020?

'Right now the majority of the course takes place in the classroom. We are creating a situation where the new mariner 2020 can challenge himself on board. We also designed management games to confront the trainee with core situations in which he needs to take responsibility. For instance working on a passage plan in cooperation with other crew members and clients on shore. There are certain assignments that challenge adventurousness and being one's own best friend. What will it be like entering a port you have never been to, in a different country where you don't know anybody and you don't speak the language?'

Can you tell me about one of the pitfalls of this project?

'From time to time we still experience resistance from our senior officers. Mostly, I think because they don't understand the concept. But I also think it has to do with changing the mindset from a control perspective to a way of working in which development and trust are the basics for a working relationship. We need to improve this by also training them in learning to lead the new mariner 2020.' Bharatan acknowledges the fact that the support of the senior officers for this new approach is crucial. He realises that for many officers this is threatening. They were used to a culture in which they direct and give solutions. Bharatan now plans a program in which he builds on

their beliefs and attitudes. 'They need to believe in it', he says.

How do the new mariners themselves evaluate this way of working so far?

'It is too early to be specific about the outcomes. The cadets have recently gone to the vessels for their first trip. We communicate with them through logbooks. The first reactions of the cadets are clear. They say they feel encouraged and supported.'

What do you learn from this project yourself and now do differently than before?

'Ha, that's a tough one, because I have learned so many things. One is that it was more difficult than I anticipated to get people on board to appreciate and accept the concept. Secondly: I now see more clearly than before that we are a HR department for shipping companies. We therefore need to learn more about the real challenges this industry is facing. We must see that people are our largest capital and learn to appreciate this and act accordingly. We need to contribute to personal development and create opportunities for Indian youngsters to join this exciting knowledge society. We added a slogan to our mission statement: We enjoy what we do. Personally, I changed my way of leading, and thereby created new challenges for the HR department, watching the responses and encourage the employees to find their own ways of contributing to this project. So no handing over solutions or directing them to a certain approach.'

Slot

Als het interview voorbij is, lopen Bharatan en ik samen naar buiten. Het is warm en vochtig. Ik heb de neiging om mijn hotel aan de overkant in te vluchten, maar we lopen nog een stuk samen op. Hij zou graag zien dat dit interview over het opleiden en leren van professionals in India wordt gepubliceerd. Hij is bang dat veel Indiase ondernemers alleen maar naar de kortetermijnwinst kijken. 'We worden te Amerikaans', vertrouwt hij me toe.

Robert van Noort is consultant en lid van de internationale maatschap bij Kessels & Smit, The Learning Company, vannoort@kessels-smit.nl.

Uitgesproken

ED FENNEMA

Geachte Frank...

Ik schrijf je om te zeggen dat ik dit jaar niet zoveel training en opleiding meer wil doen. Ik ben nu al gecertificeerd voor DNEO, DHR, DBG, DGDG en DSK. Heb bovendien ook nog even een herhaling VHS en DHS meegepakt. Maar ik moet nu echt weer aan het werk, want de zaken zijn hier een beetje blijven liggen. Ondanks die motivational speaker vorige week vrijdag lopen zaken hier nu eenmaal langzaam.

Weet je trouwens wie ik laatst tegenkwam? Boukje. Werkt hier als coach bij het project training on the job. Zit erbovenop begrijp je wel, net als vroeger. Nee, flauwe grap, ze doet het echt goed, net als vroeger.

Maar ik ben serieus over dat opleiden. Dat gaat echt niet meer; ik zit 's avonds ook al bij die sessies voor onze permanente-educatiepunten en daar moet ik dan 's middags al voor weg, dus zo komen we hier op de afdeling nooit vooruit.

Dat brengt me trouwens op een punt dat ik nog even tegen je aan wil houden: wanneer ga ik weer eens wat vooruit in deze organisatie? Ik leer me toch te pletter en schrijf altijd goede dingen in mijn evaluaties, dus ik vind dat dat wel eens beloofd mag worden. Ik begrijp wel dat onze afdeling laatst niet zo'n goede beurt heeft gemaakt toen we twee maanden over die deadline heen knalden, maar feitelijk was ik daar zelf niet bij, omdat ik toen vijf middagen in die leergang projectmanagement zat.

Was trouwens wel goed opleidingsbureau hoor, helemaal wat onze inkoper tijdens zijn informatiebijeenkomsten op dinsdagochtend altijd zegt: 3 x C, Comfortabele stoelen, Concurrenterend geprijsd en Catering geweldig. Zou jij ook eens heen moeten voor een cursusje leiderschap. Maar nou nog eens even wat: ik zit hier met twee nieuwe meiden op mijn afdeling die ik elke woensdag moet gaan begeleiden. Nou beweren zij dat ze alles al uit die werkpleksimulatie op intranet halen en zo'n multi-looser sessie op woensdag graag zouden willen overslaan, zodat het werk ook nog eens klaar komt. Nou vraag ik je! Alsof ik het zo leuk vind alles maar met ze te moeten delen, terwijl ze er toch geen snars van begrijpen en ik alles beter zelf kan doen. Zeker met mijn certificaten. Nou, ik ben weer weg. Hoor ik het nog?

Warme groet,

Ed (van verkoop binnendienst)

P.S. ga je nog naar dat seminar over kwaliteit in je werk?