



Resilient, efficient – and caring

by Fitzwilliam Scott

The maritime industry, long known for its demanding work environment and physical isolation, is undergoing a significant cultural shift. Traditionally, the focus within this sector has been on ensuring physical health and safety to meet the arduous demands of life at sea. However, in recent years, a growing recognition of the psychological pressures faced by seafarers has sparked a change in priorities, driven by an evolving understanding of the critical role mental health plays in the overall well-being and performance of maritime professionals.

As the industry embraces this new perspective and begins to actively address the unique mental health challenges posed by prolonged isolation, high-stress conditions, and the demanding nature of life at sea, VIKAND, a global leader in maritime healthcare and well-being solutions, has unveiled a novel wellness data-collection tool, enabling seafarers to share their mental health concerns anonymously. This innovation, developed in partnership with the Danish tech company Scoutbase, is transforming how ship operators address seafarers' well-being, fostering openness and proactive care in an industry that relies heavily on its people.

Ronald Spithout, Managing Director of OneHealth by VIKAND, recently spoke about the new tool at the International Maritime Human Factors Symposium (IMFHS) in London, stating that it underlined the concept of 'Crew Asset Management' – treating crew members as a ship's most valuable resource. He explained how real-time data gathering can revolutionise the maritime industry's approach to mental health, ensuring that seafarers receive the care and support they deserve. "The shift to digitalisation in maritime has massively impacted how we can support our seafarers. By capturing and monitoring wellness and health information in real-time, we can provide seafarers with medical advice and support unlike ever before. This is a huge step forward!" Spithout underscored.

How it works

Scoutbase's tool enables seafarers to provide anonymous feedback via a chatbot interface. Every 48 hours, it asks crew members a simple question from a rotating bank, such as "How are you sleeping lately?" or "What's the most stressful part of your job?" Responses are collected anonymously and analysed using artificial intelligence (AI), which assigns each response a sentiment score – positive, neutral, negative, or critical; the last of these triggers alerts, allowing for immediate action, including voluntary calls with mental health professionals.

The solution's simplicity has been key to its success, and with engagement rates surpassing 80%, Scoutbase has proven to be an effective method for encouraging seafarers to open up about their mental health. The system can engage with seafarers in 200 languages, and this has also been helping them to talk about what is really going on in their life on board. The user-friendly design not only provides a platform for self-expression but also generates actionable insights for ship operators.

From feedback to action

Scoutbase's data collection extends far beyond simply identifying issues – it transforms feedback into opportunities for improvement. For instance, on one ship, the collected input revealed that crew mattresses hadn't been updated in a decade. This insight led to a fleet-wide bedding upgrade, directly improving crew wellness and job satisfaction.

The tool's primary aim isn't to act as a digital complaint box but to empower ship operators with the data needed to make informed, proactive decisions. The insights generated can uncover systemic issues (such as workplace bullying, fatigue, or outdated safety protocols), and by addressing these challenges head-on, ship operators can enhance safety, productivity, and crew morale, ultimately supporting better business outcomes.

Shining a light

One of the biggest challenges facing the maritime industry is crew retention. Attracting new talent and retaining experienced seafarers requires creating a safe, satisfying, and supportive work environment so that tools like this can make seafarers feel valued and listened to. "Understanding how a crew is doing and what they need to succeed is the first step to creating a culture of proactive change," explained Yassin Askar, Co-founder of Scoutbase. "One client told us it's like shining a light on challenges that lurk in the shadows. To take those insights away now would be like going back to the dark ages."

By offering a platform for seafarers to express their concerns anonymously, Scoutbase acts as a pressure valve, allowing long-standing issues to surface in a constructive manner. For many ship operators, this represents a significant cultural shift towards prioritising the human element of their operations.

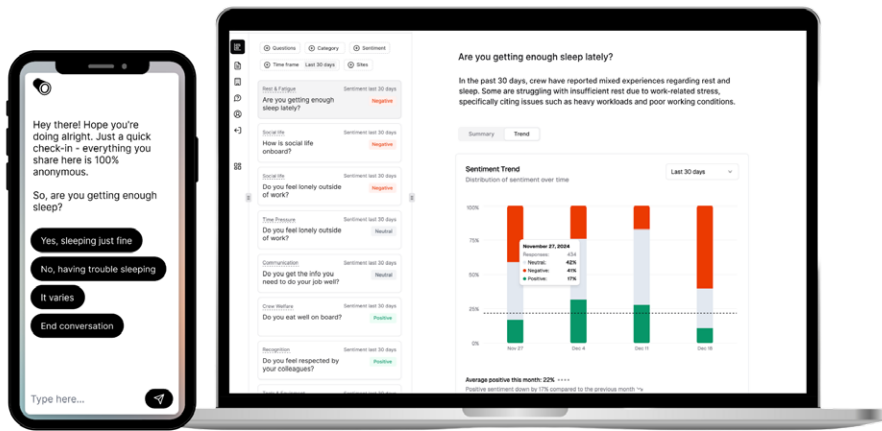


Photo: Scoutbase

crew morale, safety risks, and financial losses. The integration of Scoutbase’s technology into VIKAND’s healthcare solutions marks a shift towards proactive care. Operators can now identify and address challenges before they become major problems, creating a safer and more supportive work environment.

This shift is particularly important as the industry adapts to evolving workforce expectations. Younger generations entering the maritime field prioritise mental health and work-life balance, making technology such as that from Scoutbase essential for attracting and retaining talent.

The well-being of seafarers is more than just a moral obligation – it is vital for business. Fatigue, dissatisfaction, and mental health struggles can lead to accidents, injuries, and high turnover rates, all of which carry significant costs for ship operators. By addressing these issues proactively, VIKAND and Scoutbase are not only improving the lives of seafarers but also ensuring the long-term sustainability of the maritime industry. Yassin underlined, “Looking after seafarers must be our number one priority. With tools such as ours, we can give them a stronger voice, help operators make informed decisions, and create a brighter future for commercial shipping.”

Seafarers – empowered

As the maritime industry continues to embrace digitalisation, tools like VIKAND’s wellness data-collection platform will play an increasingly vital role in shaping its future. By empowering seafarers to share their concerns and enabling operators to act on real-time insights, this innovative solution is setting a new standard for mental health and well-being in the maritime sector.

Ultimately, the success of any ship depends on its crew, so by prioritising their mental health and addressing their needs proactively, VIKAND and Scoutbase are ensuring that the maritime industry remains resilient, efficient – and caring. □

Someone is listening


VIKAND has integrated Scoutbase’s safety and well-being platform into its healthcare solutions, creating a seamless system for collecting, analysing, and acting on crew feedback. This integration allows ship operators to address health, safety, and operational concerns more effectively than ever before.

One of the main features is the possibility for crew members to provide feedback anonymously without fear of retribution, fostering genuine openness. Data is analysed instantly, enabling proactive decision-making by shipping operators, who can then tailor feedback and advice to the needs of the individual seafarer. For instance, a crew member may be struggling with a mental health issue, flagged by their responses, and so they can be ‘nudged’ to contact a VIKAND psychologist by clicking a button. Sentiment analysis and predictive modelling also identify trends and

critical issues. “Our experience is that more people are opening up to AI rather than a human,” observed Ronald Spithout. “The whole idea of this tool is that it makes seafarers feel like someone is listening.”

Number one priority

Traditionally, decision-making in the maritime industry has been reactive. Issues were often addressed only after they had escalated, leading to reduced

 VIKAND provides proactive total healthcare solutions for the shipping, cruise, yachting, and offshore industries. Crew members and guests alike trust VIKAND to provide expert medical care, telemedicine, risk mitigation, and other valuable health services, and the world’s leading maritime companies rely on us to protect their most important asset at sea – people. Visit vikand.com to learn more.

 We support organisations in creating better and safer workplaces by helping to identify what makes work difficult for people. Scoutbase collects feedback, automatically and continuously, directly from seafarers about their work and life at sea and displays this in real time. Our interdisciplinary team combines safety science, design thinking, and technology to help improve work and life at sea. Discover more at scoutbase.com.