

Women in maritime 2020: And the winner was “Seacode”

The first Women in Maritime Lab - an innovation challenge with the objective to identify new concepts which could improve gender diversity in the maritime sector - was held in late 2020.

The winning idea, SeaCode, came from two teams who had merged around a common vision during the three-day event. One team came from Shell’s DPA (designated person ashore) group, and one from the Turkish maritime organisation Shefarers. The team members shared first-hand experience of life at sea, and they all had a strong desire to help drive change.



Their insight was that women seafarers who had experienced harassment or bullying often felt unsupported and alone. By providing a platform for peer-to-peer conversations, the aim of SeaCode was to provide a safe space for individuals to share their experiences and help one another as well as providing resources, and signposting other organisations who would be able to offer support. In addition, by using technology to codify these interactions, SeaCode would begin the process of collecting statistics to provide a more quantitative picture of what is really happening at sea.

The SeaCode team presented a credible and compelling case, which included user insight and a realistic roadmap to test the concept.

Ayse Asli Basak, the co-founder of Shefarers, described her experience *‘The Women in Maritime Lab is the first Hackathon program that collected ideas and people worldwide only for one purpose; to create a safe and equal workplace for women in maritime.’* Reflecting on the program, she praised the *‘amazing mentors.’* For her, the lab is *‘where dreams come true; from an idea to reality.’*

SeaCode from concept to creation

Once the three-day event was finished, the challenge was to bring SeaCode to life, to discover whether it could deliver the vision.

To support this, a Singapore based start-up Ivory was identified as the technology partner and early in 2021 work began to build and test the product. What followed was a series of experiments which demonstrated a strong user need but highlighted the challenge of reaching a maritime audience. Quite simply it was difficult to ensure that seafarers were aware of, able to use and trusted the platform. To address this, the pilot pivoted and a simple Facebook page in both English and Tagalog (the most prevalent Filipino language) was launched.



Within a couple of months, the site had over 1000 followers, and had become a space for interesting and thought-provoking conversations offering comfort and support as was originally envisaged.

SeaCode was up and running!

SeaCode today

The transition to social media demonstrated that SeaCode could become a valuable source of support. The final question teams then faced was what next?

How do we develop, scale, and sustain such an important platform?

Different options were assessed, but the most efficient lay around consolidating SeaCode under the umbrella of the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network's (ISWAN) services.

For ISWAN, the SeaCode platform offers peer-to-peer support and experience-sharing opportunities to seafarers as an alternative, or addition, to the organisation's helpline services; whilst for users of SeaCode, ISWAN's trained helpline staff are there to offer safe and skilled help and guidance wherever required.



On **SeaCode's consolidation under the ISWAN family**, Georgia Allen, Projects and Relationships Manager of ISWAN states *"ISWAN is very pleased to be taking over the management of the SeaCode platform and firmly believes in the motivations behind its development."* She continues *"The teams at Hafnia, Shell, Ivory, and BW, as well as the innovators who brought the idea to their attention, have done a tremendous job of taking SeaCode from an idea to a service that is being utilised by seafarers worldwide as a means of sharing their stories and having their voices heard. ISWAN's helplines SeafarerHelp and Yacht Crew Help, and the team's many years of experience providing assistance to seafarers who have experienced hardship, means that we are well-positioned to take on the SeaCode mission."*

"In the coming months, we will be developing the project's scope to further amplify the voices of abuse victims, improve access to quality support, and increase awareness of the issues being presented. Our ultimate goal is to facilitate greater sector understanding of why such abuse is happening, who it is happening to, and what can be done to prevent this for the future."

Whilst many initiatives can be challenged to be all talk and no impact, the winning idea from the Women in Maritime Lab – SeaCode – was fully realized and went from a rough concept to an experiment to a real product in less than a year.

Under the management of ISWAN, SeaCode will flourish – engaging with and supporting more individuals and seeking to make maritime a more inclusive place to work for all regardless of identity or background.