



## Costain's smooth transition to ISO 9001:2015

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**Tony Blanch,**  
Business Improvement Director,  
Costain Group

### Customer benefits:

- Improved alignment of quality management with organizational strategy
- Enhanced culture of business improvement
- Strengthened customer focus
- More proactive leadership
- Greater employee engagement
- Increased user-friendliness, for example, through mobile apps

### At a glance:

Leading UK engineering solutions provider Costain has long benefitted from a range of British and international standards, including ISO 9001 for quality management. It recently achieved certification to ISO 9001:2015, the latest version of the standard, reinforcing the company's risk-based management system and bringing a number of additional benefits.

The revised standard aligns quality with the strategic objectives of an organization and recognizes changes in the way companies now operate, from increasingly large and complex supply chains to the use of mobile technology over traditional quality manuals. Senior management at Costain took an active role in implementing the standard and empowering all staff to understand how they contribute to quality.

### Client background

Founded in 1865, Costain is a major British engineering and construction group with a proud history of landmark projects, including the Trans-Iranian Railway in the 1930s, the Channel Tunnel in the 1990s and, more recently, London's Crossrail.

Today, Costain employs over 4,300 people, providing engineering solutions in the UK and internationally. In 2014, the company reported profits of £28m on revenue of £1.1bn from its operations across diverse sectors, from roads and railways to water and nuclear.

Costain's standards journey began in 1992 when it first introduced ISO 9001 for quality management. With this building block in place, it has steadily embraced further standards, achieving certification to ISO 14001 (environmental management) BS OHSAS 18001 (occupational health and safety), BS 11000 (collaborative business relationships), ISO/IEC 27001 (information security) and ISO 22301 (business continuity management).

It recently became one of the first companies to achieve certification to ISO 9001:2015, the latest version of this renowned quality management standard.

### Why ISO 9001:2015?

Costain's certification to ISO 9001:2015 began in 2013 when the company rewrote its entire management system, known as 'The Costain Way'. As Tony Blanch, Costain's Business Improvement Director, explains, "We went through every single document to make it more user-friendly, as well as ensuring that they could be accessed with modern technology, as the system was very much 'app' based."

Blanch continues, "We then looked at the new version of ISO 9001 and realized that we had already addressed over 95% of what was required. As it really reflected the way we already did business, it made sense for us to be an early adopter."

As a customer-centric organization, maintaining a quality management system has helped Costain improve customer satisfaction and embed an ethos of continual improvement throughout the organization. In customer satisfaction surveys the company receives consistently high scores, and it can also demonstrate a high level of repeat business. "ISO 9001:2015 totally supports Costain's

'Engineering Tomorrow' strategy which is all about focusing on the customer," says Blanch.

### The benefits

The revised standard helps align quality with the strategic direction and objectives of an organization. "The new version of ISO 9001 has actually moved closer to the way Costain operates," says Blanch. "It is refreshing as it very much mirrors the way we do business and the way we plan on working in the future."

ISO 9001:2015 adopts 'risk-based thinking' throughout the standard for the first time, encouraging organizations to look at opportunities as well as threats. It is an approach that fits perfectly with Costain's wider risk-based strategy, increasing resilience and boosting performance through the integration of ISO 9001:2015 with ISO/IEC 27001 and ISO 22301.

Another benefit of the standard is that it helps manage the burden of compliance. "Many of our stakeholders are water, electricity, oil or gas suppliers, so there are lots of regulatory obligations we need to meet," says Blanch. "The new standard helps us meet regulators' expected, contractual and implied requirements."

On a practical level, ISO 9001:2015 also recognizes the use of today's technology, enabling Costain's employees to access information through mobile 'apps' and digital databases, rather than through paper documents and manuals.

### Implementation

Having operated a risk-based management system for many years, Costain found there was little extra work required to meet the requirements of ISO 9001:2015. "But there were some small differences with The Costain Way, and some new terminology we had to familiarize ourselves with," says Blanch.

"First of all read the standard, it's not as daunting as you may think," he advises. "There may be some unfamiliar terms. For example 'interested parties' is used in the standard, but we found it just meant what we refer to as 'stakeholders'."

"Our next priority was to explain the changes to top management and get their buy-in," says Blanch. "The new standard makes it very clear what is expected of top management and the

rest of the organization. We had to make sure that we audited leadership, and we were more explicit about conveying some of the messages from the leadership team."

With all employees already engaged with The Costain Way, and with this existing management system so closely in line with ISO 9001:2015, most of the business was already supporting the new version of the standard – even if unknowingly.

With ISO 9001:2015 written in a new format called 'Annex SL' or 'High Level Structure' (HLS), it follows a similar format to other new management system standards, including ISO 14001, ISO/IEC 27001 and ISO 22301. "Having already achieved other management system standards in Annex SL, we already had some idea of what the new ISO 9001 would look like," says Blanch.

### BSI's role

BSI has played a key role in supporting Costain's transition to ISO 9001:2015.

"The process started when I attended a BSI seminar on the new standard," says Blanch. "After the BSI event I met with our leadership team to explain what the new standard would offer."

He continues, "Once they could see that Costain already did most of what was required, we agreed it made sense to certify to the new version as soon as possible."

The actual transition process took Costain about six months from start to finish and Blanch says the process was fairly painless, "We were doing much of what the new standard required already, but BSI has always been readily available to guide us whenever we've needed it."

His advice to others contemplating ISO 9001:2015 is simple, "Spend time and talk to BSI."

Start your transition to the new standards and find out how BSI can help your business make excellence a habit.

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