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How the built environment sector can boost productivity with best practice

A maturity model helps organizations benchmark, build capability, and embed consensus-based best practices to drive productivity

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1. Foreword from Dr Scott Steedman CBE, Director-General, Standards

The UK Government's National Infrastructure Strategy published in late 2020 set out an ambitious plan to "deliver an infrastructure revolution: a radical improvement in the quality of the UK's infrastructure." The plan aims to tackle both the short-term recovery from Covid-19 and the long-term issues that have held back UK infrastructure. Key to this is boosting productivity, improving delivery and driving towards net zero emissions.

The government's strategy is clear and ambitious, as is its desire to overcome many of the fundamental challenges that have prevented the infrastructure sector living up to its full potential. The appetite in the plan for transformation is evident and this is reflected in the high level of activity we see today in government and industry to accelerate change across the sector.

Our vision as BSI is to drive greater productivity, resilience and sustainability across all industry sectors through the effective development and implementation of consensus based best practices, captured in actionable, market led standards that will support the delivery of national policy and industry ambition. Best practice standards are one of the most important tools that we have available to accelerate industry transformation and improve infrastructure delivery and outcomes.

We want to drive more widespread consensus building and collaboration on the most pressing issues facing the sector. We are making good progress in developing the standards that will underpin change, but we now need to encourage organizations across industry to take up the new and improved practices and to move forward together in a common and collaborative way.

I was pleased to see the publication of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority's (IPA) new Construction Playbook last year and the drive towards a greater level of consistency across government projects. I welcome the positive impact that initiatives such as the industry led Project 13 have had over recent years in smarter and more sustainable project delivery. Our paper calls these out as leading examples of the value of consensus and use of best practice on which we can build a standards based approach.

We know that standards and best practice are viewed very differently depending on sector, company size and business priorities, so in this paper we have proposed a simple maturity model approach, which any organization can use to some effect straight away. We hope this model will generate further debate around the wider opportunity for using standards more effectively, which many of our stakeholders see as substantial and very urgent.

There has never been a more important moment to think deeply about how we reform our ways of working in a post-Covid, post-Brexit world to focus on the priorities of digital transformation and sustainability. We hope that this paper will make an important contribution to the debate and will provide a practical route forward to support the government's infrastructure revolution.

2. Executive summary

Infrastructure programmes face ever-rising challenges to deliver on time and to budget, and to address productivity issues along with the industry as a whole. How can they make better use of consensus-driven best practices to improve performance?

The UK construction sector has been held back by productivity that is well behind the wider economy. This challenge is being addressed through a variety of industry initiatives, many of which are transforming the sector for the better; we highlight the ICG's Project 13 and the government's Construction Playbook as great examples of change.

We do not intend to put forward any alternative or contradictory initiative. Rather, we want to draw attention to the role that best practice can play in supporting these initiatives and how this can help to create a more productive, greener and more responsible infrastructure sector.

2.1. Why standards and best practice

Standards typically set out consensus around best practice in a particular topic. Research has found that 37% of UK productivity growth can be attributed to standards. However, this fluctuates wildly across sectors. A key variable is the way standards are used, both in terms of the number and method of use.

Through industry engagement and research, we have found that standards and best practice, if used correctly, can play a key role in driving collaboration and alignment both horizontally (client to client) and vertically (throughout the supply chain).

Many leading infrastructure organizations understand this, and there are some strong examples of best practice being created and used to great benefit. However, there are still clear opportunities for improvement.

This paper explores some of these opportunities and the type of benefits that can be achieved.

Critically, we also find that the sectors and clients that gain the most benefit from standards and best practices tend to view these less for compliance and more as a tool for value creation. A narrow view of standards misses the opportunity of capitalizing on the vast amount of best practices that exist, providing consensus-driven and often cross industry agreement of what good looks like covering a wide range of key thematic areas.

A shift in mindset is key to generating the maximum benefit and productivity enhancement from having a more mature best practice focus.

2.2. A maturity model for best practice

We acknowledge that applying best practice is not the most clear-cut initiative to tackle. Standards are mostly a facilitator; as such it can be difficult to demonstrate clear and direct value for an individual organization. Nevertheless, they are a critical enabler to close the productivity gap as an industry, and a fundamental part of ongoing industry initiatives.

Therefore, in this paper we set out a model for organizations to start to assess their maturity, using our five-step framework to help them understand their level.

BSI's Best Practice Maturity Model provides a useful starting-point. It helps organizations to assess where they are; where they need to get to so they can maximize their performance; and what they need to do to get there.

Figure 1: Maturity model outcomes

Step	Outcome
Awareness	The organization is aware of the opportunity around consensus-driven best practices, and continually scans and evaluates relevant content
Application	The organization applies a value-driven use of consensus-based best practices where relevant across its operations, with clear goals and measurements
Content Development	The organization has a flexible, consensus-driven approach to the development of best practice, both internally and in collaboration with the industry
Content Management	The organization maintains a well-organized, consistent and appropriately performance-based set of standards and best practices that drive efficiency through the supply chain
Collaboration	The organization participates in a dynamic, outcome-driven exchange of information, working with others across the industry to capture and define the latest best practices

3. The construction productivity challenge

Construction is the only major UK industry that has failed to improve its productivity over the last 20 years. With an estimated £600 billion of spending in the UK infrastructure pipeline, tackling this problem is a national challenge.

Major projects face the toughest challenges – reportedly 98% of them have incurred cost overruns or delays[1]. The root causes have been widely reported and debated so this paper will not delve into them further; instead it focuses on the scale of the problem and the work that is being done to address this.

3.1. What is the industry doing about it?

Government and industry are driving initiatives to transform the way infrastructure projects are being delivered.

The Infrastructure Client Group's Project 13 initiative aims to boost productivity by delivering projects through collaborative enterprises, with a number of early adopters of the model leading the way. Other industry initiatives, such as the Construction Sector Deal (focusing on greater investment in innovation and skills) and the Transport Infrastructure Efficiency Challenge (a cross-organizational initiative to drive collaboration and efficiency opportunities across major programmes) are also working toward this goal.

More recently, infrastructure delivery is also under pressure to demonstrate its contribution to net zero and social value. The government's Construction Playbook outlines further changes in the approach to infrastructure delivery, tying into the government's strategy to build back better, faster and greener.

> "Projects and programmes should start with an initial workshop, bringing together the delivery team, leadership, and key stakeholders to set expectations on standards, behaviours and ways of working, align success measures and objectives, and outline how the individual project is supporting an organisation's goals."
>
> The Construction Playbook

[1] McKinsey & Company: The construction productivity imperative, June 2015»

Spotlight: Construction Playbook

The Construction Playbook is the result of extensive collaboration from across the public and private sectors to bring together expertise and best practices.

The Construction Playbook is focused on getting projects and programmes right from the start. This approach to 'front end loading' is aimed at improving the potential for successful outcomes.

It aims to drive transformational change by systematically approaching risk, sustainability and innovation across portfolios of projects and programmes, addressing low levels of productivity and future skills shortages.

The policies in the Playbook aim to:

- Set clear and appropriate outcome-based specifications that are designed with the input of industry to ensure we drive continuous improvement and innovation.
- Favour longer term contracting across portfolios, where it is appropriate. The UK Government will develop long-term plans for key asset types and programmes to drive greater value through public spending.
- Standardize designs, components and interfaces as much as is possible.
- Drive innovation and modern methods of construction, through standardization and aggregation of demand, increased client capability and setting clear requirements of suppliers.
- Create sustainable, win-win contracting arrangements that incentivize better outcomes, improve risk management and promote the general financial health of the sector.
- Strengthen financial assessment of suppliers and prepare for the rare occasions when things go wrong, with the introduction of resolution planning information requirements into critical contracts.
- Increase the speed of end-to-end project and programme delivery by investing up front with time and resources to set projects up for success.

So where do standards and best practices play their role? Standards are undoubtedly widely used in some form or another across any programme or project. But we examine the varying levels of usage with associated benefits, and why they can be seen as a critical component of industry initiatives to solve the productivity imperative.

Organizations that embrace best practices and seek to generate value through creating and applying consensus-driven content can boost productivity and realize significant benefits.

BSI industry engagement found that organizations have varied views on the purpose and opportunity around a standards and best practice-led approach. More precisely, it was found that the two go hand-in-hand, with those realizing the most value placing more importance on consensus-driven best practices.

4. Consensus-driven best practice: a tool for boosting productivity

In this section we explore why a greater focus on standards and best practices is a critical element of high performing infrastructure enterprises and, if used correctly, can drive real benefits.

Our research has demonstrated that consensus-based best practice, or standards, can eliminate many of the current drags on productivity. They are a relatively simple measure – and a highly effective one.

With standards, organizations can:

- Exploit the advances that are transforming other industries
- Deliver high-quality infrastructure by following consistent guidelines
- Speed up operations by following repeatable practices and processes

4.1. Defining standards and best practice

Simply put, a standard is an agreed way of doing, thinking about or managing something.

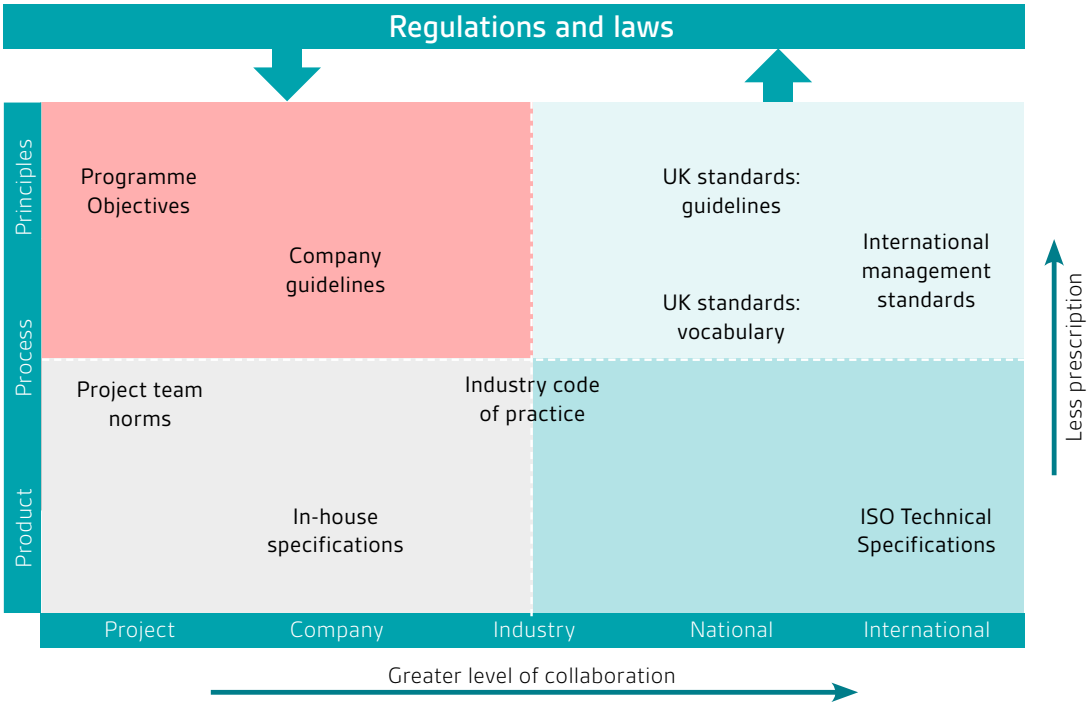
There is no set structure for a standard; it can provide requirements, specifications, guidelines or principles. It can set out an agreed way of doing something, or contain a more specific set or requirements or specifications that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose.

While they vary in form and usage, the common factor is that they represent a consensus-driven view on what good looks like, which can be defined as a "best practice". To create a standard, there needs to be agreement on some level, whether between company stakeholders, industry experts or government bodies. **Therefore, behind every standard there is collaboration.**

Standards can be prescriptive, such as those used for product safety purposes or for other applications where a high degree of certainty and assurance is required. Or they can be performance-based, allowing for a degree of flexibility and innovation while defining the agreed target outcome.

Standards are voluntary in nature, however they can complement regulations and form part of the same infrastructure. For example, standards can provide more detail and guidance for organizations that want to adhere to the rules set out in legislation, and they also support industry-led consensus in response to risk and outcome based regulatory environments.

Figure 2: Types of good practice (including examples)



4.2. The proven benefits of standards

An independent study by the Centre for Economics and Business Research found that "Standardization drives productivity growth by enhancing organizational efficiency, boosting trade and facilitating innovation. At a microeconomic level … close to half of companies report a net benefit from standards."

The report also found that:

- The UK's most productive sectors are the ones that use standards the most
- Over 37% of UK productivity growth can be attributed to standards
- Half the organizations surveyed said standards encourage innovation through the diffusion of knowledge
- 70% said standards improved their supplier products and services
- Standards increased gross value added for the sectors surveyed by £6.9bn a year

"Over 37% of UK productivity growth can be attributed to standards."

Centre for Economics and Business Research

Case study: How standards cut escalator costs in London

London Underground (LU) learned it could make significant potential savings by simplifying the standards it was using for escalators.

By challenging its own specifications, LU was able to develop a new modern specification for its escalators. This process led to a significant simplification of their requirements.

For example, an escalator installed at Oxford Circus under the old LU specification cost £1.7m. Using their new requirements, a similar escalator was installed at Charing Cross for around £0.8 million – **a saving of around 50%.**

The Crossrail project gave LU the opportunity to increase savings compared with the original bespoke proprietary LU escalator design. The Crossrail procurement team included key members from the Olympics, where common purchasing arrangements to clear standards had radically reduced costs, increased innovation and delivered successfully. **The design for the 57 escalators needed was 90%** standard (based on EN11), with bespoke additions such as electromagnetic compatibility protection. This reduced not only Crossrail's purchase costs but also its civils cost.

By moving from proprietary bespoke to formal standards-based escalator design and procurement, **LU saved around £87 million on escalator costs and Crossrail saved 25% on overall escalator provision.**

Case Study: Anglian Water created consensus-driven best practice to deliver value

In 2010, there was growing concern about the infrastructure sector's high carbon emissions and associated costs. A government-commissioned review by the Green Construction Board found that infrastructure is responsible for over 50% of the UK's carbon emissions.

Then in 2013, while working on the HM Treasury Infrastructure Carbon Review, Anglian Water connected with BSI. Together, we began work on producing a framework that would give all parts of the infrastructure value chain a common language and process to reduce both carbon and cost.

The result was PAS 2080 Carbon Management in Infrastructure: a fast-track standard developed by a steering-group of stakeholders from all across the value chain. It was published in 2016, together with a guidance document that gives users practical examples of how to act on the framework's principles.

David Riley, Anglian Water's Head of Carbon Neutrality, was part of the steering-group who developed the PAS. His company had already adopted many of its principles, and in 2016 it became the world's first organization to have its carbon management process independently verified to PAS 2080. Since then, it has strongly encouraged its supply chain partners to get verified.

"The real power that comes from PAS 2080 is not just that it's a common framework, but that product suppliers, contractors, designers and asset owners can all be verified to it," says David Riley. "When you've got the whole value chain operating in the same way, that's where the magic happens in releasing lower carbon solutions."

Since 2010, Anglian Water has reduced its capital carbon by 61%.

"PAS 2080 provides a common framework and guidance for the whole value chain to tackle the carbon challenge. It is essential for clients, designers, contractors and suppliers to work together if we are going to drive to drive a low carbon future."

Adam Crossley, Director of Environment at Skanska

4.3. Five key opportunities from standards and best practice

Opportunity	Commentary	A better outcome
Opportunity 1: Building consensus on methods to tackle the most pressing issues	As the industry looks to build back better and greener, programmes and organizations across the sector face the same challenges. These include the safe and efficient delivery of infrastructure; a drive towards net zero; adoption of innovation; and responsible and ethical construction. Consensus can be built around these issues at programme level, industry-wide and cross-sector.	The most pressing challenges facing the industry can most effectively be solved through collaboration and common working between organizations across the industry and supply chain. This can be facilitated by building consensus around the best practice approach to address these challenges, including: • Common frameworks • Common principles and guidance • Best practice use cases
Opportunity 2: Driving supply chain efficiencies	In-house company standards portfolios can be complex and inefficient. Many company standards are out of date, others overlap, and requirements are often unclear or can be interpreted differently. Over-prescriptive standards and confusion around mandatory versus advisory requirements can also drive up costs and block innovative solutions.	Organizations that simplify and rationalize their standards portfolios can drive significant cost and performance efficiencies. These include reduced tender costs; less likelihood of change; faster procurement and delivery; easier sharing across partners and suppliers; and a more professional image that enhances corporate reputation.
Opportunity 3: Standardizing products/design	Traditionally, elements of buildings or infrastructure assets have been designed on a bespoke, project or site-specific basis. This causes inefficiency from unnecessary re-design and less streamlined operations.	Delivery partners can examine the size of the opportunity to eliminate duplication and other inefficiencies, then promote this opportunity across programmes. Embracing standardization enables partners to identify repeatable tasks/design, then apply them inexpensively to a wide range of projects.
Opportunity 4: Quicker adoption of innovation	Digital transformation is still in its infancy in the construction sector. The problem is not so much about creating new technology or ideas, but adopting them. For example, BIM has been available for decades. But supply chains have been slow to adopt it, so its effectiveness has been hampered.	When suppliers clearly understand how and why to adopt these approaches, innovation can work its way throughout the entire supply chain. Shared standards can instil increased trust and confidence in new technologies and approaches, supporting faster take-up.
Opportunity 5: Greater transparency and confidence	Both industry and regulators want confidence they are working towards a common outcome, in particular around major sector challenges such as the move to net zero. Varying approaches make it challenging to compare and benchmark organizations, and for organizations to demonstrate their impacts.	Setting best practice outcomes and methods, and encouraging more organizations to work in line with these, provides: 1) Confidence for the organization that it is working to approved and agreed methods 2) Confidence for government/ regulators that the industry is working towards an agreed outcome

Spotlight: Specifying successful standards

Back in 2012 the Rail Industry Standards Group undertook an industry enquiry into how standards and specifications can enable the UK to innovate, lower costs and improve whole life value of our infrastructure assets.

The review concluded with several key recommendations for how organizations should best create, manage and use standards and best practices.

- As much as possible, define performance and outcome-based requirements rather than prescription
- Organize standards within a hierarchy, clearly distinguishing between mandatory requirements and advisory guidance
- Reduce conflicting requirements or differing interpretations to drive greater consistency
- Ensure requirements are clear, accessible and promote innovation to empower their supply chain to challenge and innovate
- Demonstrate clear value for money within their in-house standards development processes

While the review focused on the UK transport sector, its recommendations are also applicable to other UK infrastructure sectors.

4.4. Realizing the hidden value of standards

To gain full value from standardization, many organizations need to fundamentally change how they view and use best practice.

As discussed in Section 4.1 above, there are many different types of standards with varying purposes and structures. Many of these contain highly prescriptive content, acknowledged to be an essential part of a highly-functioning industry, providing confidence and assurance to buyers and customers.

Other standards outline core requirements of organizational management systems. ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and ISO 450001 are some of the most-used standards. By certifying organizations to these requirements, clients can easily be assured that their suppliers meet expected levels in terms of quality, health and safety or environmental management. This saves considerable time and risk when contracting with suppliers.

While these types are hugely important to a productive marketplace, these are by no means the only standards in existence. A host of industry and issue-specific standards includes other requirements, codes of practice, guidance, verification methods and frameworks, and terminology.

All this is consensus-driven content. Organizations come together to agree the criteria, through collaborative processes that require agreement across a wide variety of stakeholders with differing perspectives and priorities. This type of content is hugely valuable and should be the starting-point for anyone looking to work on a certain topic.

But too much of this content is still barely used, as many organizations are still unaware that it has already been developed.

The risk of an overly compliance-driven approach

When companies see standards as a productivity blocker instead of a driver, it's usually because of two approaches:

1) Standards are prescribed by clients for quality control and risk mitigation, leading suppliers to see standards as akin to regulation

2) Over-prescriptive use of standards has the unintended result of blocking rather than facilitating flexibility and innovation

"Companies which say that standards inform innovation and that regulations constrain it, tend to be the most innovative."

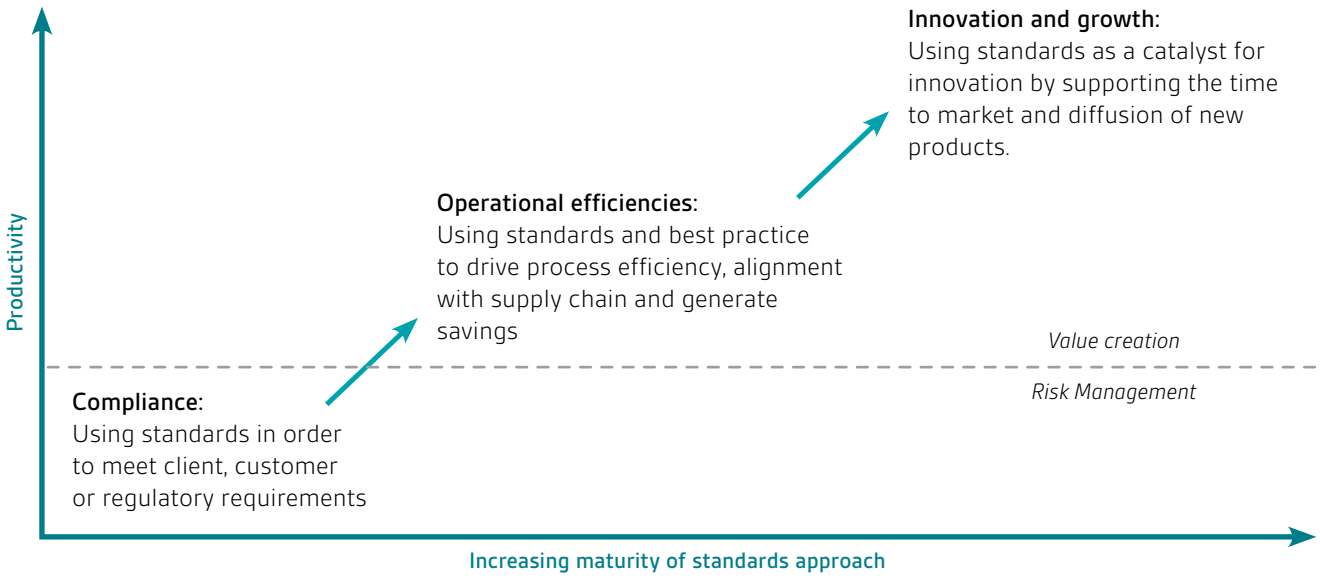
Swann and Lambert (2010)

4.4.1. From risk management to value creation

In summary, organizations using standards only as a tool for risk management significantly limit their productivity gains.

But some leading organizations are taking a different view, making a cultural shift to seeing standards as a tool for value creation. This is unlocking the wider benefits, where standards contribute to efficiencies, innovation and growth.

Figure 3: Varying usage of standards



Spotlight: Project 13

The Infrastructure Client Group's Project 13 initiative seeks:

- A move away from the traditional focus on transactional arrangements, such as lowest tender costs and passing risk down the supply chain
- A new enterprise-based model – where the client takes ownership and brings all its supply chain partners together to collaborate on delivering the end outcomes and to jointly manage risk

The goal: to boost productivity in delivery, improve whole-life outcomes in operation, and support a more innovative, highly-skilled industry.

One of Project 13's five principles is 'integration', because this new collaborative approach depends on getting the best out of all parties involved in a project. Asset owners and operators need to work collaboratively with their main contractors and their supply chains – sharing both the risks and the rewards.

Project 13's principles are at the heart of BSI's work in helping organizations to embed best practice and drive performance.

"Owners go to great lengths to procure new collaborative contracts and build a new team of partners. But they are let down by not having the basics in place that enable the different organizations to work effectively together, such as reliable and common systems."

Infrastructure Client Group, From Transactions to Enterprises, March 2017

5. How to use our maturity model approach

Embedding consensus-driven best practice is therefore critical to being a successful enterprise.

But getting there is a journey. Organizations need to know where they are on the path and how to get to where they want to be.

BSI has developed a framework to help them: the Best Practice Maturity Model. It enables organizations to benchmark, build capability, and embed a culture of best practice that **will drive increased productivity and achieve all the value-creating benefits of standards.**

5.1. The Best Practice Maturity Model

A good organization...	Simple best practice focus	Building capabilities	Adaptive enterprise
Builds awareness	• Has a broad view of relevant best practices and their usage • Promotes the use of best practice as a value driver • Scans the market for best practices	• Has a strategy to identify best practice needs and solutions • Identifies best practice or standards gaps and needs • Ensures all relevant functions are aware of best practices	• Continuously scans (within and beyond partner network) for changes to best practice • Builds best practice alignment into performance management • Communicates benefits of using best practice
Drives application	• Identifies best practice as a toolkit to deliver on strategy • Benchmarks itself against relevant best practices • Identifies opportunities for increased alignment and performance improvement	• Builds common systems (policies, processes, procedures) in line with best practice • Builds skills and capabilities in line with best practice • Follows best practice frameworks or methods	• Assesses performance and drives improvements • Measures the impact of standardization and matches this to KPIs and rewards • Updates and refreshes as best practices develop
Focuses on content development	• Develops best practice content • Infrastructure owner owns best practices across programme • Agrees common objectives and policies at programme level	• Has processes for the systematic development of new consensus driven content across partners • Incorporates aligned best practices into tender requirements for suppliers • Participates in development of industry and national best practice	• Jointly agrees best practice with partners, with input from external stakeholders to build wider consensus • Applies a flexible/dynamic approach to review and evolve best practice • Leads / sponsors development of industry and national best practice
Efficiently manages content	• Ensures standards are clearly organized and professionally presented • Ensures standards portfolios do not conflict, overlap or contradict • Ensures standards are up to date, relevant and in line with industry and national standards	• Groups and structures standards and best practices across processes and asset classes • Clearly defines and signposts mandatory and advisory requirements • Applies performance- based and prescriptive standards appropriately, with outcomes defined where possible	• Continuously manages standards portfolios with clear ownership • Uses digital portals for managing, sharing standards portfolios across supply chain and incorporating feedback • Captures and reports data on the value of standards development and management
Collaborates	• Promotes best practice, knowledge and innovation sharing across programmes • Agrees programme objectives including collaboration and knowledge-sharing • Has processes for knowledge management and retention	• Incentivizes knowledge-sharing across programmes • Builds knowledge-sharing platforms across programmes • Builds knowledge-sharing requirements into supplier contracts	• Ensures dynamic, systematic and outcome-driven exchange of best practice across industry collaboration networks • Builds measurable knowledge-sharing targets into programme KPIs • Participates in industry knowledge-sharing around best practices

5.1.1. What the maturity model shows

The model outlines **three maturity levels for organizations**:

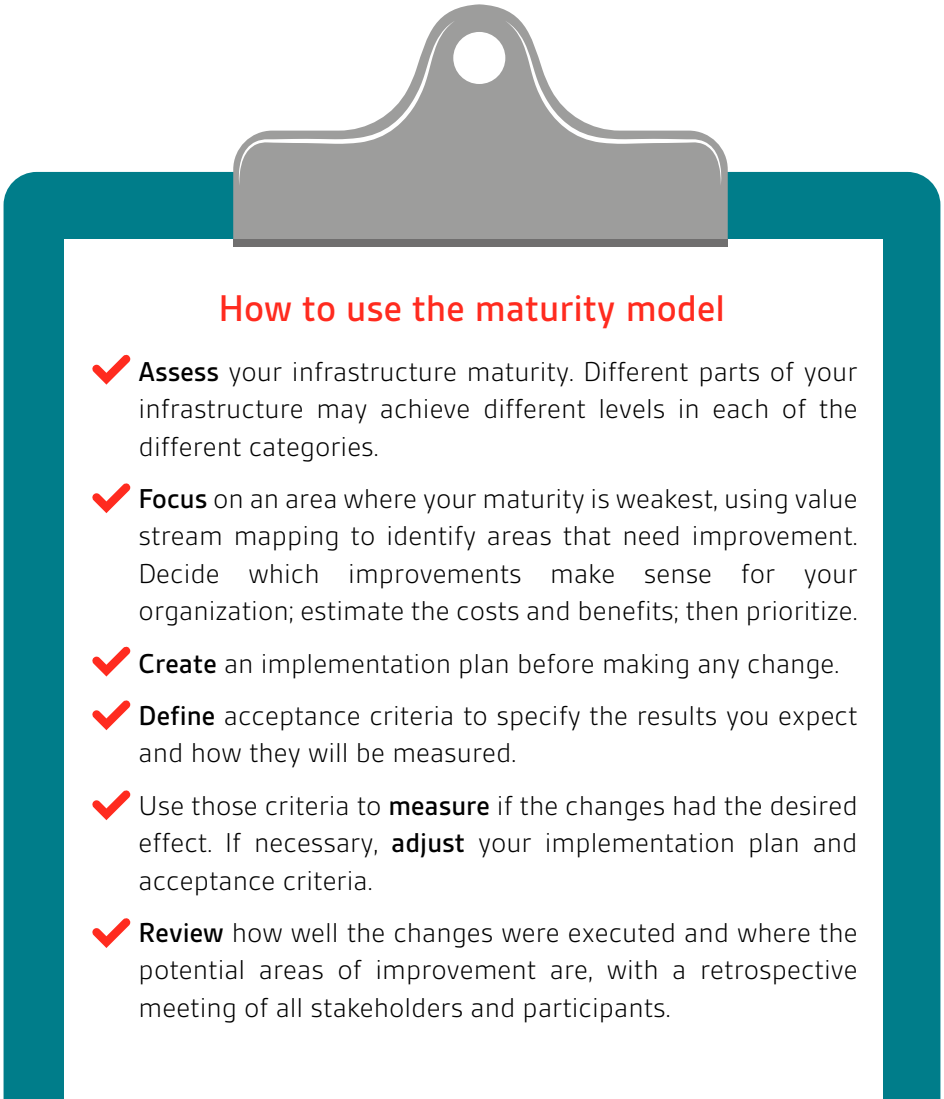
1. A simple approach to best practice – one that's a good start, but does not yet measure and demonstrate significant benefit.
2. A more advanced level – building capabilities in using, creating and sharing best practice.
3. A high-performing, adaptive enterprise – one that is focused on value creation, uses standards to drive innovation and growth, and continuously scans and evaluates best practice in order to keep improving.

This maturity model sets out what good looks like on an organization's journey to embedding consensus-driven best practices. Even a simple best practice focus starts to give organizations an edge, but real value comes from building capabilities and becoming an adaptive enterprise.

The model also sets out **five actions for organizations** to improve their:

1. Awareness
2. Application
3. Content development
4. Content management
5. Collaboraton

The data shows how advancing each of the five actions drives the evolution of the organization. Although different organizations will progress at different speeds and in different ways, they can all use this table to assess their progress in making the transition to a high-performing, adaptive enterprise.



6. Conclusion and next steps

The benefits of using standards and best practice are proven. Done effectively, it enables organizations to reduce risk; increase innovation; demonstrate quality; build reputation; improve performance; and drive growth.

That's why improving construction programme productivity depends on best practice. It's often overlooked as a priority, but that thinking needs to change. By coordinating best practice across programmes, infrastructure owners can create a culture of alignment, consistency and repeatability that will both support new delivery models and drive efficiencies.

6.1. Getting started

As the UK's National Standards Body, BSI has developed its Best Practice Maturity Model to help organizations achieve this goal by embedding best practice and getting full value from standardization. The first step is to find out where your organization is now, then work out what you can do to gain the full benefits.

BSI offers a simple Maturity Assessment to get you started. For more details on this, and on how best to use standards in your construction programme, contact us here.

About BSI

BSI is the business improvement and standards company that enables organizations to turn standards of best practice into habits of excellence, 'inspiring trust for a more resilient world'. For over a century, BSI has driven best practice in organizations around the world.

Working with over 77,500 clients across 195 countries, it is a truly global business with skills and experience across all sectors including automotive, aerospace, built environment, food and retail and healthcare. Through its expertise in Standards and Knowledge, Assurance Services, Regulatory Services and Consulting Services, BSI helps clients to improve their performance, grow sustainably, manage risk and ultimately become more resilient.

About Knowledge Services

BSI's Knowledge Services provides tailored standards-centric services to help the private sector, governments, trade associations and governmental organizations tackle the strategic and operational challenges they face.

Our service gives you the right minds for the right solutions because we draw on relevant expertise from across BSI and from our vast network of experts. This gives you a multidisciplinary team that can address your specific needs – whether you need better standards management, new content development, insight and analysis, strategic advice, or transformation activities.

Our team is both independent and neutral. We bring together consultants, information specialists and researchers with quantitative and qualitative skills, and standards development experts.

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