

Implementing a quality management system that is audited by a third party has helped Klohn Crippen Berger ensure that their projects run successfully.

Quality Management Systems

Setting corporate standards is by far the easiest part of improving the way a company operates. The most challenging part is implementing those corporate standards. Doing so requires communicating expectations to staff, reinforcing standards through strong leadership, and routinely checking that standards are followed – time and time again.

In the 1990s Klohn Crippen Berger (KCB), a global engineering consulting company based in Vancouver, found itself working hard on challenging projects. Meanwhile, however, the company was struggling to maintain profitability and grow sustainably.

The company leaders at the time recognized that project management practices were not consistent, and that a project's execution and profitability were only as good as the person who was managing the project. This was a problem.

It was clear that inconsistent project management techniques were resulting in increased project write-offs and weak profit margins. Although the company had quality control manuals, they were not being effectively and consistently implemented company-wide. Something had to change.

In the mid 1990s, the leadership team decided to develop a series of best practices for managing projects and framed it in a Quality Management System (QMS). This process laid the foundation for altering the culture and direction of the company. By implementing a QMS, KCB showed its project managers and technical staff what was expected of them and what they were accountable for, while giving them the tools to execute projects successfully.

Solidifying best practices with ISO certification

KCB took their QMS to the next level by registering it to the ISO 9001 standard in 1999. The standard requires a system to routinely measure client satisfaction and to check on the company's performance through third party audits.

KCB invested in ISO registration because the leadership team saw the benefit of having third party auditors regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the QMS and suggest improvements on how it was being implemented. It

would also be a mechanism for identifying problems early so that corrective action could be taken.

By 2002, KCB started to see a turnaround and by 2013, the company won BSI Canada's Award of Excellence in Quality Management for the implementation of their system in multiple sites.

Bryan Watts, chief executive officer of KCB, says: "Our management system is the cornerstone of our financial success, proven by the fact that our write-offs are now less than one per cent a year, which I attribute directly to the implementation of our QMS."

Vigilance is key

There is nothing magic about implementing quality management systems. It comes down to taking the time to determine what's important to the organization, writing it down in short and simple procedures, setting out bench-

marks to measure success and communicating expectations to staff on a continual basis.

The most important piece of the puzzle is to follow through on the implementation and improvements. KCB works with BSI Canada as its third party auditor to ensure that their QMS is effective and that corporate goals are being met.

Applying lessons learned in new areas

KCB has recently extended its ISO registration to other areas of the business.

In 2014, the company was certified to the ISO 14001 standard for environmental management systems and the OHSAS 18001 standard for occupational health and safety systems. Now all areas of the organization are managed through an integrated system that includes quality, health and safety, and environmental components.

KCB describes its integrated management system in an annual sustainability report which details how the company considers social, environmental and economic aspects in its business operations.

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Steve Hsiung, BSI Canada Auditor (right) interviewing Laura Bennett from Klohn Crippen Berger during an integrated management system audit in Calgary in April.

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