



A World of Standards

Nils Brunsson, Bengt Jacobsson

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In the modern world there is no shortage of people who know what is best for others. Self-appointed experts, consultants, and organizations try to convince states, corporations, and individuals that they would be better off if they only followed some specific rules about what to do. There are 'experts' in almost every field of human activity, from the management of companies to the management of our own health. Even organizations as powerful as states and large corporations follow rules provided by others on how to organize, which policies to pursue, what kinds of services to provide, or how their products should be designed. These rules are presented as being voluntary and advisory. They are standards, not mandatory directives, and in modern life standards abound. They may concern what characteristics a telephone should have, how a company should report its financial transactions, how contracts should be worded, what structure an organization should have, how children should be brought up and educated, how to play tennis, and so forth.

This book discusses standards and standardization as a form of regulation. The authors argue that standards enable a higher degree of global order in the modern world than would exist without them. They facilitate coordination and cooperation on a global scale, creating similarities and homogeneity even among peoples and organizations that are quite different. The author believe that standardization is a much neglected area of social science - an area that has by no means received the attention it deserves in view of its importance to society. This book seeks to redress the balance by providing an in-depth examination of a number of aspects of standardization, how it is formed, and what effects it has on the world in which we live.

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