

# **Standards and Best Practices**

A Working Paper for the Best Practices in Public Management Project<sup>1</sup>

Paul Minard and Leslie A. Pal<sup>2</sup>

August 30, 2012

Comments welcomed by the authors:

[paulminard@gmail.com](mailto:paulminard@gmail.com) and [leslie\\_pal@carleton.ca](mailto:leslie_pal@carleton.ca)

---

<sup>1</sup> Details on this SSHRC-funded project can be found at: <http://www.publicpolicy.utoronto.ca/ppgr/BestPractices/>

<sup>2</sup> Paul Minard is a doctoral candidate in public administration at Carleton University. Leslie Pal is Chancellor's Professor, School of Public Policy and Administration, Carleton University.

## **Section 1 - Introduction**

Institutional theory has long recognized that social gains are realized when uncertainty in human interaction is reduced (North, 1990). Multiple rules, norms, and social and cognitive structures have evolved which might perform this function. In the modern period of globalized economic exchange and the relatively open migration of people and information, standards have emerged as a species of regulation that allows adopters to realize mutual gains. Though standardization in the modern period was initially driven by the need to coordinate industrial production, particularly during the Second World War (Higgins and Tamm Hallstrom, 2007; Timmermans and Epstein, 2010), these “rules for common and voluntary use” (Brunsson et al, 2012) have become increasingly ubiquitous. Even in the field of public administration, long governed by hierarchical structures of accountability, standards are an increasingly common means of both coordinating the governance functions performed by multiple jurisdictions and ensuring quality in the delivery of government services to citizens.

Numerous questions remain, however, as to how standards are most usefully conceptualized, and of the relevance of standards and “best practices” to public administration. Some economic scholars, working in a tradition indebted to rational choice theory, emphasize the voluntary nature of standards, and explain the existence of standards through the mutually beneficial realization of network externalities that result from coordination (Spruyt, 2001). Others, working in a more sociological tradition, suggest that standards are followed according not to a logic of calculation, but a logic of appropriateness (Fransen, 2011; Timmerman and Epstein, 2010). In public administration, debate on standards has centered on generalizability across jurisdictions (Loffler, 2000; Andrews, 2008), and on whether the concept of “best practice” is

useful in the context of public administration (Overman and Boyd, 1994; Brettschneider et al, 2005; Bardach, 2003; Barzelay, 2007; Ongaro, 2009).

Though we do not attempt a comprehensive review of the large and growing literature on standards and best practices here, this paper does attempt to map the “conceptual landscape” of the theoretical literature on standards and best practices, with an emphasis on their applicability to public administration. We view this task as particularly urgent given competing interpretations of: (i) the sources of the supply and demand for standards, and (ii) the desirability of performance measurement and the search for best practices in public administration.

Furthermore, there is not a common conceptual view of standards and best practices among government practitioners and scholars of public administration. Among the former, the search for best practices is a daily task, while among the latter, some would relegate best practices to the “conceptual dustbin” (Grindle, 2011). Clarification of what we mean, and what we do not mean, when we talk about standards and best practices may help to bridge some of this distance.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on standards, focusing on rational choice (RC) and sociological institutionalist (SI) approaches.

Section 3 provides a mini-case study of ISO 9000 management standards to illustrate the applicability of the two approaches. In Section 4, we turn to “best practice research” (BPR) as an attempt to develop standards for government service delivery in public administration.

Section 5 offers a brief conclusion.

## Section 2 - Standards

Brunsson and Jacobsson (2000) are much cited by the contemporary literature on standards. Their key insight was to conceptualize standards as a species of regulation, the function of which is to reduce uncertainty in human interaction. Other institutions may fulfill the same function, of course, including markets and organized hierarchies of authority, of which the modern state is primary in the setting of laws. Yet the legitimate authority of states is limited by national borders, whereas modern economic exchange is not. Globalization is thereby a driver of the rise of standards given the absence of organized hierarchies whose authorities extend across national boundaries. Despite the continuing relevance of this insight, a key question remained under-theorized in Brunsson and Jacobsson, namely, whether standards were a voluntarily adopted form of regulation. Standard adoption was clearly more voluntary for some agents than others. We contend that the subsequent literature can be usefully conceptualized as divided on this question. In what we term the rational choice (RC) approach, distinctions between voluntary and more coercive adoption of standards are addressed in a cost framework, where the benefits of network externalities arising from common standards are weighed against the costs of adopting the standard. In the sociological institutionalist (SI) tradition, the problem is side-stepped by positing standard adoption as less a calculative attempt to maximize utility than a response to mimetic pressures in the interest of acting out appropriate management or governance “discourses”.

### ***Rational choice***

Rational choice accounts of standardization emphasize two benefits from the adoption of common standards – *network externalities* and the reduction of *transaction costs*. Alternatively, standards can serve a *coordinative* and an *uncertainty-reducing* function.

### ***Coordination function***

Network externalities arise when one firm's return to adopting a standard depends on the number of other firms adopting the same standard. A useful example is standards which ensure the compatibility of electronic communications. Firms may be indifferent as to the standard which is adopted to ensure these gains from coordination (Spruyt, 2001; Reinecke et al, 2012; Brunsson et al, 2012; ), or the costs of switching to the common standard may be unevenly distributed among firms (Besen and Farrell, 1994). In the latter case, standard adoption becomes a strategic question. When a lack of coordination results, despite gains from network externalities which are left on the table, the result resemble a common pool problem (Hardin, 1968), in which mutual benefits from coordination (in the classic case, coordination means collective restraint of current consumption) are foregone because there is no mechanism by which firms are convinced that their own restraint will be reciprocated. Such collective action problems have long been recognized by those working in a rational choice framework (Olson, 1965, Ostrom, 1990). Attempts to set common standards for firm behaviour (as in textile production) or ensure industry sustainability (for instance, the coffee industry) often face these challenges, as firms are wary of bearing the costs of adopting standards that constrain their choice sets, for fear of being outcompeted by free riders (Fransen, 2011). Whether or not the benefits from coordination

exceed the costs of switching, in the RC perspective the resulting adoption or non-adoption of a common standard is the emergent result of the rational choices of individual agents.

### *Uncertainty-reducing function*

Transaction costs, in the context of the standards literature, refer to the cost of measuring the valuable attributes of goods and services exchanged (North, 1987; Lin and Nugent, 1995).

Absent common standards, transaction costs are high, and mutually beneficial exchanges are left unconsummated due to the resulting uncertainty (Botzem et al, 2012). Standards can reduce uncertainty in exchange by reducing information asymmetries between buyers and sellers (Akerlof, 1970), and by enabling firms to signal quality (Spence, 1973; Ferro, 2011; Clougherty and Grajek, 2006). We are speaking here not of standards as coordination devices in the sense described above, but standards as a threshold of quality which, when met, signal quality to potential consumers. This is illustrated below with reference to the example of ISO 9000 certification. Such standards are coordination enhancing only in the general sense that they facilitate exchange through the establishment of signals which are commonly understood to signal quality. Network externalities are less significant in such cases. Indeed, adherence to standards which signal quality is *more* valuable if few firms are able to meet the standard, though of course mutual recognition of the standard as legitimate generates positive returns to adopters.

It is important to emphasize that in both their coordination and uncertainty-reducing functions, the RC approach views agents as consciously choosing to adopt standards on the basis of cost-benefit calculations. This might seem to imply that whatever standards adopted in an industry or sphere of organizational activity are efficient, in the sense that no other standard, if adopted, would make all adopters better off without making other parties worse off. Indeed, since

standards are adopted by utility maximizers, they are sustained only insofar as they are incentive compatible. It is tempting to say that whatever standard is present must be the most efficient standard, as an inefficient standard could not long sustain itself in the face of more efficient alternatives to which adopters would switch. Such an account would seem to be guilty of the oft-noted RC fallacy of “working back from identifiable institutional effects to determine the initial preferences of the actors involved ...” (Knight, in Thelen, 2003, 215). At its worst, RC can resemble a naive functionalism which has difficulty “explaining empirical variance between fields with similar coordination benefits and actor constellations” (Botzem et al, 2012, 738).

Sophisticated RC accounts of this empirical variation will delve more deeply into the concept of switching costs as a barrier to efficiency. The concept is best illustrated in the case of technical standards. We can imagine multiple firms pursuing a new communications technology. Each initially employs a communication method that is incompatible with that of other firms. Each firm attempts to build a large base of subscribers to their version of the communication technology. After a period of time, the consumer market is divided among the initial firms. Each firm begins to recognize that market dominance is impossible. They begin to entertain the notion that their best course of action is to enable coordination between their devices and those of their competitors, such that a common communication language is adopted. This would allow all firms to take advantage of network externalities. Depending on the fixed costs of developing this technology, firms may be indifferent as to which common communication language is adopted (indifferent, as it were, between XX and YY). Indifference implies low costs from switching from one communication language to another. Switching costs may be high, however, and firms may have a strong preference for one communication language as an industry standard (i.e., they may prefer XX to YY, or vice versa). The likelihood of coordination among firms,

then, must be considered in light not only of the presence of positive network externalities, but also of the cost of switching from an initially preferred practice to the new common standard.

Conceptually, the development of standards in non-technical settings may not be so distinct. In their study of standard adoption in the coffee industry, Reinecke et al (2012) document the coexistence of multiple standards. A compelling explanation for this is that despite evident gains from common standards, different adopters would prefer to compromise on different margins and a coordination failure results.

A further alleged weakness of the RC approach is that it has been weak in terms of explanation for the supply of standards. Spruyt (2001) notes that private demand for the most rudimentary of standards, such as weights and measures, was high for centuries given the network externalities that would result. Nevertheless, the supply and enforcement of such standards by decentralized European government was slow in supplying such standards. This resulted a form of collective action problem. In the long run, local rulers in a large territory might all gain from the adoption of common standards that would facilitate trade, generating wealth and taxation revenue. In the short run, however, local rulers resisted standardization as “their ability to directly capture gains from seigniorage and the manipulations of weights and measures” (Spruyt, 2001, 376) would be threatened. These rents accruing to rulers were an obstacle to coordination among standards, even in the face of private demands and general welfare gains.

To conclude, the strengths of RC approaches to standardization would seem to be clarity in explanation of the demand for standards at the level of the individual firm or organization through the concepts of network externalities, switching costs, and collective action problems, and the ability to deal with the question of standards’ voluntary nature with reference to



differential costs of adopting standards. Despite the explanatory power of these contributions, however, one set of questions would seem to remain. In the contemporary period, standards proliferate even where private demand for the realization of network externalities would seem to be absent. This is especially true in the realm of governance and public administration. While there are gains to be had from the standardization of accounting practices across states, the OECD, for instance, promotes standards and best practices in areas where the benefits of coordination are difficult to determine. The desirability of a given social policy in one country is unlikely to be influenced by the adoption of that same policy in another. Indeed, there would seem little reason to presume *a priori* that the best use of a marginal dollar in social spending in country A is the same as that in country B. Explaining proliferation in the supply of standards by international organizations, and the demand for these standards by member states despite the absence of gains from coordination, would seem to lead us to questions of legitimacy and mimetic pressures, areas where RC theory has difficulty leading us.

### ***Sociological Institutionalism***

SI theorists share the view that standards emerged with the internationalization of production processes (Timmermans and Epstein, 2010). Yet they emphasize standards not as a coordination mechanism arising from individual calculations to further utility, but as the product of an entire social system which generates its own governance needs. Standardization accompanies the rationalization of the modern world, as noted by Weber. As with RC theorists, SI proponents identify standards as a species of regulation which “render the modern world equivalent” (Timmermans and Epstein, 2010).

Since SI theorists locate the demand for standards at the social level, they construe standard adoption as, in practice, involuntary from the point of view of the individual adopter. On this point, the disagreement with RC theory is quite sharp. This disagreement doubtless has deep roots, reflecting the economist's tendency to take preferences and endowments as given, and to focus on the individual as the appropriate level of analysis and macro-level phenomena as emergent from the choices of individuals. Even when recognizing different scope for voluntary action among individuals, the economist's tendency is to refer to constraints faced by individuals which limit their choice sets. The question of whether a given choice is voluntary disappears; voluntariness is not an either/or proposition but a matter of the degree to which a choice set is restricted. That all choice sets are restricted is taken as given by economists. For the sociologist, however, less inclined to the concept of marginal cost, and less inclined to take the individual as the unit of analysis, an economist's restricted choice set is the result of a deeply political process which is the outcome of conflict between social groups.

Questions about the coercive nature of standards, and the accountability of standard-setters, thus arise (Kerwer, 2005, Timmermans and Epstein, 2010). Far from being a voluntary realm, standard-setting is marked by struggles over "the perception of who the appropriate actors are, what the boundaries of the space are and what the dominant logic of coordination should be" (Botzem and Quack, 2006, 267). Explaining the spread of standards without reference to the material interests of individual adopters also raises questions for SI theorists. They have typically resorted to "coercive, normative and mimetic isomorphic pressures" as an explanation (Brunsson et al, 2012). In SI work on standards, the assumption of isomorphic pressures fulfills a function rather like that of the utility maximizing rational actor in RC theory. It implies that individuals are driven by a "rule-based logic of appropriateness" (Fransen, 2011; Mattli and

Buthe, 2003). What is an appropriate standard for a given practice in a given sector is determined by legitimate, not to say hegemonic, actors, communicated through social interaction, and internalized by adopters. Given that standard adoption does not occur at the level of conscious calculation of individual material benefit, some SI scholars emphasize the coercive nature of this process, others the inclination of human beings to seek social approval and behave “appropriately”. Naturally, what is appropriate is socially constructed. Even individuals are constructed, in the sense that their role or identity as, say, decision maker in a firm or government department charged with selecting a standard, has been provided for them by the broader social structure. Individuals tend to behave consistently with the role selected for them, much as, for the RC theorist, individuals tend to behave as though they weigh costs and benefits in order to maximize utility.

On the question of actor motivation and the voluntary nature of standards, the two perspectives described here are incommensurate. On the suggestion raised earlier that there are spheres of standard adoption which RC theory has difficulty explaining, SI theory does hold out some possibilities. However, there would seem to be greater explanatory power in RC theory’s concepts.

### **Section 3 – Application to ISO 9000 Standards**

This section presents ISO 9000 as a case study for the application of the RC perspective on standards. There is a literature conceptualizing ISO 9000 as a transaction cost-reducing institution (Hudson and Jones, 2003). The standard relates to quality management, particularly

the quality of production processes, though the ISO suggests the standard is generally applicable to management practice in all domains.

Looking at ISO adoption rates presents some clues as to the sources of demand for the standard, and suggests that ISO 9000 adoption reduces uncertainty on the part of buyers by allowing suppliers to signal quality in production. Globalized supply chains present potential efficiency gains to buyers, but create uncertainty as to the quality of the goods supplied. A buyer could “sample” a series of suppliers, but any sample will be a small proportion of the population of suppliers, and this sampling is costly to buyers. There is therefore a demand among buyers for a standard which, if suppliers can be certified as having met, would reduce their search costs. Indeed, the ISO promoted the 9000 series, “*for the purpose of facilitating global trade and improvement*” (Hudson and Jones, 2003, 1004, italics in original).

High quality producers are themselves a further source of demand for standards which signal quality in the production process. Absent internationally recognized standards, it is difficult for high quality suppliers to distinguish themselves from their low quality competitors. Market transactions may eventually achieve this sorting, but absent the standard are subject to significant transaction costs. The key cost in this case is the cost of measuring the valuable attributes of the goods being exchanged (North, 1987). ISO adoption, for these firms, is a means of signalling the quality of their production process (Ferro, 2011). Building on Spence’s (1973) model of signalling in education, Ferro describes ISO certification as ideally suited to this signalling function. “The signal has to convey a cost. Furthermore, in order for the signal to effectively (distinguish firms), the cost of signalling needs to be negatively correlated with the productive capability (of the firm)” (Ferro, 2011, 5). ISO 9000 certification is granted by an independent auditor. The cost of this process has been estimated at \$125,000, and the process can take

between 9 months and two years. These non-trivial costs are more easily borne by more productive firms, and these firms are therefore more likely to seek ISO certification, making the process an effective sorting device (see also Terlaak and King, 2006; Christmann and Taylor, 2006). This line of explanation is supported by empirical work indicating that ISO 9000 has been adopted at particularly high rates in industries with large numbers of suppliers and where production processes are opaque to buyers (Beck and Walgenback, 2005).

This presents ISO 9000 as a transaction cost reducing, trade-enhancing mechanism which is an outgrowth of the demand of buyers and high quality suppliers in the context of globalized supply chains. The ISO fills this demand for third-party certification (Deaton, 2004). An alternative perspective is to place ISO 9000 in the context of an SI approach to global governance. The standard can be seen as generated by the international system, and to serve the function of maintaining existing power relations (Terlaak, 2007; Higgins and Hallstrom, 2007). For instance, Clougherty and Grajek (2009) consider whether ISO 9000 is in fact a form of protectionism in that it places an extra barrier in the way of developing country suppliers. For this perspective to be helpful, there would have to be costs to high quality developing country firms over and above those borne by high quality firms in developed countries.

#### **Section 4 – Research on Best Practices in Public Administration**

Important as it is to undertake general theoretical accounts of standardization, we should not neglect the diversity of settings in which some form of standards are being sought, created, and adopted. In the fields of public administration and governance, where positive network externalities would seem to be the exception, rather than the rule, “standard” implies excellence

in service provision. Standards, in this sense, refer to “the highest standard”, and can be identified with “best practices” (BP). In the remainder of this section, we review the literature on the applicability of “best practices” to public administration. We then review the state of best practice research.

Concern over the very premise of identifying best practices (BP) in public administration dates at least to Loffler (2000). Identifying a BP which has been found to lead to desirable outcomes requires first the identification of good outcomes. We can imagine a private firm in which profit margin is the definition of good outcomes, or a production process in which efficient use of inputs is evidently the goal when introducing a new practice. In the public service, however, this definitional exercise is challenging. For instance, the goal of breadth of service may conflict with the goal of efficiency in service delivery. Bovaird and Loffler (2003) conclude that there is no consensus as to what quality means in the context of public service delivery. It seems clear that managerial purposes must be adopted even before performance measures are adopted (Behn, 2003). If identifying a metric by which we judge outputs is problematic, then identifying BP that might achieve desirable ends is something of a fool’s errand. Some have concluded that “it is not yet appropriate to speak about ‘best practices’” in the field of public administration (Backer and Bare, 2000, 38).

A further concern is that we have little understanding of, as Loffler puts it, “to what degree a public management practice assessed as best practice is dependent on a specific institutional and cultural context” (2000, 201). In the face of this challenge, an alternative approach to improving service delivery is to set performance measurement benchmarks, reward high performers, and thereby introduce incentives which motivate the search for BP *on the part of the practitioner* which they view as relevant to helping them achieve their desired ends. This could, in time,

produce efficiency levels equivalent to those which would follow from the identification of generally applicable BP.

Several such processes have emerged. There is a growing literature on performance measures (Gao, 2009; Askim, 2007), and on awards for high performance in public service delivery (Boyne and Chen, 2006; Hartley and Downe, 2007; Loffler, 2001). The literature tends toward scepticism of the practice. Hartley and Downe consider the possibility that “faddist or isomorphic pressures”, and not merely instrumental goals, are at work in the spread of this approach. Loffler raises the concern that competition for awards and the sharing of BP might not be expected to coexist. After all, why share management secrets which have payoffs? This insight forces a careful consideration of the mechanisms held to be at work when competition and performance measurement are asserted as a tide which will rise all public sector boats.

Dominant as it has been in the popular management literature, as exemplified by Osborne and Gaebler (1993), skepticism of best practice research (BPR), dates at least to Overman and Boyd (1994). They found BPR lacking in several respects. BPR was not theoretically rigorous, scholarship did not demonstrate an accumulation of knowledge, there is no widely shared terminology or set of concepts, and the circumstances that would make generalization valid have not been identified.

De Vries (2010) emphasizes the importance of identifying performance measurements that do more than merely measure the extent of a policy problem. Such measures do not necessarily imply best practice. To take de Vries’s example, if the Mongolian government is seeking to improve literacy rates and searches for best practices to achieve this, a review of the states with highest literacy rates will produce a list of countries largely within the OECD. Does this imply

that the best option for Mongolia would be to adopt the literacy policy of, say, Sweden? BP must offer more than the identification of high performers. It may be better to reframe BP as a practice which, given inputs, desired outputs, and circumstances affecting the “production process”, produces beneficial results. In this spirit, Bretschneider et al (2005) borrow the concept of a production function from economics, and suggest that BP can be conceived as the most efficient means of allocating resources in the transformation of inputs into outputs. The goal is to adopt practices that bring one to the production possibilities frontier (PPF). The PPF captures the idea that Mongolia, say, faces different constraints than Sweden, and the optimal allocation of resources in one may not be optimal in the other, given existing possibilities.

The search for BP, then, ought to be strongly guided by theory, as any statement of BP implies a theory about how, given fixed inputs, to achieve outputs on the PPF. Bretschneider et al describe BPR as an attempt, assuming agreed upon benchmarks, to develop causal theories which suggest the best practices for achieving stated ends. Though the demand for such theory on the part of public administration practitioners is high, BPR has typically relied on cases studies which suffer from weak internal validity, are ambiguous about the causal mechanism by which practice leads to outcome, and do not sufficiently address alternative explanations for the outcomes observed. At a minimum, two conditions must be met by any research claiming to identify a best practice: completeness of cases and comparability of cases. An incomplete sample is inevitable, which limits our confidence that a practice identified as best is indeed the best in the entire population of comparable cases. On the question of comparability, an effort to identify the conditions which define comparability must be undertaken. For instance, if we search for best practices among schools in achieving high scores on standardized tests, we must specify the conditions which



determine whether schools are comparable with one another, including demography, class size, etc. In effect, Bretschneider et al urge the specification of covariates.

Despite the multiple pitfalls of BPR, the concept of BP does continue to have currency in the public administration literature. In 2011, the editor of *Public Administration Review* noted approvingly the journal's role in featuring, "broad historical perspectives about 'best practices' gleaned from yesteryear in order to create a better society in the future" (Stillman, 2011). BP has remained an important concept in research on innovation (Hannah, 1995, Borins, 2001), privatization and government contracting (Auger, 1999), hospital resource utilization (Kerr et al, 1999), public relations (Watson and Noble, 2007, Parsons, 2004), corporate social responsibility (Brietbarth et al, 2009), gender in the workplace (Crandall and Jain, 2007), government transparency (Kim, 2008), among others. Yet the charge that such work is weak on theory is persuasive. In a study of BP in immigration service planning in Thailand, Bendixsen and Guchteneire (2003) make the following claim:

An initiative in Thailand recently launched by a number of Thai and hill tribe NGOs, universities, and Thai Government agencies concerns citizenship status. Research has shown that lack of citizenship is the greatest risk factor for hill tribe women in Thailand for being trafficked. To combat this, NGOs will assist hill tribe people in meeting the Thai requirements for registration and citizenship" (2011, 678).

It may well be that hill tribe members are at greater risk of being victims of human trafficking than are urban residents, and it is doubtless the case that hill tribe members are less likely to hold citizenship than are urban residents. This need not imply, however, that hill tribe members are more vulnerable to traffickers because they lack citizenship. And if there is a "passport effect" independent of other factors, there is nothing in the article suggesting its magnitude, and thus no estimate cost-benefit calculation on the benefits of the new programs is possible.

Recent research in the spirit of Bretschneider et al represents the “frontier” of BPR theory (Ongaro, 2009, Bardach, 2003, 2004, Barzelay, 2007). The focus of this work is the identification of identifying conditions for extrapolation of BP from one setting to another (as opposed to its mere replication). The consensus of this scholarship is that the identification of “causal mechanisms” and “contingent features”, by which a practice does its work and which might impede its transfer to another domain. Essentially, better causal theory is presented as a solution to the extrapolation problem. Ongaro defines mechanisms as “systematic sets of statements that provide a plausible account of how two entities are linked to one another by moving beyond simple covariation and investigating the causal texture of social phenomena” (2009, 4). Both Ongaro and Bardach make use of the idea that a practice “can be conceived as a means to exploit opportunities” (Ongaro, 2009, 6). Bardach submits before extrapolating a practice, we should be able to complete the following sentence: “This new practice takes advantage of ...” (2004, 214). If we cannot do so, it is probable that we have no sound theory of the mechanism by which the practice produces its good effects. Note that achieving the condition of comparability implies identifying the causal relationship which links practices and results.

## **Section 5 – Conclusion**

Much as demand for BP on the part of practitioners outstrips the capacity of the scholarly community to deliver recommendations based on rigorous research, the standards proliferate at a pace that strains the capacity of theory to catch up. This paper has outlined attempts to rescue BPR in public administration, and to come to terms with the growth of standards from RC and SI

perspectives. At present, the RC literature appears richer in explanatory concepts, and provides a set of tools which enable future researchers to navigate this still-developing field.

## References

- Akerlof, G. (1970). "The Market for "Lemons": Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism." The Quarterly Journal of Economics 84 (3): 488-500.
- Andrews, M. (2008). "Good Government Means Different Things in Different Countries." Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Papers Series **November 2008**.
- Askim, J. (2007). "How do politicians use performance information? An analysis of Norwegian local government experience." International Review of Administrative Sciences **73**(3): 453-472.
- Auger, D. A. (1999). "Privatization, Contracting, and the States: Lessons from State Government Experience." Public Productivity and Management Review **22**(4): 435-454.
- Bardach, E. (2003). "Creatign Compendia of "Best Practice"." Journal of Policy Analysis and Management **22**(4): 661-665.
- Bardach, E. (2004). "Presidential Address - The Extrapolation Problem: How Can We Learn from the Experience of Others?" Journal of Policy Analysis and Management **23**(2): 205-220.
- Barzelay, M. (2007). Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions **20**(3): 521-543.
- Beck, N. and P. Walgenbach (2005). "Technical Efficiency or Adaptation to Institutionalized Expectations? The Adoption of ISO 9000 Standards in the German Mechanical Engineering Industry." Organization Studies **26**(6): 841-866.
- Bendixsen, S. and P. de Guchteneire (2003). "Best practices in immigration services planning." Journal of Policy Analysis and Management **22**(4): 677-682.
- Besen, S. M. and J. Farrell (1994). "Choosing How to Compete: Strategies and Tactics in Standardization." The Journal of Economic Perspectives **8**(2): 117-131.
- Boiral, O. (2012). "ISO Certificates as Organizational Degrees? Beyond the Rational Myths of the Certification Process." Organization Studies **33**(5-6): 633-654.
- Borins, S. (2001). "Innovatio, Success and Failure in Public Management Reasearch: Some Methodological Reflections." Public Management Review **3**(1): 3-17.
- Botzem, S. and L. Dobusch (2012). "Standardization Cycles: A Process Perspective on the Formation and Diffusion of Transnational Standards." Organization Studies **33**(5-6): 737-762.

- Bovaird, T. and E. Löffler (2003). "Evaluating the quality of public governance: indicators, models and methodologies." International Review of Administrative Sciences **69**(3): 313-328.
- Boyne, G. A. and A. A. Chen "Performance Targets and Public Service Improvement." Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory **17**: 455-477.
- Breitbarth, T., P. Harris, et al. (2009). "Corporate social responsibility in the European Union: a new trade barrier?" Journal of Public Affairs **9**(November): 239-255.
- Bretschneider, S., F. J. Marc-Aurele, Jr., et al. (2005). ""Best Practices" Research: A Methodological Guide for the Perplexed." Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory **15**(2): 307-323.
- Brunsson, N. and B. Jacobsson, Eds. (2000). A World of Standards. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Brunsson, N., A. Rasche, et al. (2012). "The Dynamics of Standardization: Three Perspectives on Standards in Organization Studies." Organization Studies **33**(5-6): 613-632.
- Christmann, P. and G. Taylor (2006). "From self-regulation through international certifiable standards: determinants of symbolic versus substantive implementation." Journal of International Business Studies **37**: 863-878.
- Clougherty, J. A. and M. Grajek (2006). "The Impact of ISO 9000 Diffusion on Trade and FDI: A New Institutional Analysis." Working Paper, Social Science Research Center, Berlin.
- Clougherty, J. A. and M. Grajek (2009). "ISO 9000: New Form of Protectionism or Common Language in International Trade?" EMST Working Paper **09-006**: 1-48.
- Crandall, S. R. and S. Jain (2007). "New Directions in Workforce Development: Do They Lead to Gains For Women?" New England Journal of Public Policy **22**(1): 81-98.
- de Vries, M. S. (2010). "Performance measurement and the search for best practices." International Review of Administrative Sciences **76**(2): 313-330.
- Deaton, B. J. (2004). "A theoretical framework for examining the role of third-party certifiers." Food Control **15**: 615-619.
- Ferro, E. (2011). "Signaling and Technological Marketing Tools for Exporters." World Bank Policy Research Working Paper **5547**: 1-39.
- Fransen, L. (2011). "Why Do Private Governance Organizations Not Converge? A Political-Institutional Analysis of Transnational Labor Standards Regulation." Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions **24**(2): 359-387.

- Gao, J. (2009). "Governing by Goals and Numbers: A Case Study in the Use of Performance Measurement to Build State Capacity in China." Public Administration and Development **29**: 21-31.
- Grindle, M.S. (2011). "Governance Reform: The New Analytics of Next Steps." Governance **24** (3) 415-418.
- Hannah, S. B. (1995). "The Correlates of Innovation: Lessons from Best Practice." Public Productivity and Management Review **19**(2): 216-228.
- Hartley, J. and J. Downe (2007). "The Shining Lights? Public Service Awards as an Approach to Service Improvement." Public Administration **85**(2): 329-353.
- Hardin, G. (1968). "The Tragedy of the Commons." Science **162**: 1243-1248
- Higgins, W. and K. T. Hallstrom (2007). "Standardization, Globalization and Rationalities of Government." Organization **14**(5): 685-704.
- Hudson, J. and P. Jones (2003). "International Trade in 'Quality Goods': Signalling Problems for Developing Countries." Journal of International Development **15**: 999-1013.
- Kerr, C. A., C. Glass, et al. (1999). "Best Practice Measures of Resource Utilization for Hospitals: A Useful Complement in Performance Assessment." Public Administration **77**(3): 639-650.
- Kerwer, D. (2005). "Rules that many use: Standards and global regulation." Governance-an International Journal of Policy and Administration **18**(4): 611-632.
- Kim, P. S. (2008). "A Daunting Task in Asia: The move for transparency and accountability in the Asian public sector." Public Management Review **10**(4): 527-537.
- Lin, J. Y. and J. B. Nugent (1995). Institutions and Economic Development. Handbook of Development Economics, Volume J. Behrman and T. N. Srinivasan. New York, Elsevier Science Pub. Co. **3**.
- Loffler, E. (2000). "Best-practice cases reconsidered from an international perspective." International Public Management Journal **3**: 191-204.
- Loffler, E. (2001). "Quality Awards as a Public Sector Benchmarking Concept in OECD Member Countries: Some Guidelines for Quality Award Organizers." Public Administration and Development **21**: 27-40.
- Mattli, W. and T. Buthe (2003). "Setting International Standards: Technological Rationality of Primacy of Power." World Politics **56**(1): 1-42.

- North, D. C. (1987). "Institutions, Transaction Costs and Economic Growth." Economic Inquiry **25**(3): 419-428.
- North, D.C. (1990). Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Olson, Mancur (1971). The Logic of Collective Action. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Ongaro, E. (2009) A protocol for the extrapolation of "Best" Practices: How to draw lessons from one experience to improve public management in another situation. Mimeo .
- Osborne, D. (1993) Reinventing government: how the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public service. New York: Plume.
- Ostrom, Elinor (1990). Governing the Commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Overman, E. S. and K. J. Boyd (1994). "Best Practice Research and Postbureaucratic Reform." Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory **4**(1): 67-83.
- Parsons, P. H. (2004). Ethics in Public Relations: A Guide to Best Practice. London, Kogan Page.
- Reinecke, J., S. Manning, et al. (2012). "The Emergence of a Standards Market: Multiplicity of Sustainability Standards in the Global Coffee Industry." Organization Studies **33**(5-6): 791-814.
- Spence, M. (1973). "Job Market Signaling". The Quarterly Journal of Economics **87** (3): 355-374.
- Spruyt, H. (2001). "The supply and demand of governance in standard-setting: insights from the past." Journal of European Public Policy **8**(3): 371-391.
- Stillman, R. J. I. (2011). "Why PAR Matters: Reflections after Seven Decades and Beyond." Public Administration Review(November/December): 909-915.
- Terlaak, A. (2007). "Order Without Law? The Role of Certified Management Standards in Shaping Socially Desired Firm Behaviors." Academy of Management Review **32**(3): 968-985.
- Terlaak, A. and A. A. King (2006). "The effect of certification with the ISO 9000 Quality Management Standard: A signaling approach." Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization **60**(4): 579-602.
- Thelen, K. (2003). "How Institutions Evolve: Insights from Comparative Historical Analysis" in Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, eds., Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Timmermans, S. and S. Epstein (2010). "A World of Standards but not a Standard World: Toward a Sociology of Standards and Standardization." The Annual Review of Sociology **36**: 69-89.

Watson, T. and P. Noble (2007). Evaluating Public Relations: A Best Practice Guide to Public Relations Planning, Research and Evaluation. London, Kogan Page.