A View from Inside a CEN Working Group

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at some of the aspects of standardisation primarily from the perspective of a Working Group. This practical view may be not too terribly scientific, but it highlights some important down-to-earth aspects of our work. The text considers the structural constraints under which Working Groups operate. It also discusses the restricting, and some of the enabling factors. Some of these are surprisingly mundane while others are deeply intertwined with the mechanics of standardisation organisations and those of the industry which demands standards. Thus remedies could be simple or difficult to achieve. This article is meant as food for thought to make standardisation faster and less troublesome. It relates to the work in official standardisation bodies in Europe in the IT sector. The subject of CEN's ISSS workshops has been left aside because it deserves comprehensive analysis in a separate article.

Keywords: CEN; CEN structure; support of standardisation; working groups (WG)

INTRODUCTION

Standards are an accepted and necessary part of our industrial culture; they provide vast societal benefits. Standardisation is an essential enabling mechanism and tool for products, services, administrative procedures and business relations.

Originally there were only isolated national standardisation bodies. Later standardisation bodies organised themselves in larger regions, such as Europe, and eventually on a global scale. In Europe both national and international standardisation bodies provide powerful vessels for ever more and increasingly complex normalisation. The national governments recognise the importance of that work, as does the European Union. Today the latter has to be seen as the most important official body in Europe to monitor standardisation, to interact with its governing bodies and to partly sponsor it.

Currently the main concerns voiced about standardisation are its costs and the slow-going of the work. In the first issue of the International Journal of IT Standards and Standardization Research, Sherif (2002) provides an excellent analy-
ysis of “the perceived slowness of standardisation” on various principal levels. The paper presented here adds a grassroot view on the work of CEN from the perspective of the Working Groups. For a better understanding the framework within which CEN Working Groups operate is described first. It is hoped that with the help of thorough principal work approaches as outlined by Sherif and improvement on the working level as suggested in this paper, there is an opportunity for faster and more efficient work on all levels of standardisation.

**Relevant Structures Within CEN**

Policy makers are aware of the importance of standardisation, the industry requires it, the necessary organisations and structures are all in place. Before we investigate how the “doing” level is set up, we will briefly look at some relevant elements of the CEN organisation, the European body that governs most of the work related to information technology (IT).

CEN is organised in a number of Technical Committees, of which each is dedicated to a specific subject, e.g., TC48: domestic gas-fired water heaters. There are about 220 committees of which only about 10 are more or less concerned with IT matters. This compares “with 350 ICT industry consortia (which) operate as informal ‘standards bodies’” (Ketchell, 2002).

The TCs receive their guidance from CEN’s Technical Board (BT, Board Technique):

“The Technical Board of CEN is responsible for the development of technical policies and for the overall management of technical activities to guarantee coherence and consistency of the CEN standardization activities system-wise”

The BT has a number of tools to fulfil these responsibilities, e.g., by setting up task forces or by mandating specific investigations.

The BT exclusively serves as a policy- and decision-making body, while the TCs are related to putting the work into practice:

“CEN Technical Committees (CEN/TCs) are responsible for the programming and planning of the technical work in the form of a Business Plan, for the monitoring and the execution of the work in accordance with the agreed Business Plan and for the management of the standards making process, including the respect of CEN’s policies and the consensus building amongst all interested parties represented through the CEN national members, the CEN Associates and the Affiliates”.

Each TC has a number of Working Groups (WG) in which the actual work is carried out. Each of these groups is dedicated to a more specific aspect of the overall subject of the respective TC. Examples are:

- TC224 “Machine-readable cards, related device interfaces and operations”
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