

# 'Doing Better With Less'\*

\*With acknowledgement to: Boyle, R. and MacCarthaigh, M. (2011), *Fit for Purpose? Challenges for Irish Public Administration and Priorities for Public Service Reform*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

# But now, shift happens!

**GREATER SUCCESS**

+

at **GREATER SPEED**

+

with **CONSTANT  
UNCERTAINTY**

+

with **LESS RESOURCE**

+

with **MORE  
COMPETITION**

**Our world of  
work**

**Who wants to play?**

*Robert Holden*



**Ombudsman** Northern Ireland

# The world the Ombudsman now operates in

- The global financial crisis of 2008 has changed the world, profoundly.
- Backdrop of: high government deficits, reduced consumer confidence, insecurity, insipid growth, real incomes falling, high levels of unemployment, reduced tax take
- At worst, the most recent phase of the crisis, the spectre of sovereign debt default, has raised the possibility that governments may not be able to fund themselves and, by extension, the public services they provide to citizens.

BE INFORMED

# Succeeding in the new environment

- Critically, citizens perceive an erosion in their statutory entitlements, as their demand for public services is increasing
- Expectations are thus rising at a time when social media are transforming engagement
- The new financial and political circumstance presents a major challenge for independence and integrity of the Ombudsman

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

# Meeting this challenge

- A strategic response is essential, no quick fix
- Five key strands:
  - Renew our values
  - Constantly test received wisdom, recognising the need to innovate and deal with systemic issues to enhance the quality of public services
  - Utilise technology
  - Engage with citizens
  - Reengage with politicians, develop a deeper understanding of the role of the Ombudsman

COMMIT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

# Response required from Ombudsmen

- Ombudsmen can creatively and constructively respond to their changed circumstances by providing demonstrable leadership.
- This process will be driven by:
  - proactively promoting the value of the role of the ombudsman;
  - demonstrating integrity and probity in everything we do by testing our own performance, internally and externally; and
  - explaining and demonstrating how we engage with new forms of public service delivery.

BE PROPORTIONATE

# Making this happen – harnessing the positive drivers of change:

- Managing public expectations
- Harnessing citizen knowledge (internet and media)
- Implementing new and improved technology
- Building partnerships, e.g. judiciary, advocacy groups, politicians

BE PROACTIVE

# Responding to public concerns

Public concerns about public service organisations highlighted by 24/7 news cycle and social media:

- Poor performance
- Tolerance of poor practice
- Lack of openness about professionals' performance
- Poor communication
- Inadequate accountability
- Regulation not sufficiently transparent

BE RELEVANT



# Demonstrating the core values that must inform our work

- Independence
- Integrity
- Impartiality

To give life to these core values we must treat people with courtesy, consideration and respect their privacy

BE PASSIONATE

# The Ombudsman at all times must :

- Demonstrate impartiality, integrity and objectivity
- Maximise value for money
- Be accountable
- Comply with spirit of openness

**NONE OF THE ABOVE ARE OPTIONAL**

# Good governance is central [1]

- Provides assurance that our organisations are fit for purpose
- Achieves its mission
- Holds to account public authorities and governments

BE AN EXEMPLAR

# Good governance is central [2]

- Is the central catalyst in enabling an organisation to fulfil its purpose and give account for its performance
- More than about structures – fundamentally about the values, ethics and conducts of the people that will make the structures work, the culture of the organisation
- Audit and risk management are the key pillars of good governance

BE AN EXEMPLAR



# Good governance is central [3]

- Good governance....
  - the core foundation in maintaining and building our most precious asset, our reputation
  - a key component of assuring effective performance
  - maintains and enhances trust and confidence, internally and externally

BE AN EXEMPLAR

# Greatest risk – loss of reputation

- Common theme from case studies where reputation is lost— denial (Randall 2007)
- Typical chain of events leading to reputational catastrophes (Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania):
  - There's an initial mistake, often minor, that goes uncorrected;
  - A subsequent error compounds the initial error;

- Attempts to correct the problem are often half-hearted, either because there is no recognition of the increasing seriousness of the situation, or executives are in denial;
- When the problem eventually becomes too big to ignore, attempts are made to hide the truth; and
- There is an awful moment of acceptance that the situation is completely out of control

# Different aspects of governance

(Julia Unwin)

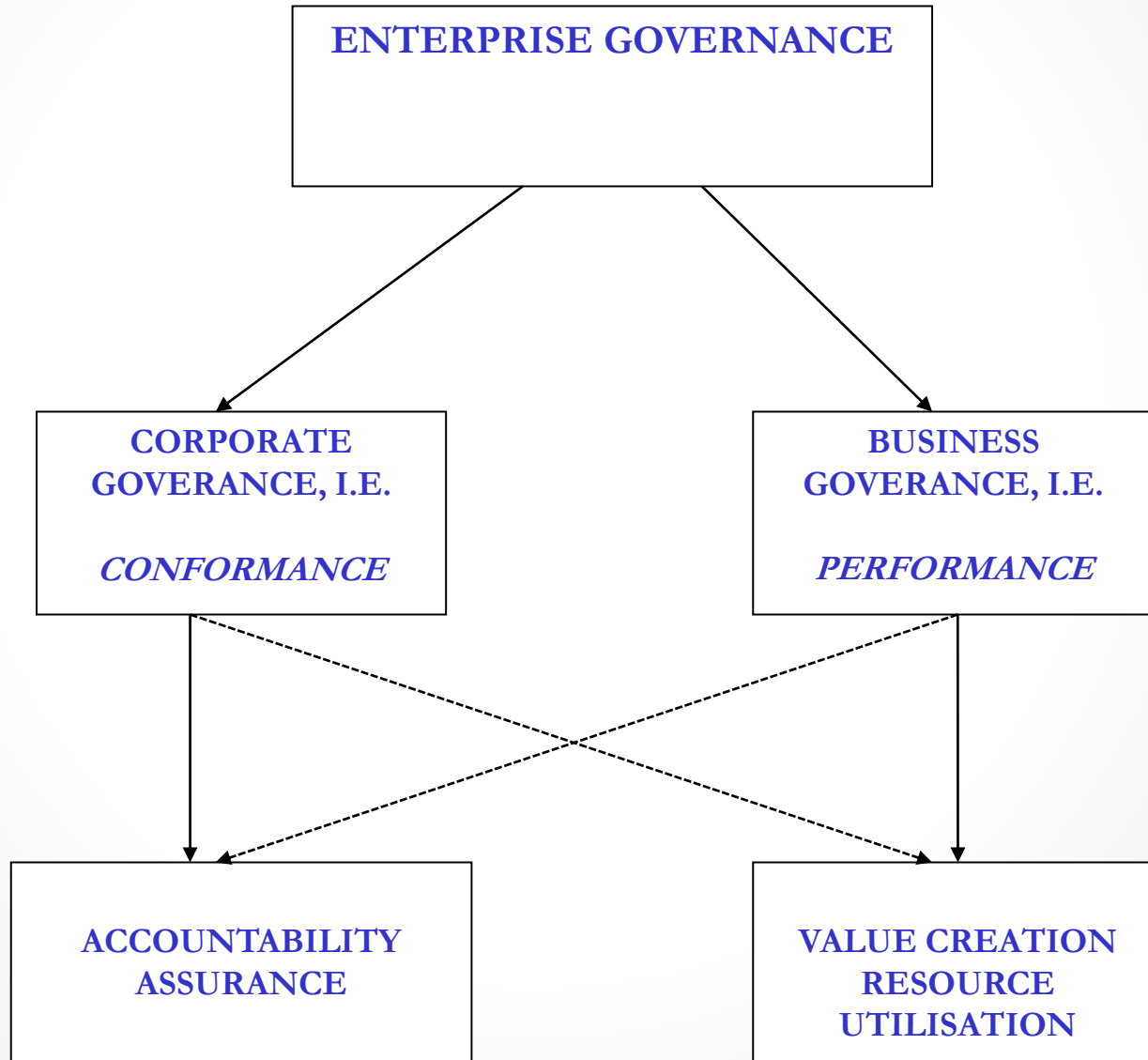
- Business governance
  - Resources
  - Staff
- Policy governance
  - Bringing together evidence, ideas and amplifying the voice of the citizen
- Ambassadorial governance
  - Building external relationships and networks



# One governance model.....

## Enterprise Governance

(International Federation of Accountants/CIMA)



# What bodies need to achieve these standards of good governance.....

- Data/evidence – must be realistic, relevant and selective
- Understand the organisation
- Distance – keep a healthy sense of perspective
- Confidence – have authority and legitimacy
- Stakeholder views – what benefit is evidence without this perspective?
- Seek expert opinions



# Governance – beyond a structural fix (Unwin)

- Changing the culture
- The most significant shift in implementing good governance arrangements should not be simply structural, but cultural
- A renewed focus on the user requires a renewed focus on our staff in creating capacity for dealing with changing expectations of customer service

# Conclusion

- We are the custodians of the Ombudsman concept
- To fulfil this responsibility, we must:
  - Give life to the values we espouse in our personal conduct and professional practice
  - Relentlessly ensure the public interest
  - Communicate, communicate, communicate

It should be borne in mind that there is nothing more difficult to arrange, more doubtful of success, and more dangerous to carry through than initiating change in a State's arrangements.

The innovator makes enemies of all those who prospered under the old order, and only lukewarm support is forthcoming from those who would prosper under the new'

Machiavelli

# Ombudsman

Northern Ireland

