

The Influential Company Secretary

Description

A debate has continued for many years regarding the title of Company Secretary, not necessarily about whether or not it adequately describes the essence of the role, as anyone who has ploughed that furrow knows that it does not, but more about what the title should be in order to effectively illustrate the essential constituents of the role and to capture the influence of the company secretary in much of what's critical to the governance of organisations.

I'll be honest, I don't have a remedy to bring that debate to a positive conclusion and I'm not sure there is any one title that could adequately describe the importance of a good company secretary and the multi-faceted skills and contributions they bring to an organisation. I do know that the full spectrum of responsibilities of the role is not fully understood in the vast majority of organisations, and the multi-faceted industry of the individual in the role and his/her team, much of which is under the radar, is not always visible to most.





The role isn't helped by publications on the role of the company secretary which tend to list the many statutory duties under the Companies Acts, company filings, maintenance of registers, etc., a list of essential items for sure and items which will get the company in trouble if not fulfilled, but, as company secretaries themselves know, these items bear no resemblance to the demanding Mondays to Fridays (and regular weekends) and January to December travails that are typically the life of the company secretary.

Don't get me wrong, there is another, much brighter side to the coin. The role of the company secretary, in the right hands and in the right companies, can be extremely rewarding and the most fulfilling of careers for many, bringing the company secretary into many aspects of company life and dynamics at the most senior levels of an organisation in a short space of time and in a way that would just not be possible in many other roles.

So rather than expend energy on the impossible task of finding a title for the role which encapsulates all of the above, I felt it might be timely and a better use of energy to write a series of short articles which better illustrate and publicise how the company secretary influences and facilitates much of what's important to the functioning of organisations and their boards. The articles are intended to be of equal relevance to the company secretaries of all company types, investment funds, non-profit and charitable organisations, cooperatives and beyond.

I was company secretary of a large, publicly-listed, international, financial services organisation for many years, working with a number of chairs and CEOs and a significant number of non-executive directors both in Ireland and the UK during that time, and I've been chair and director of a number of different companies. I'm now a partner with Board Excellence, a specialist board consultancy practice.

Central to our philosophy at Board Excellence is that the company secretary is an essential player in ensuring the board's effectiveness and achieving consistently high board performance, so this series under the banner of "**The Influential Company Secretary**" will hopefully illustrate the criticality of the company secretary's role and their influence in crucial aspects of the board's and the organisation's effectiveness and performance.

The first article in the series, "The Influential Company Secretary: Facilitating board effectiveness and performance" will follow shortly.

David O'Callaghan is a Partner at Board Excellence, an engaging and objective specialist consultancy practice which enables boards, working as teams, and individual directors to excel in effectiveness, performance and corporate governance. We also work with company secretaries to assist them in shaping the structures and practices required to support the board in achieving excellence.

The views expressed in these articles are based on engagement and interaction with many company secretaries from many sectors over many years and are not reflective of any particular role or company.

Future articles in the series:



The Influential Company Secretary: Facilitating board effectiveness and performance;

The Influential Company Secretary: Supporting alignment of the board's focus with strategic and governance priorities;

The Influential Company Secretary: Making your board information management and processes fit for purpose;

The Influential Company Secretary: Influencing board composition, diversity and succession planning.

Other titles in the series will follow so please contact me (david@boardexcellence.ie) and let me know if there are other topics in which you're interested.

David O'Callaghan is a Partner at Board Excellence, a specialist board consultancy, advisory and training practice that supports boards of directors, working as teams, and individual directors to excel in effectiveness, performance and corporate governance best practices. We support boards in all company and business types across all sectors and of all sizes in Ireland and the UK.

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