

Masterclass

for Web & Product Managers
on the topics of Web Governance & Digital Management



Video 2 transcript

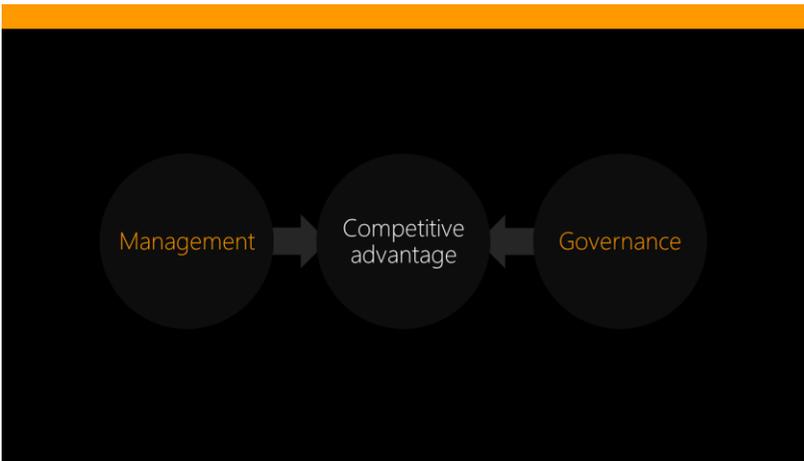
How web management & governance got so messed up (& how to fix it!)



Introduction

Welcome to this second video of the *Masterclass for Web and Product Managers*. This is Shane Diffily.

In our first lesson, we explored why the topics of **digital management and governance** are currently attracting so much attention.



We learned that this is being driven both by the need to resolve long standing problems and by a desire to find new sources of **competitive advantage**.

In this video then, we'll get started on our journey:

- First, we'll go over a little of the history of this subject in order to understand why **online management** is now so critical to success.
- Second, we'll delve into the concept of **governance** (upon which operations is built) to find out exactly what it means and identify all the elements that come within its remit.
- And finally, I'll introduce a practical new *Framework* you can use to plan a more stable system of control.

As before, this lesson is intended for anyone who occupies a role of digital responsibility, no matter what your formal title, be it:

- Web Manager
- Web Product Manager
- Online Editor
- Web Communications Co-ordinator
- Etc.

The aim is simply to equip you with the insight you need to re-impose order on operations. No other special expertise is required.

And now, let's begin.

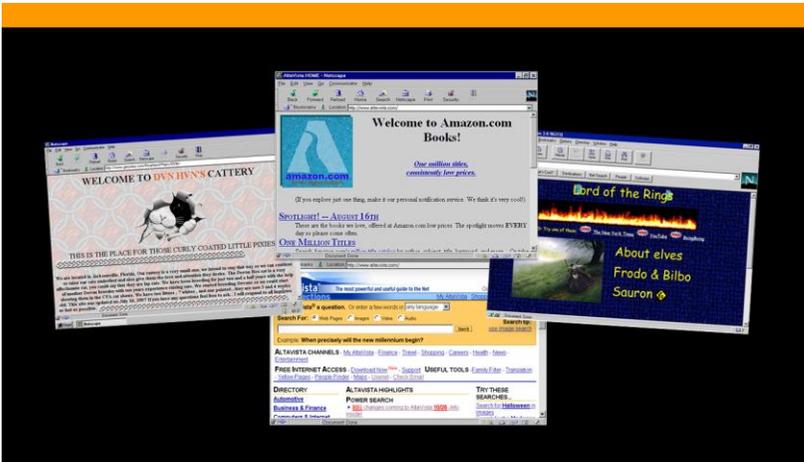
From Lord of the Rings to Twitter

Who remembers the early days of the internet, when the web was all about freedom of expression and *Lord of the Rings*?

Wasn't it great! Anything could happen.

And then it did.

Jeff Bezos and others started selling goods online and nothing was ever the same again.



The geeks who had dominated the internet since its genesis were gradually side-lined as scope began to grow and more staff piled on board.

Among the first were the ubiquitous “Web Designers” who were hired to create dramatic works of digital art—and sometimes even usable interfaces!

Copywriters also got involved as the need for professionally produced content was realised.

As the reach of online continued to expand, marketing, **advertising types** and business analysts saw their chance and muscled in.

Until finally, people like you and me were enlisted and given the task of co-ordinating it all as a **Web or Product Manager**.

The metamorphosis was complete.

Or was it?

In fact, many of the administrative structures in use today continue to betray their untidy origins in the chaos of the early internet.

While the complexity and scale of operations has grown beyond recognition, in many cases management has not kept pace.

It is still much too easy to find organisations where processes, manpower, teams, roles, responsibilities and other elements have barely changed since they were first created perhaps a decade or more ago.



Part of the reason, is that for a long time basic issues like usability, accessibility, content and others grabbed all the attention. In this context it was easy to ignore inefficiencies when there was so much else to do.

But no longer.

A new generation of leaders – for whom web is neither cool nor cryptic – has finally emerged and is now being appointed to positions of authority.

These people have lifted the lid on operations and discovered just how **poorly organised** things have been.

To set it right they need to build a new system of control, one that can create order from complexity and deliver the competitive edge their boards demand.

Fortunately, that is precisely what the discipline of *Governance* upon which so much of web and product management relies, can offer.

Just what is “*Governance*”?

But here’s a curious thing.

Amongst all the current debate and commentary on this topic, there is as yet no commonly accepted definition for *Governance*.

The problem is that this term is so flexible and so malleable that just like the old joke; ask 10 different people to describe it and you are likely to get 11 different answers!

- "It's how we set strategy."
- "It's how we make decisions."
- "It's how we manage operations."
- "It's how we set up ... you know ... stuff."

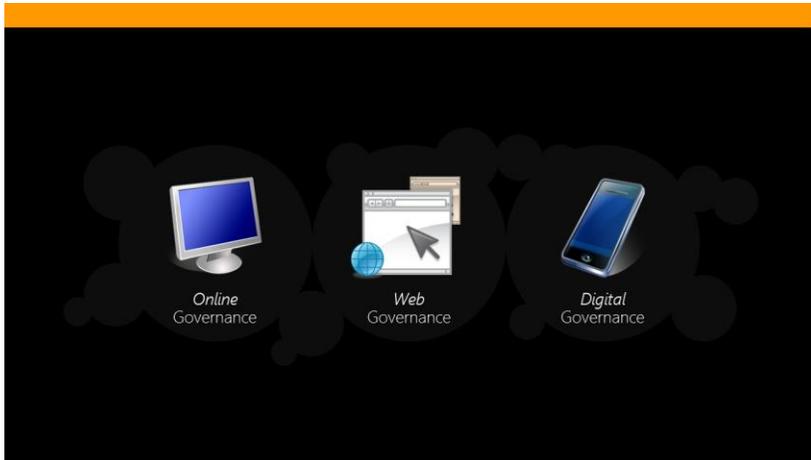
And so on.

I think part of the issue is that for a long time *Governance* was simply a convenient label for just about any operational or leadership problem on a site.

For example, if you had interpersonal issues on your team, *Governance* was all about roles & responsibilities.

On the other hand, if your challenge was establishing high level direction, for you *Governance* concerned strategy & leadership.

Added to this, the phrase *Web Governance* has often been used interchangeably with *Online* & *Digital Governance*, such that it's meaning has been further obscured.



Thus, *Governance* has been defined not in any unified way, but as a woolly catch-all for the many disparate elements connected with running a digital service.

And this type of **fuzzy thinking** is not new.

Remember how the term *Web Design* used to be bandied about?

Depending on who you talked to it meant everything from graphic design to user experience to the process of design itself & more besides.

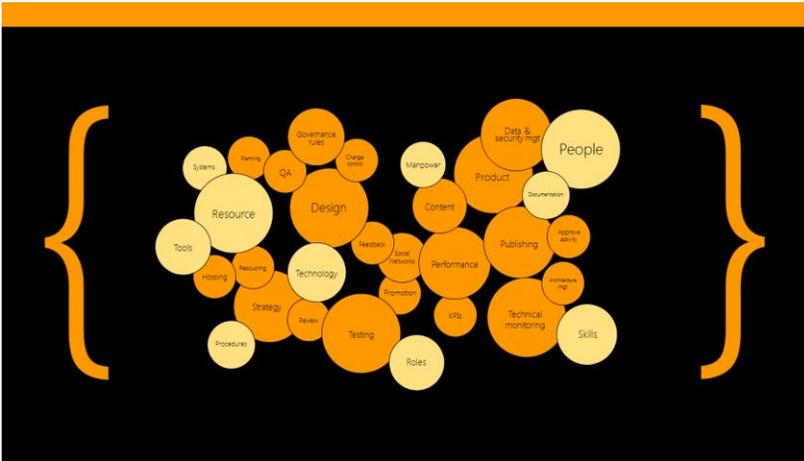
But as we now know, Design is not a single thing. Instead, it encompasses a wide set of activities, skills & other elements that together add up to a **discipline** called Design.

The same is true of Governance.

Governance is **not** a single activity.

There is no solitary document, organisational structure or set of standards I can point to and say, "There – that is my Governance".

Rather, it is a system—a system that unites the many distinct elements connected with online operations and allows them to be organised in a cohesive way.



With this in mind, the definition for Governance we will be using is as follows:

Governance is a system that describes how to manage a digital product or service in a controlled & orderly way.

The principal benefit of Governance is that it delivers operational **certainty and stability**. This means you don't have to worry about things like inadequate authority or too little manpower.

Rather, you have everything you need configured in the right way, so that you can just get on with things and focus your effort on pursuing online goals.

Admittedly, this definition is somewhat wider than those used by other commentators.

For example, the respected analyst Lisa Welchman has described Governance as simply *“the authoritative administrative structures that set policy and standards”*.

And, this is a good definition.

Indeed it is close to the original meaning of Governance as a set of high-level rules.

But as we have seen (and as my own experience suggests) in the parlance of practitioners, Governance refers to more than just guidelines or standards – but to how things are actually done.

This includes how web and product management is carried out, such as supervising people, allocating resource and ensuring essential tasks are expedited.

This is backed up by findings from the research group **Altimeter** in whose 2014 report **Social Business Governance: A Framework to Execute Social Business Strategy**, Governance was described as a *“loaded word”* encompassing everything *“from policies to organizational structure”*.

In reflection of this, the discipline has been dividing into a number of separate domains, matching the relentless spread of technology.

While our choice of terminology may never be perfect, in broad terms what is now called **Web Governance** refers to products or services delivered via a browser on devices such as a desktop computer, smartphone and tablet, often including apps too.

The larger realm of **Digital Governance** embraces all things web as well as how internet technology is used in general; from smart fridges, to talking cars, ‘flying-killer-robots’ and the internet of things.

As regards this *Masterclass*, for the most part we'll restrict ourselves to the area of **Web Governance** – which nonetheless embraces a huge array of social networks, apps, intranets, mobile sites and more.



Of course, it could still legitimately be asked whether this definition is too wide?

Can all the dozens of factors involved in online management really be represented by such a broad description?

Indeed, its sheer scope may have set alarm bells ringing for you.

"Oh Lord! I am just a Product Manager! Do I really have to be an expert in everything?"

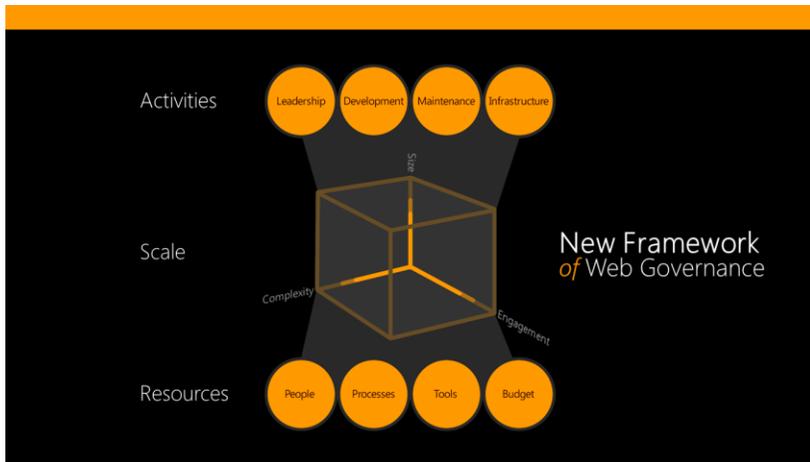
Well, of course, you don't. That's why you hire specialists for your team; to look after the details for you.

All the same, you need enough of an understanding of the totality of Web Governance in order to be able to ask the right questions of colleagues and (more importantly) prevent the wool being pulled over your eyes.

A Framework of Web Governance

And anyway, despite such diversity, when you drill right down to it everything can in fact be summarised into just three basic components, as illustrated here.

This is the new *Framework of Web Governance*.



It is this model that lies at the heart of effective operations and describes everything you need to plan and build a successful system of online administration.

As you can see the *Framework* consists of three inter-related elements. These are:

At the top we have 4 Activities.

In summary, these describe everything you must do to in order to expedite web or product management effectively.

At the base, we have 4 Resources.

These describe everything you must provide in order to ensure the above activities can take place.

At the heart of the model we have the concept of *Scale*.

Scale is a measure of the *Complexity*, *Size* and levels of *Engagement* of an online presence. As we will see, *Scale* helps determine how to configure the 4 *Activities & Resources* into a workable system of control.

This *Framework* has a number of advantages as an approach to Governance.

First it is comprehensive.

It encompasses everything you need to do to run an online initiative of any type, and also lists all the resources required to support it.

Nothing is excluded.

Second, it is robust.

No matter what a project is about (whether web, intranet, social network or app) or what platform it is on (mobile, desktop or tablet), the same activities always occur and are supported by the same resources. They never change.

Indeed, a key lesson of this video series – and one I hope you really take note of – is just how consistent the elements of Governance are across the board.

Of course, sadly this means you are not unique. Sorry about that.

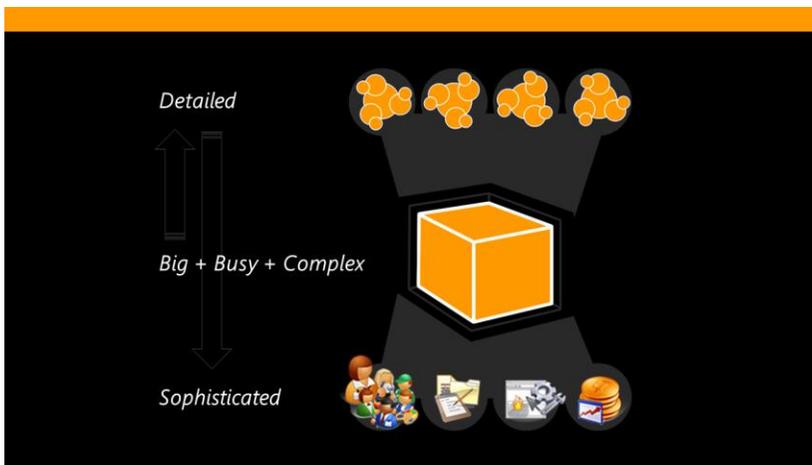
But on the other hand, happily, it means you are not unique; which suggests you can rely on the new *Framework* as a guide wherever you work.

Third, the *Framework* is scalable.

This means that no matter how big your product or service becomes, it is flexible enough to cope.

The only thing that changes is that the **granularity & sophistication** by which the various *Activities & Resources* are carried out will increase as a factor of *Scale*.

That is, the larger the *Scale* of your undertaking (the bigger, busier and more complex it is) the more detailed become the various *Activities*—and thus the more sophisticated must be the *Resources* to support it.



Which when you think about it makes a lot of sense.

By way of analogy, consider how similar operations are in, say, the bricks and mortar world of running a retail store, despite differences in scale.

Sure, there may be many contrasts between a huge international discounter and a corner store but at a basic level they must both carry out the same activities to keep things going, including:

- Planning stock
- Packing shelves

- Taking returns
- Managing tills, etc.

As well as that, they must both ensure the same categories of resourcing are in place to support it all, such as:

- Staff
- Till software
- A stock system
- A reordering processes and more.

The key distinction is that the **granularity & sophistication** by which things are done differs greatly as a factor of Scale.

While the corner store can afford to be quite informal in its approach, the volume and complexity of supervision for a large retailer is such that many more specialist staff, expensive tools and formal processes are needed.

And what is true offline, is equally true online.

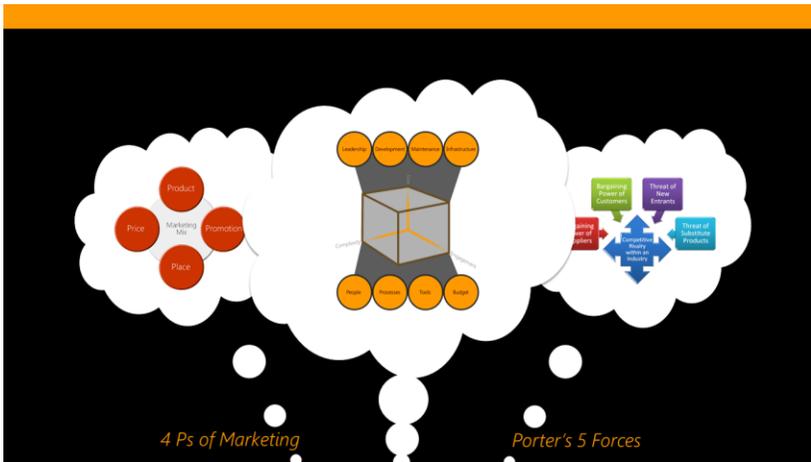
In this sense, a good way to think about the *Framework of Web Governance* is as a **conceptual model**.

That is, it simplifies what could otherwise be an impenetrably complex array of management factors into a single, straightforward construct.

It also provides a natural home for everything to do with operations and also makes it easier to recognise interdependencies that may once have been obscure.

Similar to other conceptual models (like the *4Ps of Marketing* or *Porter's 5 Forces*) the *Framework* also has predictive qualities and – as we will see –

can serve as a starting point when planning people, processes, tools and budget.



Of course, the *Framework* cannot tell you exactly how to manage your site, or exactly how many people to hire. But it does give very clear indications of how **sophisticated** your approach must be.

By way of example, let's consider the needs of two businesses at opposite ends of the online spectrum.

Mom-n-Pop vs. MegaCorp

Mom-n-Pop run a website and its very simple.

It's composed of just a dozen or so pages of brochureware content, which is mainly text and images with a few downloads.

Because it is aimed at their local community, it is not so busy and is used principally to publicise opening hours and special offers.

In contrast, **MegaCorp** runs scores of sites, apps and social networking presences localised to markets around the world. Each contains

thousands of pages of sophisticated, interactive content and attracts millions of visitors per month.

Although these endeavours could not be more different, the fact is they must both expedite **exactly** the same *Activities* and invest in **exactly** the same *Resources* in order to deliver a minimum level of stability.

That is, each needs to:

- Provide **leadership**
- Undertake **development**
- Expedite **maintenance**
- Manage **infrastructure**
- And provide the **resources** to do so.

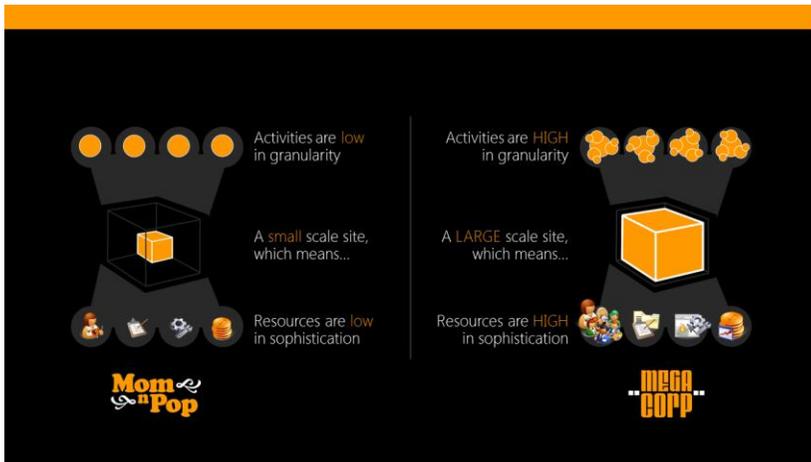
But as we know MegaCorp's online presence is huge while Mom-n-Pop's is tiny.

This means that although the categories of *Activity* and *Resource* may be the same, the **granularity & sophistication** by which they are deployed differs hugely.

For Mom-n-Pop, the configuration of their Governance may be as simple as asking their son *Junior* to maintain the site using a few freeware tools, and giving him a couple of hundred dollars a month to keep it going.

Easy!

In contrast, MegaCorp requires dozens of skilled people (designers, techies, writers) organised into teams with clear responsibilities and supervised by numerous Web and Product Managers. In addition, they require expensive and specialist tools with a large budget to support operations.



So we see that while the core *Activities* and *Resources* are the same for both, the **granularity and sophistication** by which they are implemented differs enormously.

This difference is a factor of the difference in *Scale* between the two organisations.

That is why the *Framework of Web Governance* is such a powerful tool for imposing order.

It enables you to recognise and plan for the needs of vastly different projects in a structured and predictable way.

As such, if you are currently supervising an online service and are confused about what *Activities* to carry out or what *Resources* you need, use the Framework of Web Governance as a means for auditing and filling in any gaps.

Alternatively, if you have been tasked with creating a new management system or revising one already in place—use this model and the concept of *Scale* as a basis for forecasting the sophistication of the solution that will emerge.

A “means”, but not an “end”

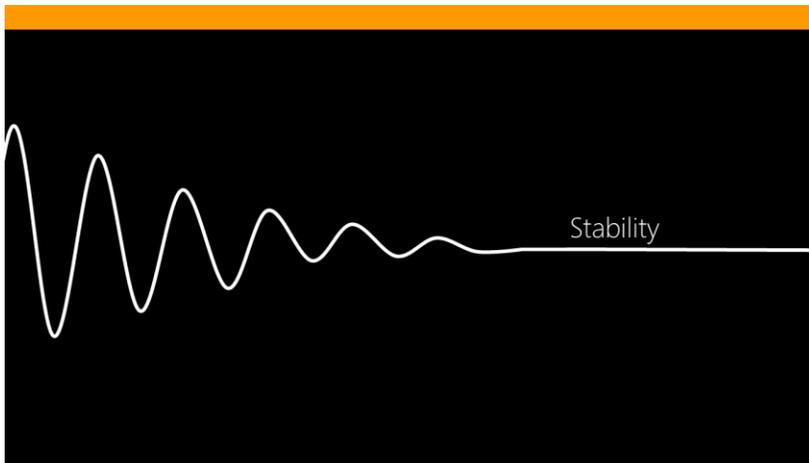
And that brings us to the end of lesson 2.

By this point you should have a good understanding of how the *Web Governance Framework* can be used to plan a better system of control. Indeed, you may already have some ideas for changes you want to implement.

And yet, you should resist the temptation of leaping to a solution of, say, creating a system that looks picture-perfect (for example, in the division of *Activities & Resources*) but is incapable of delivery.

We must remind ourselves that operations are **not an end** in themselves. They are merely a means to an end.

The actual form they take is not as important as the outcome they must deliver: **Stability**.



As the research firm **Gartner** would have it, we are probably in a bit of a *Hype Cycle* about things like Governance at the moment, hovering around the peak of inflated expectations.

This is the end of the transcript of *Video 2 - How things got so messed up & how to fix it* created by Shane Diffily.

As the internet's leading commentator on Web Governance, I recorded these classes as a low cost alternative to in-person training.

Watch all 4 videos from my new *Masterclass* at [Diffily.com/ Masterclass](http://Diffily.com/Masterclass)

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