FranklySpeaking



BOARD PAPER

The paper you put in front of your board

What an investigation is, what it costs, what the board receives and what happens if nothing changes. Written to be tabled, not rewritten.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

Contents

This paper is for the executive who has decided the work is worth doing and now needs it approved. Section 01 is the recommendation. Sections 02 to 08 are the supporting paper. Section 09 is the approval page. Nothing needs rewriting to be tabled, and sections 01, 05 and 06 lift out cleanly into a house template.

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The decision being asked for

IN ONE SENTENCE

That the board approve an independent investigation, running 12 to 16 weeks, ending in a written finding and a costed plan to fix the cause, sponsored by an executive with the authority to act on whatever it finds.

Why now

The same remedy has been applied to this problem more than twice, and the problem has returned each time. That pattern is the signal. If changing the structure were the fix, it would have worked the first time.

What is being bought

- A finding on what is actually happening, traced through dated evidence, and the plan that closes it.
- A fixed scope, a fixed fee and an end date, all agreed before the work starts.

What is not being bought

- An assessment of any individual. Blame sits outside the terms of reference, in writing.
- A strategy. The strategy is an input, not the subject.
- Delivery capacity. If the business needs people to execute, this is the wrong instrument.
- A document to support a decision already taken. That request is declined.

The ask

Approve the scope	An investigation across the defences named in section 05, on the terms in section 08.
Approve the budget	From US$35,000, fixed at scoping. Section 07 explains how the fee is set.
Confirm the sponsor	The executive who will receive the finding and can act on it, named in the resolution in section 09.
Note the standstill	No restructuring of the areas in scope during the first phase, because it changes the evidence.

Before any of this, the first meeting has no fee: 90 minutes with the sponsoring executive. If there is nothing worth investigating, that is where it ends.

What the problem looks like from the inside

Sector is the easy part. What decides whether an investigation is worth running is the condition the business is in. These 5 are the ones that matter.

1 **The same remedy has been tried more than twice.**

A reporting line restructured 3 times, a process redesigned twice, the same leadership offsite every year. Each attempt was competent. The problem came back.

2 **There is agreement in the room, and different funding outside it.**

The executive committee signs off a direction. What gets budgeted, staffed and prioritised does not match it, and neither side sees it as a disagreement.

3 **Good analysis is already on the shelf.**

A consultancy report, an internal review, a culture survey. The analysis is sound, and nothing moved. That usually means the diagnosis named a symptom.

4 **Explanations arrive one at a time.**

5 senior departures with 5 separate reasons. 4 missed quarters with 4 different causes. Each is plausible alone. Together, they are one pattern.

5 **A failure here would be public within hours.**

Other organisations depend on this one. That raises the cost of a misaligned leadership team above what the business itself carries.

Where we would decline

An honest board paper says what the instrument does not do. We decline work where:

- One function is underperforming against a clear, agreed plan. That is a management problem.
- 2 people disagree and need mediation. That is a different discipline.
- The board wants a document to support a decision it has already taken.
- The team has already decided who is to blame, or needs delivery capacity rather than a diagnosis.

What this is, and what it is not

Every alternative below is capable, and most boards have used at least one. The difference is not quality. It is what each one is built to examine.

INSTRUMENT	WHAT IT EXAMINES	WHAT IT CANNOT REACH
Internal audit	Whether practice matches policy	Why people work around the policy, and the politics that run the organisation in practice
Strategy consultancy	The strategy and the operating model	What the team believed when it acted, which is where the gap lives
Culture or engagement survey	How people feel, on average	Which decision the feeling produced, and what it cost
Executive coaching	One person's effectiveness	Conditions that would defeat any capable person in that seat
A permanent hire	Whatever the role is set up to own	The hierarchy the role reports into, which is the thing being examined
A FranklySpeaking investigation	The distance between what leadership believes and what is true	Anything that needs delivery capacity rather than a finding

The structural point

Every internal option on that list reports into the hierarchy being examined. That is not a criticism of the people in those roles. It is why none of them can produce this finding, and it is the case for an independent investigation with a board-level sponsor.

> *A permanent hire is an expensive way to fix a temporary problem.*

Where it comes from, and why it holds up

The method is adapted from aircraft accident investigation, a discipline built for exactly this situation: capable people, following the rules, producing an outcome none of them chose. None of our sources is a management theory. That is deliberate.

DISCIPLINE	WHAT IT GIVES US
ICAO Annex 13	The international standard for aircraft accident and incident investigation. How to trace a chain of causes with blame excluded from the terms of reference.
The Swiss cheese model	James Reason, 1990. How to map weaknesses across several defences and find where the gaps line up.
Situational awareness	Mica Endsley, 1988. How to separate what a team saw, what it understood and what it expected next.
Restorative just culture	Sidney Dekker. How to keep people talking once uncomfortable findings are on the table.
Crew Resource Management	From flight deck training. How to tell whether junior people can safely challenge senior ones.
Failure Mode and Effects Analysis	From reliability engineering. How to score what is left by severity, likelihood and how easily it is spotted.

The 5 defences

Every business relies on 5 defences to stop a decision going wrong quietly. A problem that gets through one is normal. A problem that gets through all 5 is a structural condition, and that is what an investigation looks for.

Strategy	Is the direction understood the same way by the people funding it and the people delivering it?
Communication	Do decisions travel with the reasoning attached, or arrive as instructions?
Trust	Does raising a problem early cost the person who raises it?
Accountability	Does each decision have a named owner and a date, or a committee and an intention?
Escalation	Is there a route upward with a stated time to respond?

The rule of evidence

Nothing is treated as fact until something independent supports it: a second person saying the same thing unprompted, a document or a number. A single account is a lead, not a finding. That is what makes the report hold up when an executive disputes it in the room.

A second inspiration. The method also drew on the television series *Undercover Boss*: when rank leaves the room, the truth people tell changes. We do not go undercover. We took the lesson, not the disguise.

12–16 weeks to a finding. 12 more to make it stick.

The same 3 steps every time, in this order. The scope changes. The order does not, because the order is what keeps the finding traceable. The scope and the fee are fixed before the first interview.

1

WEEK 0 · NO FEE

Talk

90 minutes with the executive who would sponsor the work. If there is something to investigate, a preliminary report sets out the scope and the fee. You decide after reading it.

2

WEEKS 1–14

Find the cause

We collect what already exists, listen across your leadership team and the layers below it, and trace the problem back to the conditions that made it likely. Then the written finding.

3

WEEKS 12–28

Fix it and keep it fixed

Your team agrees the facts, sees the cost and commits to specific changes. Then 12 weeks of putting them into practice, while our support steps back on a schedule you can see in advance.

What the business provides

- Access to board packs, minutes, budgets and exit interviews, including the uncomfortable parts.
- About 90 minutes per person in scope, once.
- A sponsor who takes a fortnightly update and does not brief the outcome ahead of it.
- No restructuring of the areas in scope during the first phase.

> *The sessions are the part executives worry about most. In practice, they are the part people ask to extend.*

The questions are the same for everyone and nothing is attributed, which is what makes them work.

4 documents, and one you keep using

An investigation with no intervention is an expensive document. So the last 2 are about the change, not the finding.

DOCUMENT	WHEN	WHAT IT CONTAINS
Preliminary report	Week 1	A written position on 3 things: whether this looks like a system problem, what an investigation would examine and what it would cost.
Findings report	Weeks 10–14	Numbered findings, one to a page. Each carries the pattern, the evidence and the cost. How many people we heard it from is in the sentence.
Alignment register	Weeks 12–16	Every change scored for severity, likelihood and how easily it would be spotted. Each has one named owner and a completion test anyone could check.
Embedding protocol	The next 12 weeks	A published schedule for withdrawing our support, with the register re-scored at each step. Your board keeps the register when we leave.

Who sees what

The sponsor receives everything. The board receives the findings report and the register in full. No version of the findings report exists with the uncomfortable parts removed, and that is agreed in writing before the work starts.

What stays out of the report

- Who said what in any session.
- Any assessment of an individual's competence or suitability.
- Any recommendation about anybody's employment.

Findings describe decisions and facts, never motives or character. If the evidence shows information reached a decision-maker and nothing followed, the finding says so, the person concerned sees it first and can respond, and the board decides what to do.

07 · COST

Priced against the appointment you would otherwise make

We price against the executive hire this work replaces, because that is the decision it competes with. The fee is fixed at scoping and does not move.

FEES FOR 2027

ENGAGEMENT	FEE	WHAT IT COVERS
The first meeting	No fee	90 minutes with the sponsoring executive, ending in a clear answer on whether an investigation is worth doing
Preliminary report	US$2,500	If an investigation is warranted: what it would examine, how long it takes and what it costs. Deducted from the fee if you go ahead
Defences Review	From US$15,000	Before anything fails: your 5 defences scored and the gaps ranked
Investigation	From US$35,000	The full investigation and the plan that closes it, 12–16 weeks, then 12 weeks of support
Investigation, large and multi-country	US$250,000 or more	A multinational group or a regulator, with more defences and units in scope
AI Decision Review	From US$7,500	A board session before an AI system is approved. A review after a failure from US$12,000

Fees are published in US dollars. South African clients are quoted in rand. We do not quote day rates: a day is not the thing being bought.

What moves the number

How many of the 5 defences are in scope, how many operating units, and how much of the history has to be rebuilt because it was never written down. Not the seniority of who does the work, and not the number of days.

The comparison

Fully loaded annual cost, market estimates.

THE HIRE	COST A YEAR	WHY IT CANNOT PRODUCE THE FINDING
Chief risk officer	US$150,000–300,000	Measures compliance against policy, not the distance between belief and fact
Transformation director	US$120,000–220,000	Owns delivery of the strategy being examined
Head of organisational development	US$130,000–250,000	Has the people skills, without the mandate to investigate or to put a number on it
Strategy consultancy	US$300,000 and up	Examines the document and the operating model, not what the team believed when it acted

4 things agreed before a fee is quoted

1. **Somebody senior enough to act on the finding sponsors the work.**
   If the finding lands with someone who cannot change what it names, the investigation was an expensive way to produce a document.

2. **Blame sits outside the terms of reference, in writing.**
   This is not a courtesy. It is the condition that makes people say what they would otherwise not say.

3. **No restructuring during the first phase.**
   Moving reporting lines in the middle of an investigation changes the evidence and breaks the timeline.

4. **You receive the whole findings report.**
   Including the parts that were uncomfortable to write. There is no second version.

Confidentiality

Everything produced belongs to the client. Cases are published only in disguised form: the name, country, dates, size and exact figures are altered, while the sector, the mechanism, the sequence and the order of magnitude are not. Nothing that could identify a person is published. A figure carries a client's name only when the client clears it in writing.

Fair process

We protect sources, not decisions. Nothing anyone says in a session is traced back to them. Decisions taken with authority are not hidden, but a finding states facts only, never motive or character, and the person concerned sees it first and can respond.

Data and documents

Session notes are held without attribution. Documents provided by the business are returned or destroyed at the close of the engagement, at the client's choice, and we confirm this in writing.

The cost of the condition compounds quietly

This belongs with the board, not only with management, because each further attempt at the same remedy uses up budget and credibility, and makes the next attempt harder to fund.

The businesses in our published cases had all tried at least twice before the work started. In every one of them, the cost of the delay was more than 10 times the cost of the investigation.

> *Every further attempt at the same remedy makes the next one harder to fund.*

09 · APPROVAL

A resolution the board can adopt as written

DRAFT RESOLUTION

That the board approves an independent investigation by FranklySpeaking, on the following basis:

1. The scope covers the defences and operating units set out in the attached scoping note, over 12 to 16 weeks.
2. The fee is fixed at the amount in the scoping note and does not vary with the number of days worked.
3. [Name, role] is appointed as sponsoring executive, with authority to act on the findings within existing delegations.
4. Blame and any assessment of individual performance sit outside the terms of reference.
5. No restructuring of the areas in scope will take place during the first phase.
6. The board will receive the findings report and the alignment register in full, without amendment.
7. The sponsoring executive will report progress to the board at each scheduled meeting during the engagement.

SPONSORING EXECUTIVE

CHAIR

DATE

BOARD REFERENCE

Before this is tabled, the first meeting has no fee: 90 minutes with the executive who would sponsor the work, ending in a clear answer on whether an investigation is warranted.

BOOK THE FIRST MEETING
franklyspeakinghq.com/enquire

WRITE TO US
enquiries@franklyspeakinghq.com

CHECK YOUR DEFENCES IN 4 MINUTES
franklyspeakinghq.com/diagnostic

THE WEBSITE
franklyspeakinghq.com