

FORGE

Forge Strategic Paper

001

Your Governance Might Be Functioning.

One accountability question every Board should test.



DOCUMENT CLASSIFICATION PUBLIC

This publication forms part of the Forge Public Series. It offers a short, evidence-based perspective on organisational accountability, for Boards and executive teams. It does not disclose Forge's proprietary assessment tools, diagnostic frameworks, or practitioner methods.

Preface

Forge's research examined forty-five documented cases of organisational change. It found a consistent pattern in how accountability actually holds, or quietly stops holding, inside organisations. This paper takes one finding from that study and puts it in front of the people best placed to test it against their own experience: Board Chairs and the executives who report to them. It introduces no new evidence. It asks one question.

I. The Pattern

Governance rarely fails all at once.

It loses influence gradually, in a way that leaves every visible sign of itself intact. The committee still meets. The charter still exists. The reporting line is still drawn correctly on the org chart. Nothing on paper changes.

What changes is quieter. The decisions that were supposed to run through that structure start being made somewhere else, informally, before the meeting where they're supposed to be decided. The mechanism stays in place. It stops being where the real decision happens.

Forge's research found a specific condition that predicts which accountability mechanisms hold and which ones hollow out this way: whether the mechanism can be unilaterally dismissed by the person or group it's meant to hold accountable. Where it can be dismissed without real consequence, whether by a delegated office with no independence, or by a senior leader with no check on their own judgement, it tends to survive on paper while carrying less and less actual force. Where it genuinely cannot be waved away, it holds.

That's a checkable question, not a values statement.

II. Why This Matters for Boards

This is precisely the layer a Board Chair is positioned to see, and a management team often isn't. From inside an organisation, a governance mechanism that still meets, still reports, and still exists doesn't look broken. It looks fine. The evidence suggests "still exists" and "still doing its job" are not the same claim, and the gap between them is hardest to see from the inside.

The practical risk isn't dramatic governance failure. It's a Board that believes its oversight is real because the structure is real, without ever testing whether the structure could actually be overridden if someone wanted to.

III. Questions Leaders Should Ask

- Which of our accountability mechanisms could be unilaterally dismissed by the person or group they're meant to hold accountable, and which genuinely cannot?
- Has any of our governance structure quietly stopped being where a real decision gets made, even though it still meets on schedule?
- If commercial or political pressure increased tomorrow, which of our current protections would actually survive?
- When did we last test one of our own mechanisms, rather than simply confirm it still exists?

Strategic Reflection

A Board's real authority is not measured by how many mechanisms it has. It's measured by how many of them could survive being tested. Most Boards can answer which mechanisms exist. Fewer can answer which ones would actually hold.

Scope

WHAT THIS DOCUMENT IS

A short, standalone perspective on one governance pattern, drawn from a broader Forge research study of forty-five organisational cases.

WHAT IT IS NOT

A proposal, a capability statement, or a piece of marketing collateral. It introduces no new evidence beyond that underlying research study.

WHERE IT SITS

The first in a short series of Forge Strategic Papers, each translating a single research finding for Boards and executive teams.

Read the underlying research: [Forge Research Paper 001](#)

Full library: forgez.co/publications

About Forge & Version

Forge publishes research, strategic papers and foundational works exploring how organisational environments shape behaviour, decision-making and performance.

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