The Champion Brief

The written case for terminology governance — two pages, openly framed, ready to adapt

This is the case you make inside [ORGANIZATION], written to be adapted: fill the brackets, swap in your own audit findings once you have them, and put your name on it. It is deliberately openly framed — you are proposing a program and proposing to help run it, and the brief says so. The deck (`champion-deck.pptx`) makes the same argument for a room; this version is for the leader who reads.

The pattern

Two examples, standing for many. Our materials use *tribal knowledge* — in workshops, in delivery docs, in the phrases we've stopped hearing. The term is doing two jobs badly: it's imprecise (undocumented knowledge? tacit skill? both?), and it borrows Indigenous identity as a metaphor for "unmanaged" — which is why the knowledge-management discipline itself has moved to *institutional knowledge* and *tacit knowledge*. And a recent public post reached for *Mexican standoff* — a phrase that attaches an ethnicity to dysfunction and means nothing to a reader without the film reference. *Standoff* alone says it better.

Neither is an accusation. They are symptoms of the same condition: **nobody owns our vocabulary.** Terms drift in from engineering slang, sales idiom, and habit, and nothing checks them on the way to a client.

This isn't two words

The same audit that finds those two finds the family: *master/slave* in architecture docs, *whitelist/blacklist* in security content, *grandfathered* in pricing, *sanity check* in QA, *man-hours* in estimates, *open the kimono* in sales calls, *guru* and *ninja* in job posts. Industry bodies have already done the consensus work — the Inclusive Naming Initiative (Cisco, IBM, Red Hat, the Linux Foundation), the ACM, Microsoft's and Google's style guides, the Linux kernel, 3GPP. This is not a frontier we'd be settling; it's a standard the serious end of the industry has already adopted, and our content dates itself every quarter we haven't.

Three costs of doing nothing

1. **Clarity and retrieval.** Terms are retrieval keys. One concept under three names splits search results for humans and weakens matches for machines — including the AI systems increasingly assembling answers from our content. Idiom compounds it: a non-native reader gets nothing from *open the kimono*, and neither does a retrieval system.
2. **Procurement and platform.** Enterprise RFPs and supplier reviews increasingly screen vendor content; style-guide compliance and terminology questions show up in security and comms reviews. Each S1-grade term in a public asset is one screenshot away from being someone else's post about us.
3. **Talent and clients.** The people we most want to hire and the clients we most want to keep notice language earlier than we do. In a consultancy, content *is* the product demo.

The upside — why this is an advantage, not a chore

We sell clarity. A firm whose own vocabulary is governed — one name per concept, plain language in front of clients, a standard someone signs — is demonstrating the discipline it sells. This is a differentiator precisely because it's rare: most firms treat language as taste. We'd treat it as an asset with an owner, which is the same move we recommend to clients about their knowledge.

What good looks like

Four phases, none requiring new tooling: **Audit** (twenty client-facing assets, two reviewers, thirty days — evidence, not opinion) → **Standard** (a two-page terminology standard, ratified with named owners, contested calls decided once and logged) → **Gate** (three line-items in the existing content-review path, plus a grep list any CI job can run) → **Enablement** (the standard becomes how we write, via onboarding and coaching — not policing). This is a knowledge-and-content-governance program, run with the same machinery as any content standard.

What leading is required

An owner with four things: an outside-enough vantage point to see phrases the culture has stopped hearing; depth in content governance and knowledge practice (the retrieval argument is the load-bearing one); enough fluency in our business to make calls that survive contact with sales and delivery; and the change-management craft to install a standard without creating language police. [NAME THE OWNER — or the search for one — HERE.]

The ask

Approve the 30-day audit: twenty assets, two reviewers, findings report at day 30 — including the fix list for anything urgent we find. Cost is two people's part-time month. Decision after the readout, with evidence on the table.
