ANDING & COMPANY

The Forward Deployed Entrepreneur

ANDING PERSPECTIVE | 2026



Executive summary

Most corporate attempts to build new business do not fail for lack of ideas or technology. They stall **in the middle of the process**, between a validated problem and a scaling venture, where **nobody is positioned to win the first customers and to anchor the new business in the organization**.

We propose a role to close this gap. A **forward deployed entrepreneur (FDEnt)** is **a senior professional deployed into a client's leadership team and venture, working at eye level with the C-suite, with a mandate to act at the two fronts of a new business – the market and the core organization – backed by the full capability of the firm, for a defined period until the client's own team carries the business.** The FDEnt takes part in the strategic meetings where decisions about the new business are made, and he is **advisor and performer at once**: He shapes these decisions and then executes them with the venture team.

The term borrows from the **forward deployed engineer**, and each word carries meaning: **Forward** describes the position, **deployed** the relationship to a home base, **entrepreneur** the behavior. The home base is what separates the role from the entrepreneur-in-residence, a model that has rarely delivered.

Inside the client, the FDEnt works with a defined set of counterparts. The **executive sponsor**, typically the CEO or owner, grants the mandate and protects it. The **CFO** holds the budget and the governance and equity questions. The **heads of strategy and innovation** are the daily sparring partners. The **heads of sales and of the business units** control customer access and core assets, and they are where cannibalization fears sit, so winning them over is part of the job. **Technology and HR leaders** decide whether the new business can be built, staffed and incentivized. One named senior counterpart is essential, because the role can only move as fast as the person who clears its path.

I. Why new businesses stall in the middle

Corporate business building has been tried in many forms, from **venture capital arms** to **venture clienting** to building corporate startups from scratch (excubation). In our experience, **the tactics are largely solved**: Design thinking, sprints, prototypes, even startup-style incentives and legal entities are widely in place. What remains unsolved is **the paradigm that drives the effort**. Organizations default to one of three: **Product-led**, **finance- or organization-led**, or **sales-led**.

The first two feel safe and fail late. A financial services client built software that solved an internal problem and discovered that **no external buyer shared it**. A machinery manufacturer spent a seven-digit sum and then stopped, because **no business unit was willing to host** a venture that would cannibalize its own sales. An insurer staffed venture CEOs from the core business, who advanced product and internal relationships and **neglected the customer**. In each case the idea was acceptable. **What was missing was someone positioned to sell it and to make the organization carry it.**

AI has widened the gap. Prototypes and tooling now take weeks. What remains scarce is **business judgment**: Which problem is worth solving, for which buyer, at what price, and in which organizational home. That judgment is entrepreneurial, and it is rarely developed in a conference room. It requires a certain **entrepreneurial ruthlessness that harmony-driven organizations rarely tolerate.**

II. What "forward deployed" means

The forward deployed engineer was established by software companies whose platforms create value only once they work inside the customer's processes. The vendor sends an engineer out of its product organization to the customer's site. He works where the problem is, decides on the spot, and feeds what he learns back into the product. The FDEnt **transfers this logic from technology to new business**. We take each of the three words literally.

Forward: The position

The FDEnt stands where a new business is decided, and that place has two fronts. The **external front** is the client's customers: A new business is won or lost in the buyer's economics, not in the sponsor's business case. The **internal front** is the core organization: Budget, governance, sales channels, and the business units whose support or resistance decides whether a venture can operate. A strategy department sits behind both fronts; an innovation lab usually sits beside them. **The FDEnt works on both fronts at the same time.**

The position also has a vertical dimension: **Close to where decisions are made**. The FDEnt works **at eye level with the C-suite** and takes a seat in the **key strategic meetings – executive** board sessions, investment committees, steering boards, portfolio reviews – instead of receiving their results second hand. Because he is present when decisions are made, he can shape them. Because he then executes them himself, he knows what they take.

Deployed: The relationship to a base

Deployment implies a home base that sends, supplies, backs up and takes back. The FDEnt arrives with a **defined mission and mandate**, acts without escalating every decision, and has a **return date**. Behind him stands Anding & Company with methods, people and experience he can draw on at any time (section IV). What he learns flows back into the firm's playbook, as the engineer's learnings flow back into the product.

Entrepreneur: The behavior

The FDEnt behaves like a founder. He **sells before the product is polished**, decides on evidence rather than seniority, and **has something at stake** through an outcome-linked fee. He does not own the client's business: The client owns the business and its P&L. The FDEnt is **co-accountable with the venture lead for agreed milestones**: Validated demand, a tested price, first paying customers, a working operating model, and a clear decision to scale, spin out or stop. A clean stop counts as a result, because it frees capital and talent early.

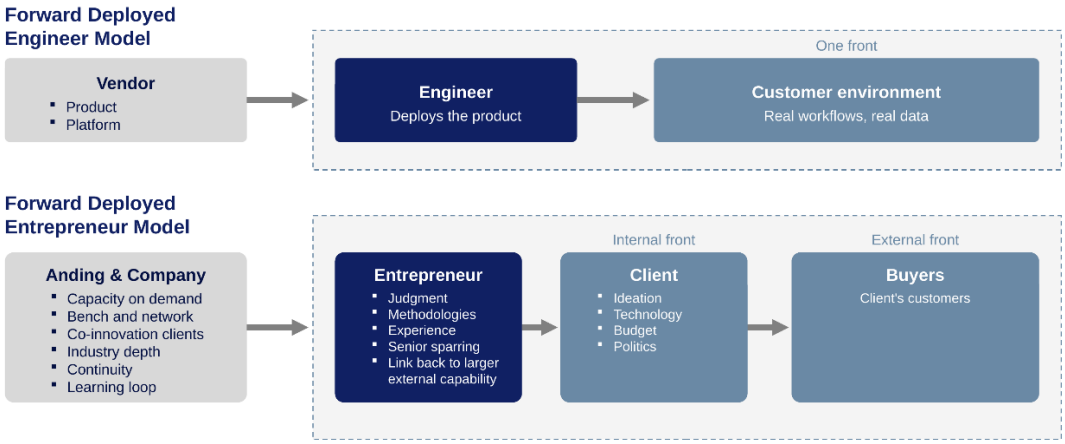


FIGURE 1: THE FORWARD LOGIC: ONE FRONT FOR THE ENGINEER, TWO FRONTS FOR THE ENTREPRENEUR

The comparison also explains why the **entrepreneur-in-residence** has rarely worked. He is **placed, not deployed**: A single individual with a loose brief, no decision rights, no method beyond personal experience, and no base to draw on or return to. He often looks for his own venture rather than the client's. When he leaves, his experience leaves with him.

III. The role in practice

Profile

A forward deployed entrepreneur **understands the client's industry and the industry of the client's clients**, because the new business succeeds or fails in the buyer's economics. He **challenges the client's understanding of its own business** and **asks the questions insiders have stopped asking**. Startup methods are necessary but not decisive; what carries something new through a mature organization is **grit, energy and passion**, combined with a practical understanding of **how corporate organizations and their politics work**: Who decides, who must be convinced, and who can quietly stop a venture. We typically deploy **a manager trained in top-tier consulting who also carries a founder's experience**, and who lives the Anding values: Entrepreneurship, professionalism, integrity, long-term orientation, and humor and humility.

Advisor and performer

The role is **advisor and performer at once**. As advisor, the FDEnt works **at eye level with the C-suite** and the strategy and innovation leaders and **participates in the strategic meetings** that decide budget, priorities and the venture's organizational home. There he provides **external opinion and reflection**, suggests ideas for new business and proposes the **organizational structures** that make them work. He locates the real issues with the **Value Canvas and the scalability audit**, backed quantitatively, so that discussions move from opinion to evidence. As performer, he **does the work** inside the venture: Calling customers, building the pricing model, drafting the sales process. And he **instills the same habits in the venture team**: Hypothesis-driven work, a customer-first reflex, and fast decisions.

Client example: Venture building for an international industrial conglomerate

The Anding team was the venture builder for a new electric vehicle fleet management venture, acting as voice of reason between the corporate sponsor and the venture team. Both sides describe the role:

"[Anding's team] has been driving our new dedicated venture for Electric Vehicle fleet management as a venture builder from the very start. They have been the backbone that – together with our venture leadership team – ensured customer-centric product and market development, sound venture operations and strong push towards first customers and revenues, directing effort towards priority use cases."

Corporate sponsor of the venture

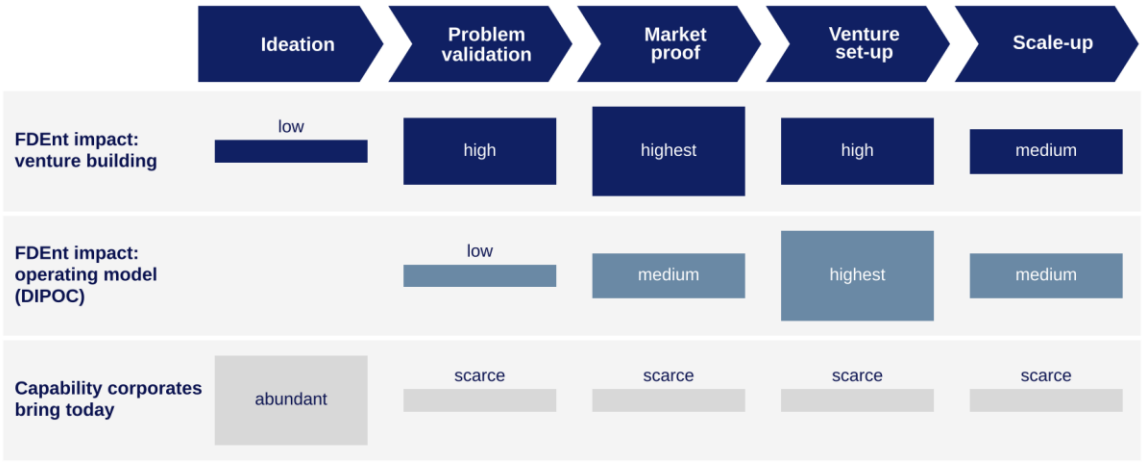
"From day one, Anding's team shaped and delivered on the project with pragmatism and focus on our mutual goal. […] The daily working mode with the venture team is very hands-on and responsive. We really see each other as one team with a mutual goal, which drives direct and fact-based discussions and much better results."

Venture CEO

Where the role makes the difference

The work **begins with value and ends with a decision**. The **Value Canvas** aligns leadership on how much value should come from direct revenue, from the core business and from strategic effects. A **hypothesis tree** turns the ambition into beliefs to be tested, **riskiest first**: Willingness to pay, margin, scalability, legal setup, and whether the organization will let a startup team operate as one. Testing happens **in the market, not in the organization**: A customer pipeline starts on day one. For example: In an equipment-as-a-service build for a machinery manufacturer, a pitch deck anchored on the Value Canvas, a simple ROI calculator and a CRM funnel of several hundred contacts reshaped the offer more than any internal workshop. The cadence follows our **Campus model**: Three sprints from problem-solution fit to product-market fit to profit-and-scale fit.

Impact is therefore **concentrated in the middle of the process**. Ideation and technology build are crowded with internal ideas and cheap AI-built prototypes; the scarce capabilities are **proving demand, winning the first sales and anchoring the venture in the organization**.



Impact: bar height indicates relative contribution of the FDEnt per phase (qualitative assessment).

Source: Anding & Company

FIGURE 2: IMPACT OF THE FORWARD DEPLOYED ENTREPRENEUR ALONG THE INNOVATION PROCESS

In parallel, and peaking in venture set-up, the FDEnt designs the **operating model** along **DIPOC**: Processes, decision rights, capabilities, incentives and organization. Here the role knows best **what makes a new business work inside a corporate setting**: Who sells, who decides what, which skills are hired or borrowed, how the team is rewarded, and how the venture connects to the core. Every venture needs **five roles** – visionary, integrator, sales, operations and finance – and until the first hires land, the FDEnt often carries several of them.

The focus adapts to the starting point. With an **idea and no customer evidence**, the FDEnt runs Campus sprints toward the first paying customers. With a **venture running below plan**, he starts with the scalability audit and resets

steering around the red items. With a **launch decision just taken**, he designs operating model, governance and staffing before the first hire. With a **core business under pressure**, he applies the Value Canvas to the core and to the customer's customer and settles build, partner or buy.

IV. The base behind the role

What the FDEnt can draw on is the **decisive difference to an individual hire or the classical entrepreneur-in-residence**. Anding & Company as a home base provides eight capabilities.

Methodologies: Value Canvas, hypothesis tree, scalability audit, Campus, Corporate Startup Canvas, DIPOC, PAIRAMID and the sales-led playbook give the FDEnt a tested toolkit instead of improvisation.

Experience from more than 15 ventures built: Our venture builds across multiple industries have produced principles that the FDEnt applies from the first week. Drawing from these venture builds, the FDEnt leverages learnings, contacts and a clear understanding of what works and what doesn't, and has the confidence to argue it with the client.

Capacity on demand: A teamlet of manager, senior consultant and consultant can be added for a sprint, a customer campaign or the operating model design, and withdrawn again, without a new procurement process. The team can scale up and down flexibly and doesn't need to be briefed or trained – it pulls from the situational client knowledge the FDEnt has built up.

Senior sparring and escalation: A partner acts as second voice of reason toward the C-suite. When the FDEnt has to deliver an uncomfortable message, the firm's senior leadership stands behind it.

Bench and network: Interim CxO experience, candidates for the five venture roles, and access to investors and partners shorten the path from set-up to operation.

Clients for co-innovation: Anding brings a broad base of its own clients across industries. In the market proof phase, the FDEnt can introduce the new business to them as **pilot customers and co-innovation partners** – access that a corporate venture typically does not have, because the parent's sales channels serve the core business. Early reference customers from outside the client's own customer base are often what turns a validated problem into a proven market.

Industry depth and continuity: Colleagues across the firm add knowledge of the client's customers' industries. If the situation changes or a person leaves, Anding replaces or reinforces, which removes the single-person risk of an individual hire.

A learning loop: Each deployment feeds back into the playbook, so the FDEnt capability gets better and sharper over time to benefit existing and new clients alike. This is the equivalent of the engineer's feedback into the product.

V. How the role is engaged and compensated

A forward deployed engineer is often financed through the platform contract it helps to win. Anding has no platform to recover that cost later, and a free or discounted FDEnt would turn the role into a sales instrument, weaken its independence when tough questions are due, and contradict its purpose of making the client independent. The FDEnt is therefore **a compensated mandate from day one**.

Entry is a fixed-price diagnostic, typically the four-week scalability audit or a Value Canvas alignment of the leadership team. It shows whether the conditions for the role exist and whether a single FDEnt or a teamlet fits. The **mandate** itself is time-boxed, typically six months and renewable, and combines a **reduced fixed fee with a success component** tied to venture milestones. Past structures have included a minority equity stake with a pre-agreed call option for the client.

The FDEnt is the account, not the pitch. Further capacity – Campus sprints, teamlet support, interim management, recruiting of the venture team – is drawn from the base when the venture needs it, and scoped and priced separately. One rule protects credibility: **The FDEnt recommends, the sponsor decides**, and the success component is linked to venture metrics, never to Anding's revenue. The model follows a principle we applied when proposing a **Results Delivery Office** for a large manufacturer: A team with hybrid expertise rather than a lone individual, a defined period, a transition to the client at any time, and an outcome-based option. Anding's presence recedes as the client's own team grows.

The role works only under three conditions. First, a **ring-fenced budget**: Real euros transferred to the venture, with authority to reallocate them, and stage-gate oversight instead of operational interference. Second, **arm's-length steering**: Sponsors decide at stage gates while the team owns execution. Third, **early customer access**: A senior counterpart clears internal obstacles and opens doors to customers from the first week. Where these conditions are missing, we say so in the diagnostic, before the mandate starts.

Internally, the role is also a **seniority track**. Because the profile requires founder experience, the track includes an **operating tour**: Consultants run validation sprints and customer conversations, take an operative role in a venture, lead embedded engagements as project leaders and managers, and finally carry commercial accountability for a venture. We promote for shown performance at the next level. We make sure to deploy the most experienced and capable individuals into this important role.

Conclusion: Who makes it happen

The binding constraint on corporate new business is not ideas or technology but **the middle of the process**, where demand must be proven and the venture anchored in the organization. The forward deployed entrepreneur is the role built for that place: **Forward** at the market, inside the core organization and at the decision table, **deployed** from a base that supplies method, capacity and backing, and **entrepreneurial** in how he decides and what he has at stake. It succeeds only with a **ring-fenced budget, arm's-length steering and early customer access**, and its end state is a decision, in which **a well-run stop is as valuable as a scale-up**. For clients, it answers the question every new business raises: **Who will actually make this happen?**

Appendix: Further references

The methods referenced in this paper are described in more detail on our website.

- Anding Methodologies (overview): Value Canvas, hypothesis tree, DIPOC and PAIRAMID at a glance
- Value Creation with Digital Products and Services: Value Canvas: Aligning leadership on where value is expected to come from
- Steering organizations towards a modern operating model – The DIPOC Framework: Processes, decision making, capabilities, incentives and organization
- Taking the Art out of Artificial Intelligence (PAIRAMID): Tying AI initiatives to measurable cost and revenue levers
- New Business Scalability Audit: The four-week diagnostic used as entry point
- Sales-led Business Building: Why market performance is the definitive test of a new business
- Business Building at Anding & Company: Our business building services

This paper is intended for distribution to senior leaders. It represents the views of the author and is intended to inform strategic dialogue on building new business in established companies.

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