

LEAD THE WORK · GOVERNANCE & DECISIONS

Decision & Accountability Toolkit

Accountability blurs when authority is implied. Friction increases. Decisions get revisited. People work hard without knowing if they are the right people doing the right things.

- 1 Who actually owns this decision?
- 2 Who needs to be consulted — and who just needs to know?
- 3 What happens when we are blocked?
- 4 Where are expectations still implicit?

45 minutes

Team or solo use

Governance & Decisions

Clarity is not control. It is the condition under which good people do their best work.

What you leave with

Written ownership for every key decision. A pre-designed escalation path. Language for the conversations that restore clarity without drama.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Part I — Define Decision Ownership

Every decision has one accountable owner. Consulted and informed roles are explicit. This is how trust is built — not assumed.

Part II — Escalation Ladder

Three levels. Clear conditions. Pre-committed responses. Escalation designed before pressure arrives is the kind that works.

Part III — Role Clarity Script

Language for the conversations that restore clarity without assigning blame. Designed to be used in the moment.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Decision owners are explicit — not implied.

Escalation paths are predictable before needed.

Responsibilities are written, not assumed.

Conflict reduces through clarity.

USE IT WHEN

Work is stalling because no one is sure who decides. Escalation is happening without a shared language.

Clear Ownership
One owner per decision

Reduced Friction
Less coordination cost

Improved Coordination
Escalation before conflict

Accountability without clarity is not accountability — it is exposure. This toolkit builds the clarity that makes accountability possible and fair.

PART I

Define Decision Ownership

Every decision has one accountable owner. Not a committee. Not a consensus. One person who makes the call and is responsible for the outcome.

- 1 List the decisions that need owners
Surface what is implicit. Write each decision as a clear statement.
- 2 Assign one owner per decision
If more than one person could be named, the ambiguity is the problem.
- 3 Define consulted roles
Who provides input before the decision? Their input shapes it — but doesn't make it.
- 4 Define informed roles
Who needs to know after? Timely information is a form of respect.

DECISION OWNERSHIP REGISTER

DECISION	OWNER	CONSULTED	INFORMED

PART II

Escalation Ladder

Escalation designed before pressure arrives is the kind that works. Three levels. Clear conditions. Pre-committed responses.

LEVEL	CONDITION	ACTION	WHO RESOLVES
Level 1	Blocked more than 24 hours	Clarify and re-sequence. Name the next visible step.	Decision Owner
Level 2	Blocked more than 72 hours	Convene decision owner. Review criteria and constraints.	Decision Owner + Sponsor
Level 3	Outcome at risk	Sponsor resolves the tradeoff. Criteria revisited deliberately.	Sponsor

PROMPTS WORTH SITTING WITH

Where are expectations still implicit in this team?

Name one. Write it down. That is the beginning.

What would change if every decision had a written owner?

This is usually a quieting question.

Where is escalation happening without a shared language?

Escalation without language is conflict.

What conflict would become a conversation with clearer ownership?

Often: most of them.

PART III

Role Clarity Script

Use this language when ownership is unclear or escalation is needed — without assigning blame. Clarity is the goal, not correction.

WHEN OWNERSHIP IS UNCLEAR:

Surface the ambiguity rather than absorb it.

"Here is the decision that needs to be made."

State it clearly. One sentence.

"Here is what is currently unclear about who owns it."

Name the ambiguity directly.

"I propose this owner and this consult list."

A recommendation is easier to react to than to invent.

"If there is disagreement, here is how we escalate."

Name the path before the pressure arrives.

WHEN ESCALATION IS NEEDED:

Move the blockage up the ladder without drama.

"We have been blocked for [time]. Here is what we have tried."

Factual. No blame.

"Here is what we need to proceed."

Specific. One ask.

"Here is the impact of continued delay."

Honest. Not catastrophizing.

ROLE CLARITY WORKSHEET

THE DECISION OR SITUATION WHERE OWNERSHIP IS UNCLEAR:

PROPOSED DECISION OWNER:

One person.

CONSULTED:

INFORMED:

ESCALATION PATH IF BLOCKED:

Level 1 / Level 2 / Level 3

REFLECTION — AFTER THE WORK

Use these prompts after the situation has stabilized — not to assign blame, but to understand what the work revealed.

WHERE ARE EXPECTATIONS STILL IMPLICIT IN THIS TEAM?

Name one. Write it down.

WHAT WOULD CHANGE IF EVERY DECISION HAD A WRITTEN OWNER?

Be specific about what gets easier.

WHAT CONFLICT WOULD BECOME A CONVERSATION WITH CLEARER OWNERSHIP?

Clarity is not control. Written ownership is one of the most generous things a leader can offer a team.

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