Ownership Map

Facilitator guide

Your job: get the team to put its real work on a board and one name on each piece, then let the board reveal what was hidden — the work several people thought they shared, and the work nobody owned at all — and leave with one clear owner on everything. The board shows the gaps; your job is to get the work up honestly and hold the one-owner rule.

The one idea: "we're all on it" usually means no one is. When ownership is assumed rather than said out loud, work gets missed in the gaps between people — until you map them. Put every piece of work on a board with one name on each, and the moment everyone has claimed, the board reveals the gaps — the overlaps and orphans become impossible to miss. **One accountable owner. Many contributors.**

WHEN DO I USE THIS?

Use this when

GOOD FIT

Work keeps stalling and "who owns that?" gets blank looks or several hands; a few people are quietly doing the same thing while other work has no owner; a new project or reorg — or a major scope change or reprioritisation — has reshuffled who does what. Bring the real, current body of work.

WRONG TOOL

The team disagrees on what matters most, not who owns it › Prioritise Under Pressure. You're not sure people heard the same thing › Echo Test. A manager wants to hand off ownership well over time › Decision Delegation Lab.

The one test before you start: is this real, current work the people in the room actually deliver? If it's a hypothetical org chart or a list of roles, it won't reveal anything. Bring the live body of work.

WHAT WILL THE TEAM LEAVE WITH?

What you'll leave with

WHAT YOU GET

A visible map of every piece of work with one clear owner on each; the overlaps resolved to a single accountable name; and the orphans claimed or consciously parked — no more unowned gaps.

WHY IT MATTERS

The team sees that "we're all on it" meant no one was, and watches the gaps that were obvious but unnoticed appear on the board. Chasing drops once every item has a single owner.

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PART 1 BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

get ready

1 · WHAT IS MY JOB HERE?

Your job

You are running this to one outcome: one accountable name on every live piece of work. Your job is to:

- get the **real work** up on the board — concrete deliverables, not roles
- run the claim **silent and simultaneous** — don't let the first voice set who owns what
- hold the **one-owner rule** — contribution is shared, ownership is one name
- protect the **orphans step** — a nameless live item is the exact gap the team came to close

> **Don't assign ownership — let the board reveal it.** Your job is to run the claim and hold the rule, not to hand out owners. The moment you start "helping" by assigning names, you replace what the team discovered with your own guess — and the reveal is lost. Stay neutral; let the board do the work.

THE ONE IDEA

One accountable owner. Many contributors. Without one accountable owner, shared ownership often becomes no ownership. The gaps stay invisible until work stalls. One name per piece — agreed out loud — makes those gaps visible before they cost the team.

2 · WHO DOES WHAT?

Roles

Role	What they do
You (facilitator)	Lay out the board, run the claim, hold the one-owner rule, capture the result, keep time. Stay neutral — don't assign ownership yourself; let the board and the team do it.
Participants (3–6)	The people who actually do the work. They write the work, claim what they own honestly, and resolve the overlaps and orphans together. 30–45 minutes.

3 · HOW DO I OPEN?

Opening script — 2–3 minutes

In your own words, never read aloud. Make it clear this isn't about blame — it's about finding the gaps before they cost the team again.

SAY — IN YOUR OWN WORDS

"We're going to put our real work on this board and each put our name on what we own. Then we'll see what the board shows us — where two of us both thought we had it, and where nobody did. This isn't about blame; it's about finding the gaps before they cost us again. One accountable owner on each piece — many of us can contribute, but one name owns it."

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4 · HOW DO I PREPARE THE SPACE?

Setup and materials

Component	What it is, and when you use it
The board	A shared surface, three columns: the work, the owner, the status. Step 1: lay it out. The team's real work fills it, one item per row.
Work cards	Blank cards or sticky notes, one piece of work each. Step 2: the team writes its actual deliverables — no generic roles.
Name tokens	One set per person — labels or coloured dots. Step 3: each person places a token on everything they believe they own. The tokens make overlaps and orphans visible at a glance.
Capture space	Room to mark the agreed single owner and note anything parked. Steps 5–7: this becomes the map the team keeps.

Two setup notes. Large worksets: if the team has more than about 25–30 live items, map the current project's major deliverables first — you can repeat the activity for another workstream rather than overload one board. **Remote teams:** run it on a shared digital whiteboard, using coloured dots instead of physical tokens — the claim and the reveal work exactly the same.

PART 2 DURING THE ACTIVITY

run it

Before you begin — 30-second check

- ✓ This is real, current work the people in the room actually deliver
- ✓ The people who do the work are here (3–6 is ideal)
- ✓ The board is laid out with three columns: work, owner, status
- ✓ You're ready to run the claim silently and hold the one-owner rule

5 · HOW DO I RUN IT?

How to run it

Brief the team (2–3 min), then run these in order. The bold part is what you say or do; the note under it is where you add the most. Hold the timings.

1. Set up	**3 min**	*Board out, three columns: work, owner, status.* Appoint the facilitator; you run it and hold the one-owner rule.
2. Map the work	**8–12 min**	*Real pieces of work on cards, one each, down the board.* Push for specifics: "release sign-off", not "quality". Get the whole body of work visible.

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3. Claim it	**5–8 min**	*Each person puts a name token on what they own — silent, and all at once.* Claim only what you currently believe you own, not what you think you should own. Don't let the first voice set who owns what.
4. Spot the gaps	**5 min**	*Read the board: several names = overlap; no name = orphan.* Don't fix yet — let the gaps land first. This is the moment they become obvious.
5. Resolve the overlaps	**5–8 min**	*Agree the single accountable owner for each; remove the extra tokens.* Others may contribute or support it, but only one person is accountable for making sure it gets done.
6. Claim the orphans	**5–8 min**	*Assign one owner now — before the team leaves the room — or consciously park it with a name to decide.* No live item leaves the board nameless.
7. Commit	**3 min**	*Every live item has one name; photograph it; owners say their item aloud.* Claimed aloud sticks better than assigned.

These times are indicative and will depend on the nature of the work and the size of the team; the whole activity runs 30–45 minutes. The step that overruns is mapping the work (2); the step that gets squeezed is claiming the orphans (6) — protect it. A nameless live item is exactly the gap the team came to close.

6 · HOW DOES THE CLAIM WORK?

The claim — silent and simultaneous

The claim is the engine. Run it silently and all at once, or the first voice sets the picture and the real overlaps and orphans hide.

SAY — TO SET UP THE CLAIM

"We're going to claim now — silently, and all at the same time. Place a token on every item you believe you own. Don't discuss while claiming — just place your tokens. We'll read the board together once everyone's done."

THE CLAIM — SILENT, AND ALL AT ONCE

DO THIS

Everyone places tokens at the same time, without discussion.

Claim only what you currently believe you own — not what you think you *should* own.

Honest claiming beats polite vagueness.

WHY SILENT & SIMULTANEOUS

If people claim out loud, in turn, the first voice sets who owns what — and the real overlaps and orphans hide.

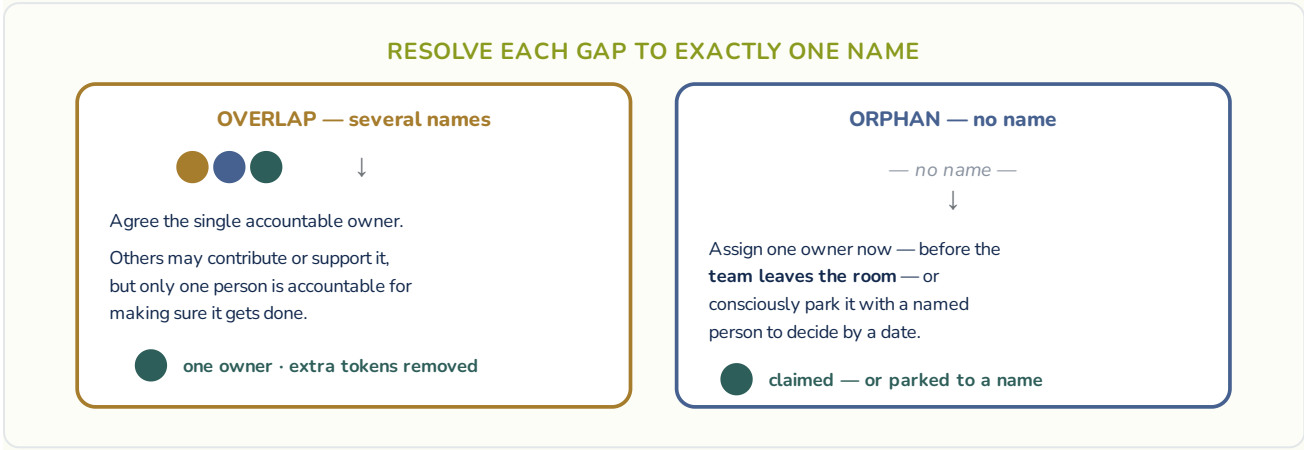
Claiming at the same time, in silence, is what makes the true picture appear on the board.

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7 · HOW DO I RESOLVE WHAT THE BOARD SHOWS?

Resolve each gap to one name

Every overlap goes to one accountable owner; every orphan is claimed or parked to a name. This is where the map is made.



Split the work, not the accountability: if a card really holds two separate deliverables, split it into two cards, each with its own single owner. But never split accountability for the *same* deliverable to dodge a hard conversation — hybrid ownership is the same problem you came to fix.

When to step in — and when to stay out · a principle, not a step

STEP IN

People claim what they think they should own, not what they do → "claim what's really yours today".

An overlap gets "resolved" to shared ownership again → push for one accountable name.

An orphan gets skipped because it's awkward → it's the most important one to claim.

The talk drifts to who should decide → bring it back to who owns the work.

STAY OUT

The room goes quiet seeing the orphans → that discomfort is the reveal landing.

Two people negotiate an overlap themselves → let them settle it.

Someone is surprised they don't own what they assumed → let it sit.

The claim gets a little tense → honest claiming beats polite vagueness.

The clearest tell it's time to step in: an overlap is being settled by "let's both keep it." That's the same problem you came to fix. Ask: "when this needs a call, whose name is on it?" One name owns it; the other contributes. **Hold this line:** the moment an item has two owners again, it has none.

SAY — WHEN SOMEONE OFFERS "I'LL SUPPORT BUT NOT OWN"

"Good — support is exactly right. One name still owns it. When a decision is needed on this, whose name is on it? That person owns it; you support. Let's put their name on it and note you as a contributor."

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PART 3 AFTER THE ACTIVITY

make it stick

8 · HOW DO I CLOSE?

Closing script — 2 minutes

Read the board back, name the gaps it closed, and make each owner say their piece aloud.

> **SAY — IN YOUR OWN WORDS**
>
> “Here’s what the board showed us: *[overlaps]* had several names — we’d all assumed someone else had them; *[orphans]* had none. Now every live piece has one name. Owners, say your piece aloud so it sticks. Next time work appears, we ask one question first: for this, whose name is on it?”

9 · WHY DOES THIS WORK?

The idea underneath

When responsibility is shared, individuals feel less personally accountable — so the gaps and overlaps stay invisible until they cause a stall. Making ownership visible and singular is what closes them. The board doesn’t assign ownership; it reveals what was already true, so the team can put one name on each piece before the work stalls.

WHAT THE BOARD REVEALS — THE MOMENT EVERYONE HAS CLAIMED

THE WORK	OWNER (NAME TOKENS)	WHAT IT SHOWS
Release sign-off	● ● ●	OVERLAP
Rollout checklist	— no name —	ORPHAN
Customer comms	●	one owner
Regression tests	● ●	OVERLAP
Data migration	— no name —	ORPHAN
Go/no-go notes	●	one owner

Several names on one item is an overlap; no name is an orphan.

The overlaps and orphans are the gaps — visible the moment everyone has claimed.

Before you finish — the check

- ✓ Every live item carries exactly one accountable name
- ✓ Each overlap was resolved to a single owner — extra tokens removed
- ✓ Each orphan was claimed, or parked to a named person with a date
- ✓ No item was “resolved” back to shared ownership
- ✓ The board has been photographed
- ✓ Each owner has said their item aloud

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10 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS A HABIT?

Take it back to work

THE HABIT

Whenever a new piece of work appears, ask: “for this, whose name is on it?”

One name, said out loud. Teams that run this once start naming owners as work arrives, instead of discovering the gap when it stalls. One accountable owner — many contributors.

Appendix · Reference

You should not need this while you run the activity. Read it before, or use it if a run goes sideways.

11 · A WORKED RUN

Watch the board reveal the gaps

A six-person squad three weeks from a launch, everyone flat out and confident it’s covered. They map the launch work and claim with their tokens.

WORKED RUN — A SQUAD THREE WEEKS FROM LAUNCH

THE MAP

Six pieces on the board: sign-off, rollout checklist, customer comms, regression tests, data migration, go/no-go notes.

THE REVEAL

Sign-off and regression tests carry two or three names each — everyone assumed someone else was accountable. The rollout checklist and data migration carry none. The room goes quiet — nobody argued; the board had already made it obvious.

THE RESOLVE

Sign-off goes to the engineering lead alone (others contribute). The orphaned migration is claimed on the spot; the checklist is parked to a named owner who’ll confirm by Friday. They found the gaps before the launch did.

What the facilitator did: got the real work up, ran the claim silently, and let the board speak — two overlaps, two orphans, and a quiet room. Then held one accountable name on each: sign-off to the lead alone, the migration claimed on the spot, the checklist parked to a named owner by Friday. They found the gaps before the launch did.

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12 · WHAT GOES WRONG MOST OFTEN?

Common mistakes

Mistake	Why it fails the run
Resolving an overlap to "we'll share it"	That's the original problem in disguise. Push for one accountable name; the others contribute.
Skipping the awkward orphan	The work nobody wants to claim is exactly the gap the team came to close. Protect step 6.
Claiming what you should own, not what you do	The map only reveals if people claim honestly. Push for the real, current picture.
Mapping roles, not real work	An org chart reveals nothing; the live body of work reveals the gaps.
Splitting accountability to dodge a conversation	Split the *work* into separate cards if needed — never split accountability for the same deliverable.

13 · WHAT IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG?

Edge cases

What happens	What to do
Nobody will claim an orphan	That's the most important moment — don't let it pass. Assign one owner, or park it with a named person to decide by a date. A nameless live item is the exact gap the team came to close.
An overlap won't resolve to one name	Ask the deciding-call question: "when this needs a call, whose name is on it?" That name owns; the others contribute. If they still can't, escalate it as a real ownership decision, not a board glitch.
Someone claims far more than they can hold	Surface it gently — "can you own all of those well?" Over-claiming hides future orphans. Spread ownership, or name it as a capacity risk.
The work is genuinely shared (e.g. pairing)	One name still owns the accountability; the pairing is contribution. Mark the owner, note the collaborators — don't let "we pair on it" become "no one owns it".
A card holds two real deliverables	Split the card into two, each with its own single owner. Splitting the work is fine; splitting accountability for one deliverable is not.

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14 · WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

If instead…	Use this
a stalled item needs its blocker traced	**Dependency Snapshot** — once you know who owns it, trace what it's waiting on.
one path to the deadline needs protecting	**Protect the Critical Path** — guards the owned work that must not slip.
the team disagrees on what matters most, not who owns it	**Execution Alignment Lab / Prioritise Under Pressure** — aligns on what comes first.
you're not sure people heard the same thing	**Echo Test** — checks shared understanding before ownership.

Rule of thumb: this one comes first — who owns each piece of work? Once ownership is explicit, the tools that act on the work (Dependency Snapshot, Protect the Critical Path, Execution Alignment Lab) all get sharper.

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