

Everyone Was Waiting for Someone Else

How a technology services team clarified ownership around a difficult client account

SECTOR

Technology services

ORGANISATION

Regional provider of cloud implementation and managed services

PARTICIPANTS

Eighteen leaders and managers from sales, solution design, delivery and customer success

BUSINESS PRIORITY

Stabilise a strategic client account before contract renewal

CARDS USED

The Scapegoat, The Pawn, The Rebel and The Accomplice

OUTCOME

The group replaced competing explanations with a shared account of how commitments, handovers and escalation were being managed

01 Business context

A strategic client had raised concerns about missed milestones, changing delivery dates and slow responses during escalation. The contract was due for renewal within four months.

Sales believed that delivery teams were being too cautious. Delivery leaders said that sales commitments reached them after commercial discussions had already concluded. Customer success spent much of its time translating between the two groups and managing the client's frustration.

Each function had evidence for its position. Sales could point to unanswered requests. Delivery could show scope changes and unrealistic dates. Customer success could list issues that had remained open while teams debated ownership.

The account review needed to move beyond a sequence of explanations. The group needed a clear picture of how its own behaviour shaped the client experience.

02 How Mirror Deck was used

The facilitator placed the client account at the centre of a large sheet and asked participants to select cards for the roles that appeared whenever a commitment became difficult to deliver.

Participants worked first within their functions and then as a mixed group. For each card, they discussed four questions:

- Who needs this role?
- What does it protect?

- Who rewards it?
- What would change if the role moved?

The exercise focused on the arrangement around the account. Participants could discuss a role without assigning it permanently to one person or department.

03 The Scapegoat

The delivery group placed The Scapegoat closest to the client escalation.

Delivery managers felt that they carried responsibility for every missed date, including commitments made before they had reviewed the technical work. The label had become familiar: delivery was slow, inflexible and difficult to work with.

The sales team initially challenged the card. As the group reviewed recent examples, they saw how quickly the account conversation moved towards delivery performance. That focus reduced attention on scope decisions, commercial pressure and the quality of the original handover.

The card helped the group separate accountability from concentrated blame. Delivery remained responsible for execution. The wider team also had a part in creating the conditions under which delivery dates were set.

04 The Pawn and The Rebel

Customer success selected The Pawn. Team members described themselves as carriers of information with limited authority to settle the issues they handled. They collected updates, softened messages and arranged meetings, while decisions remained elsewhere.

A solution architect chose The Rebel. He regularly bypassed the formal handover process and contacted delivery specialists directly when the standard route felt too slow. His actions often solved an immediate problem. They also created parallel commitments and left customer success with incomplete information.

The group recognised that both roles grew from the same pressure. The Pawn waited for authority. The Rebel acted outside it. Each response made sense in isolation and weakened coordination when repeated across the account.

05 The Accomplice

A senior sales leader added The Accomplice to the map.

He described occasions when he had accepted an ambitious client date to preserve commercial momentum, expecting the internal team to find a way to deliver. Colleagues often raised concerns privately and then worked around the commitment.

“What is this pattern helping to continue by staying unnamed?”

Sales gained speed in the client conversation. Delivery absorbed the uncertainty. Customer success managed the consequences. The client received confident promises followed by changing explanations.

06 Actions agreed

The group redesigned three points in the account process.

First, any commitment affecting scope, cost or delivery date would require a short review by sales, solution design and delivery. Second, customer success received authority to convene a decision meeting within twenty-four hours when an issue crossed functions. Third, the weekly account review would begin with changes to client commitments rather than separate functional updates.

The group also agreed to track unresolved ownership questions. The purpose was to settle them early, before a delayed decision became a client escalation.

07 What the session achieved

The discussion replaced a contest between functions with a map of the whole account system. The team could see how blame, limited authority, informal workarounds and silent agreement supported one another.

Mirror Deck gave the group language for discussing responsibility with greater precision. The question changed from which function had failed to how the organisation created and carried a client commitment.

The account team left with clearer decision points, stronger authority for customer success and a shared basis for future escalation conversations.

“Which function failed, or how did the organisation create and carry this commitment together?”