

The Founder at Every Door

How a fintech leadership team reduced dependence on its founder

SECTOR

Financial technology

ORGANISATION

Five-year-old payments company preparing for its next stage of growth

PARTICIPANTS

Founder and four members of the senior leadership team

BUSINESS PRIORITY

Increase decision speed and strengthen senior-team authority

CARDS USED

The Architect, The Patron, The Hostage and The Pawn

OUTCOME

The team clarified which decisions belonged with the founder and which had to move fully to functional leaders

01 Business context

The company had grown from a small founding group to more than 250 employees. Its products served several large business clients, and regulatory scrutiny had increased with scale.

The founder remained closely involved in product releases, senior hiring, pricing decisions and client proposals. His knowledge of the business was valuable, and colleagues regularly sought his view before proceeding.

The same habit was slowing the company. Leadership meetings ended with apparent agreement, followed by separate conversations with the founder. Functional heads postponed decisions when they expected that he might revisit them. The founder, meanwhile, felt surrounded by capable people who still brought too many questions to him.

The five-person team used Mirror Deck to examine the pattern before reviewing decision rights.

02 How Mirror Deck was used

Each participant selected two cards. The first represented the role they believed they played in the leadership team. The second represented a role the team might experience from them under pressure.

Participants shared their first card before revealing the second. This sequence allowed them to compare intention with impact.

The group then placed the selected cards around three current decisions: a product release, a senior appointment and a change in enterprise pricing.

03 The Architect and The Patron

The founder selected The Architect as the role he recognised most easily. He had designed the original product, built the early team and created many of the operating rules that allowed the company to grow.

For his second card, he chose The Patron. He described his role as creating opportunity, opening doors and giving leaders the backing they needed to succeed.

His colleagues valued both contributions. They also described how support sometimes arrived with continued involvement. A leader could receive authority and still expect a later review. The founder's questions carried the weight of a decision even when he intended them as curiosity.

The team distinguished between sponsorship and approval. Sponsorship gave a leader access, support and protection. Approval kept the final decision with the founder.

04 The Hostage and The Pawn

The chief operating officer selected The Hostage as her second card. She had broad responsibility, yet often framed recommendations around what she believed the founder would accept. Waiting had become a way of managing the risk of reversal.

Another leader added The Pawn to describe how functional heads sometimes moved between competing senior views. They delivered a decision made elsewhere and carried the response from their teams back upwards.

The cards helped the group see that dependence had several authors. The founder continued to enter decisions because colleagues invited his judgement. Colleagues invited his judgement because experience told them that his view could later reshape the outcome.

The pattern offered reassurance to everyone. It also limited the authority of the senior team and filled the founder's calendar with decisions that could sit elsewhere.

05 Decision review

The team used the three live decisions to define a clearer boundary.

Regulatory exposure, capital allocation and decisions affecting the company's public position remained with the founder and board. Product sequencing, functional hiring and standard commercial terms moved to the relevant leaders within agreed limits.

The founder could ask questions in these areas, while the decision owner retained authority. If he wanted to reopen a completed decision, he would state the new information or risk that justified the review.

06 Actions agreed

The team documented twelve recurring decisions and assigned one owner to each. Every decision also carried a clear consultation list and an escalation threshold.

For thirty days, the founder kept a record of decisions brought to him. He marked whether each required his authority, his advice or simple visibility. The senior team reviewed the list at the end of the month.

Functional leaders agreed to make decisions within their authority and communicate them as decisions rather than proposals awaiting informal consent.

07 What the session achieved

The session gave the team a practical account of founder dependence. The issue came from a successful history of close involvement, reinforced by the ways colleagues sought safety and support.

Mirror Deck allowed the group to discuss that history without reducing the founder to a controlling personality or senior leaders to passive followers. The roles showed how the pattern was built together.

The team left with clearer authority and a direct test for future conversations:

“Does this decision need the founder, or has the organisation simply learnt to look for him?”