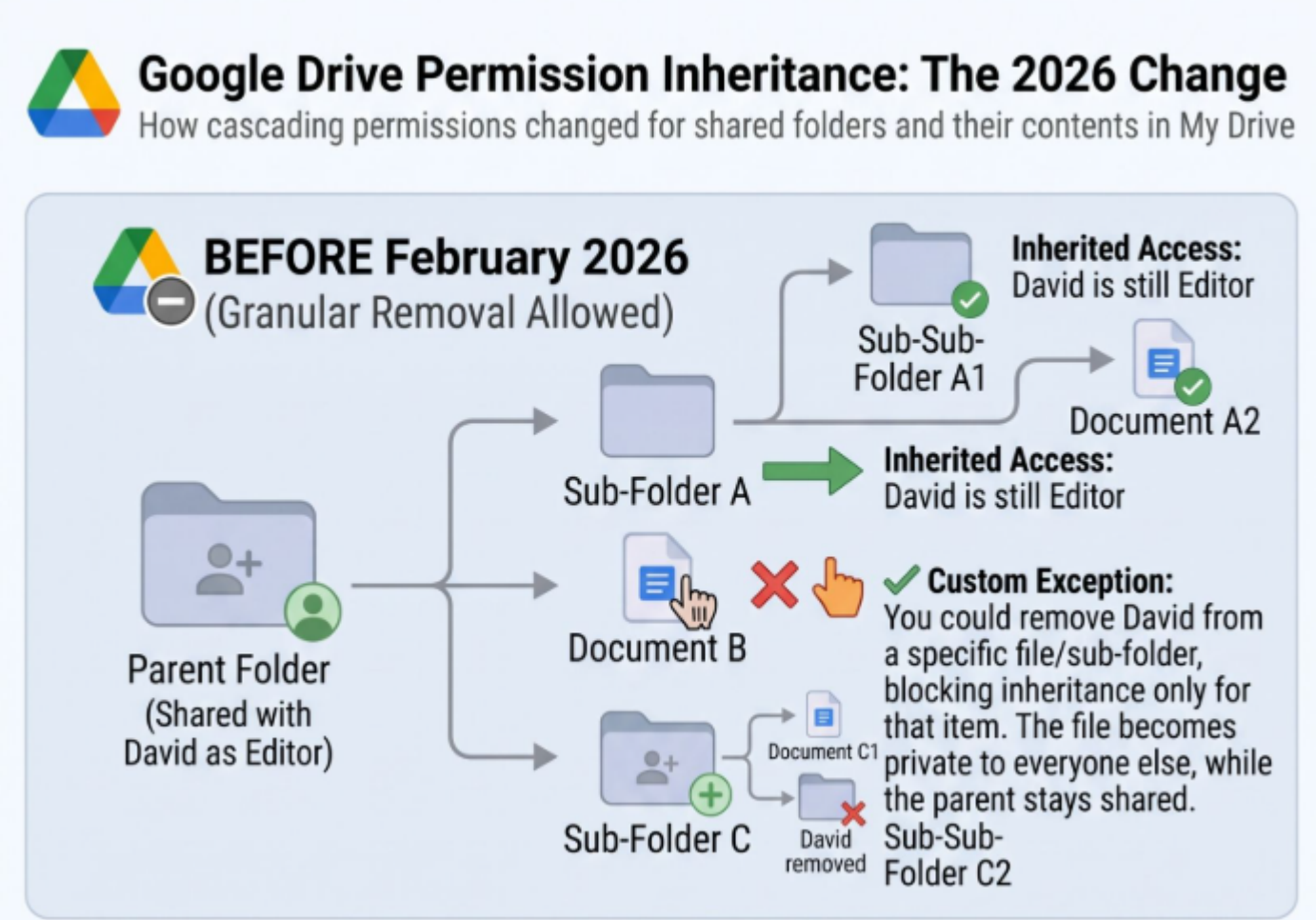
Google Drive Changes to Inherited Permissions

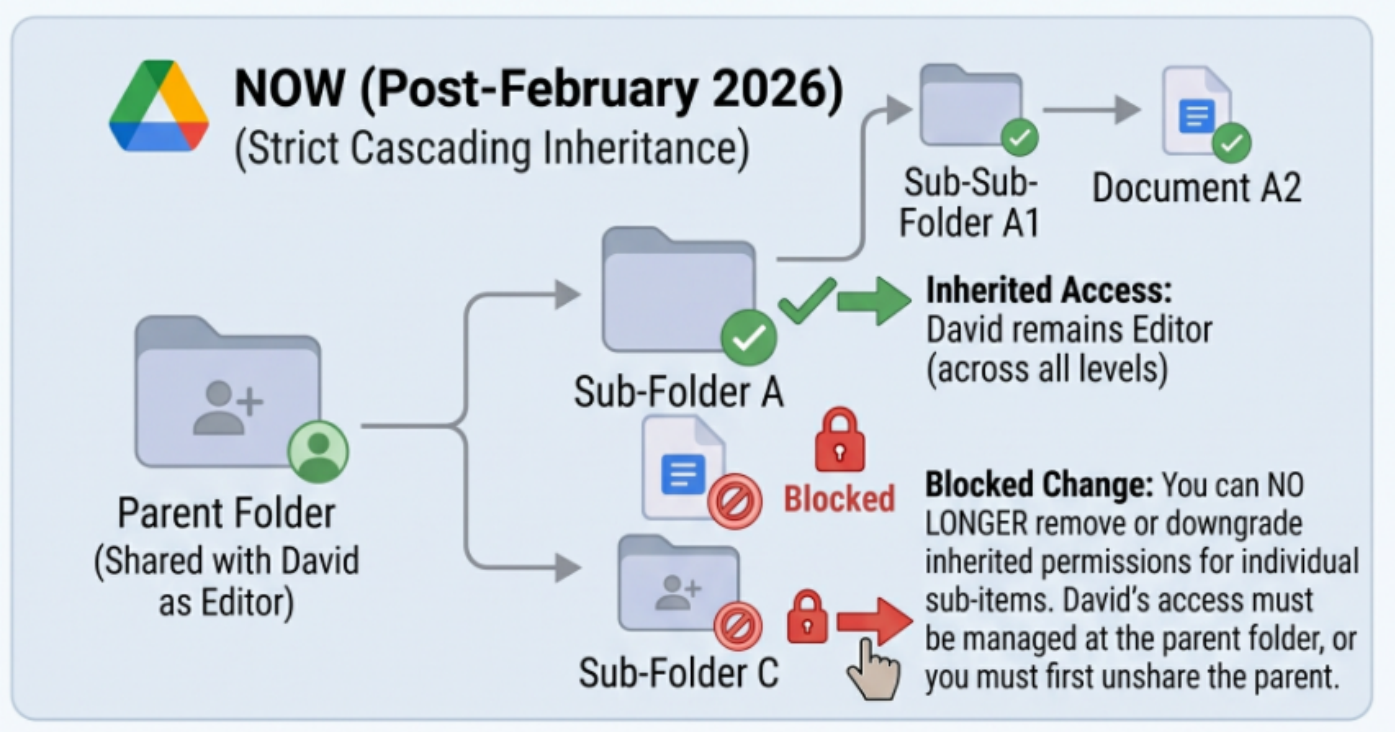
Drive Audit & Management · https://gatlabs.com/knowledge/tech-tips/google-drive-inherited-permissions/

In February 2026, Google Drive officially released an update enforcing a strict cascading inheritance model for folder permissions.



Under these new changes, parent folder permissions strictly dictate sub-folder and document access. Users can no longer selectively remove inherited access on files for specific users within a sub-hierarchy without removing the parent folder or physically moving the assets.

This guide outlines how to manage external permissions and avoid common pitfalls under these new rules.

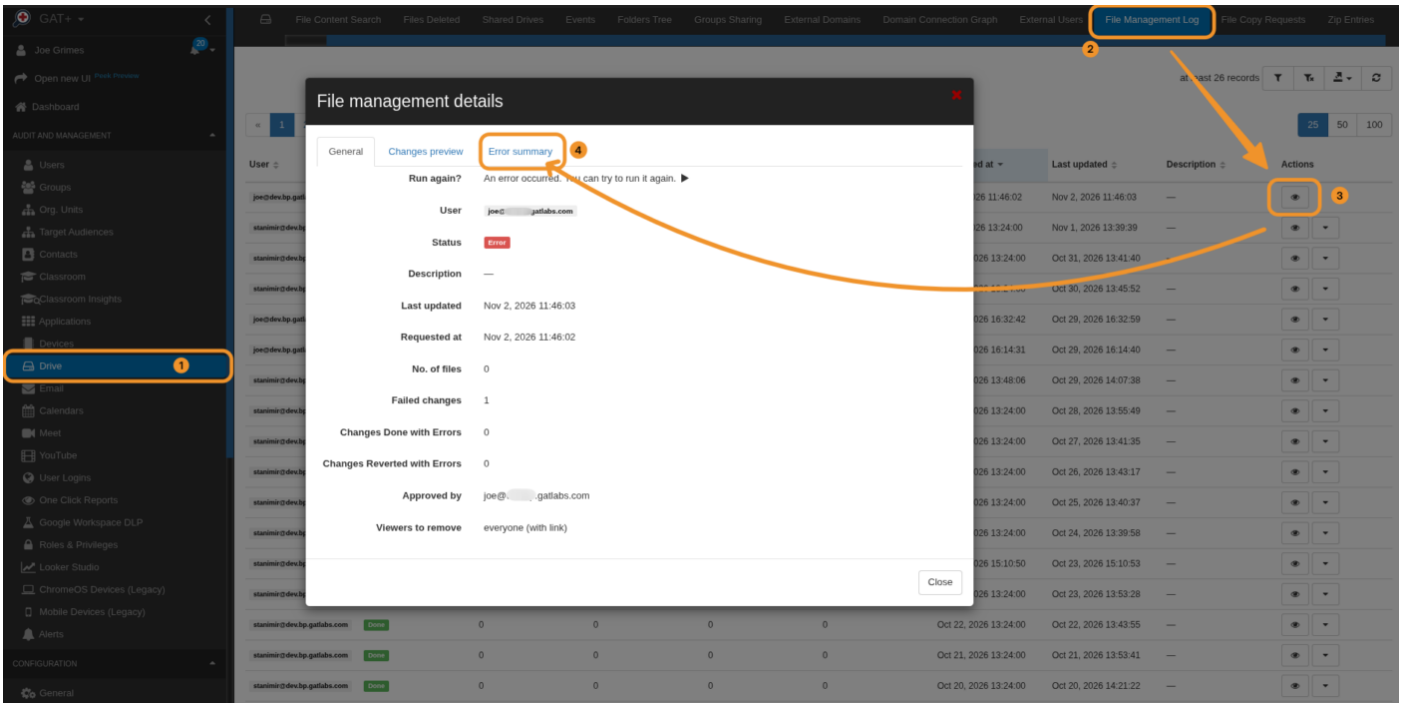


Removing the permission anyway

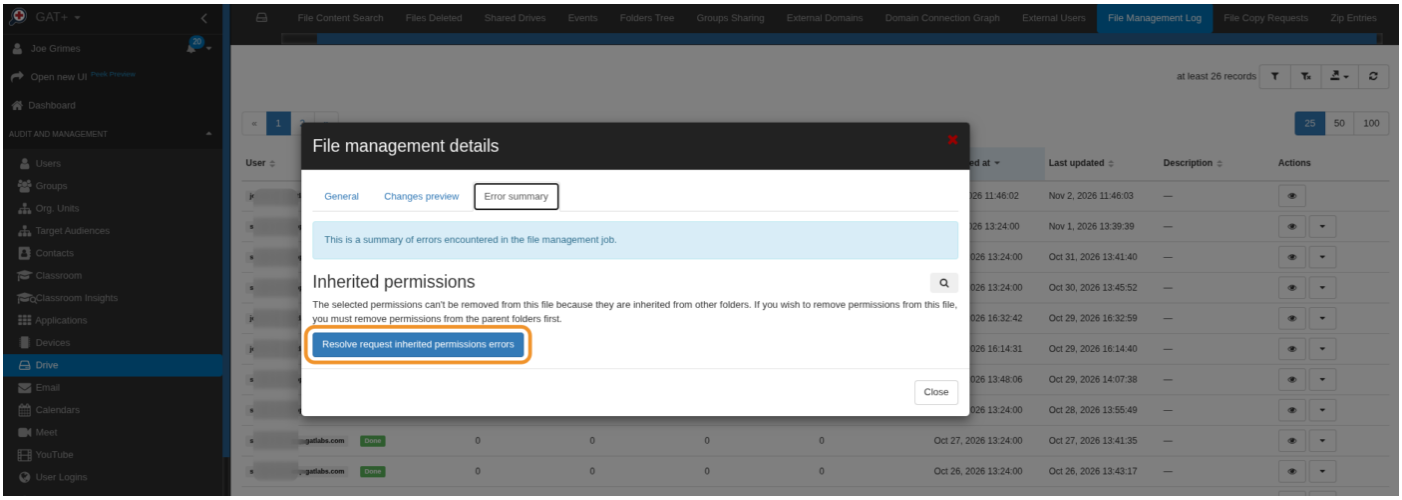
GAT Labs has designed a solution, to let the admin forcefully remove the access on the parent folder if they feel it is necessary.

If an admin has made an attempt to remove access to a folder, and that was disallowed as a result of the new rules, a new tab will appear in the file management log.

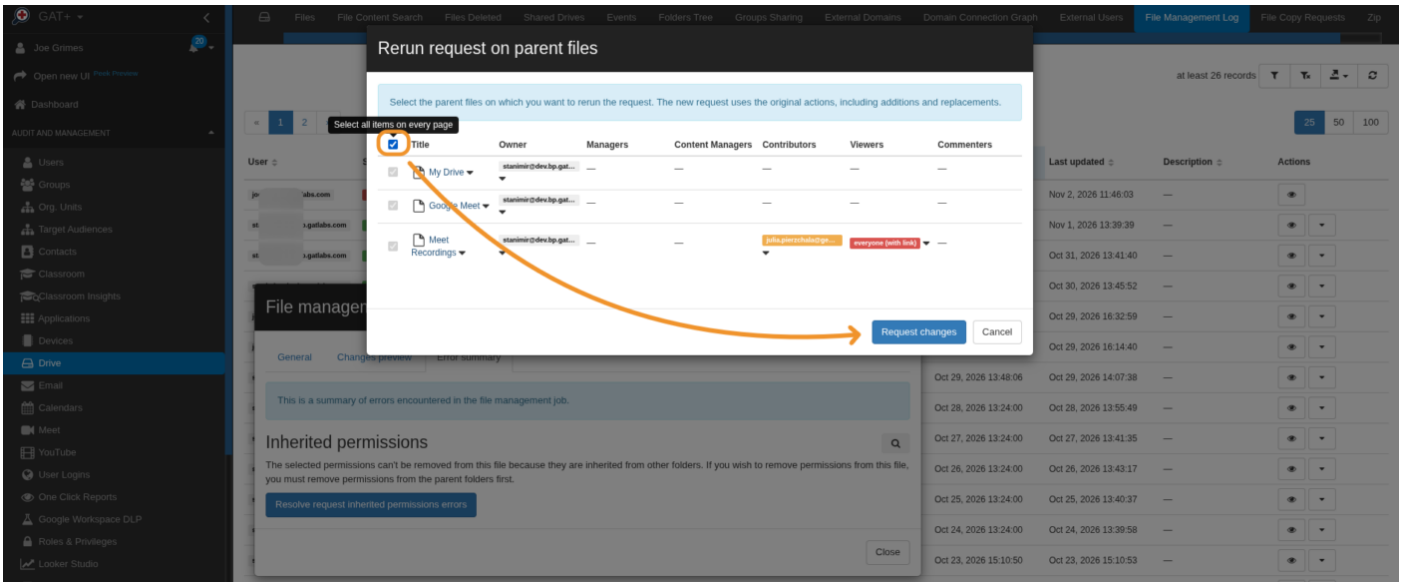
The admin can navigate to the 'Error summary' tab on their failed task in the **Drive > File management log**



On the Error summary page, a button appears, labeled ‘Resolve request inherited permission errors’

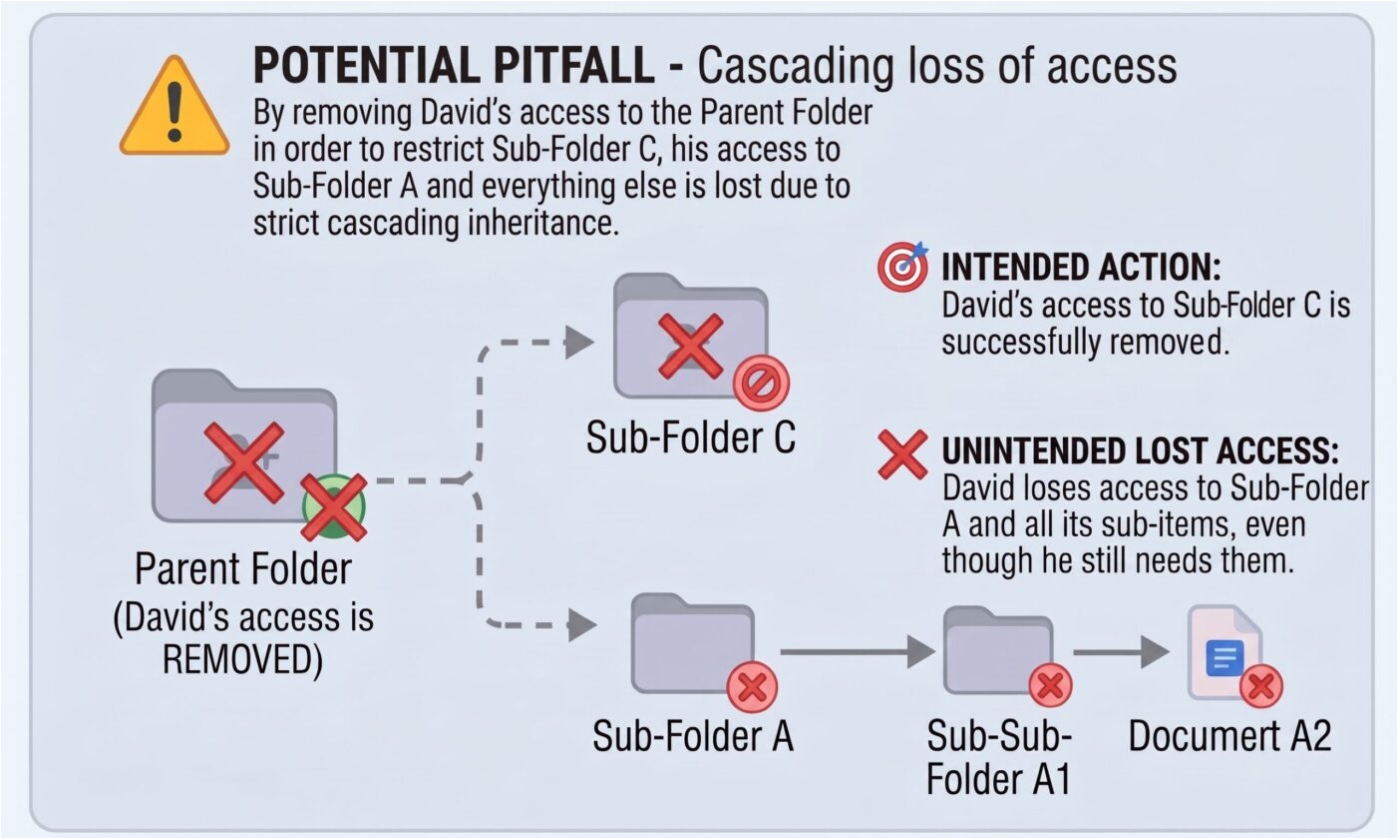


Select all the options you want, and click the button to ‘Request Changes’



These actions introduce a major pitfall if you try to adjust permissions at the top level, without accounting for the downstream effects.

Let's take the example below. You need to restrict a user from accessing a specific folder, such as "Sub-Folder C". To achieve this now, you must remove his access entirely from the ‘Parent Folder’.

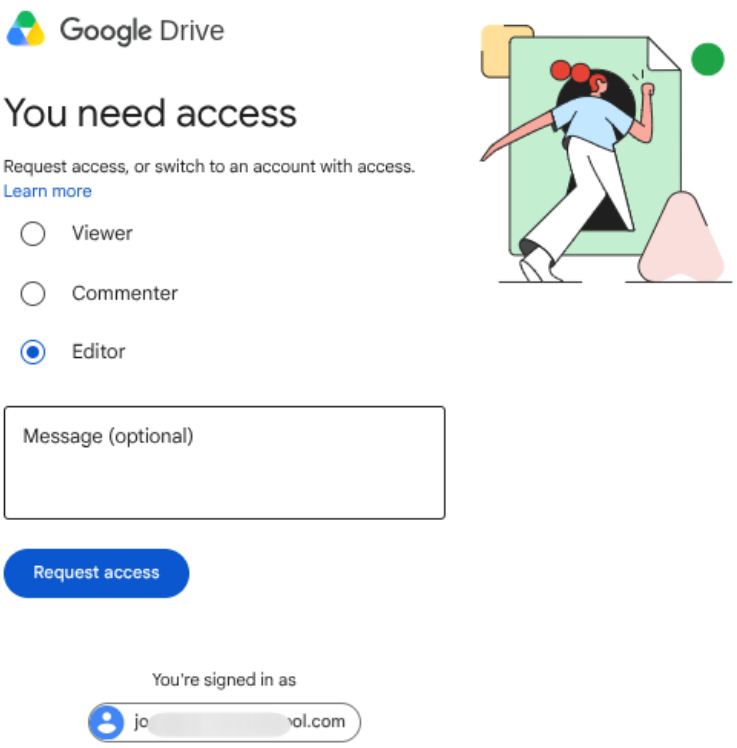


As expected, David's access to Sub-Folder C is successfully removed, but **because of the strict cascading inheritance, removing David from the ‘Parent Folder’ means his access to ‘Sub-Folder A’, and everything else within it, is also removed**.

Resolving the lost access

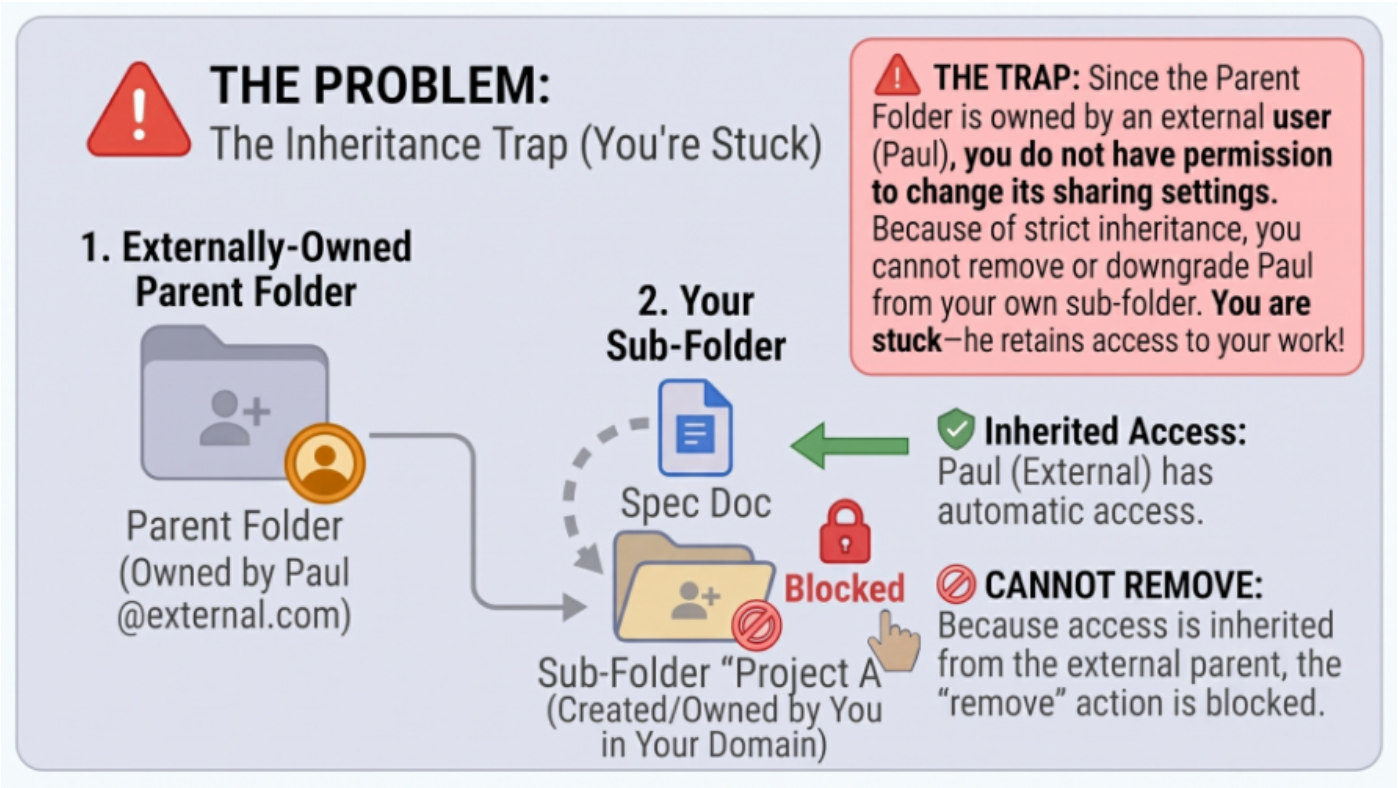
David may still request access to these files and folders through the regular avenues. It may also be possible to re-add him to ‘Sub-Folder A’ manually using GAT+, provided there are other users from your domain that still have access.

However, if these folders were externally owned, and no other account from within your domain has access, re-adding them to the subfolders with GAT+ will no longer be possible. The end user must request access manually.



The External Owner Trap

One of the most significant challenges introduced by this update is the external owner’s inheritance trap, which occurs when your users’ create files in externally owned folders, and your users have been accessing the files from these shared folders.



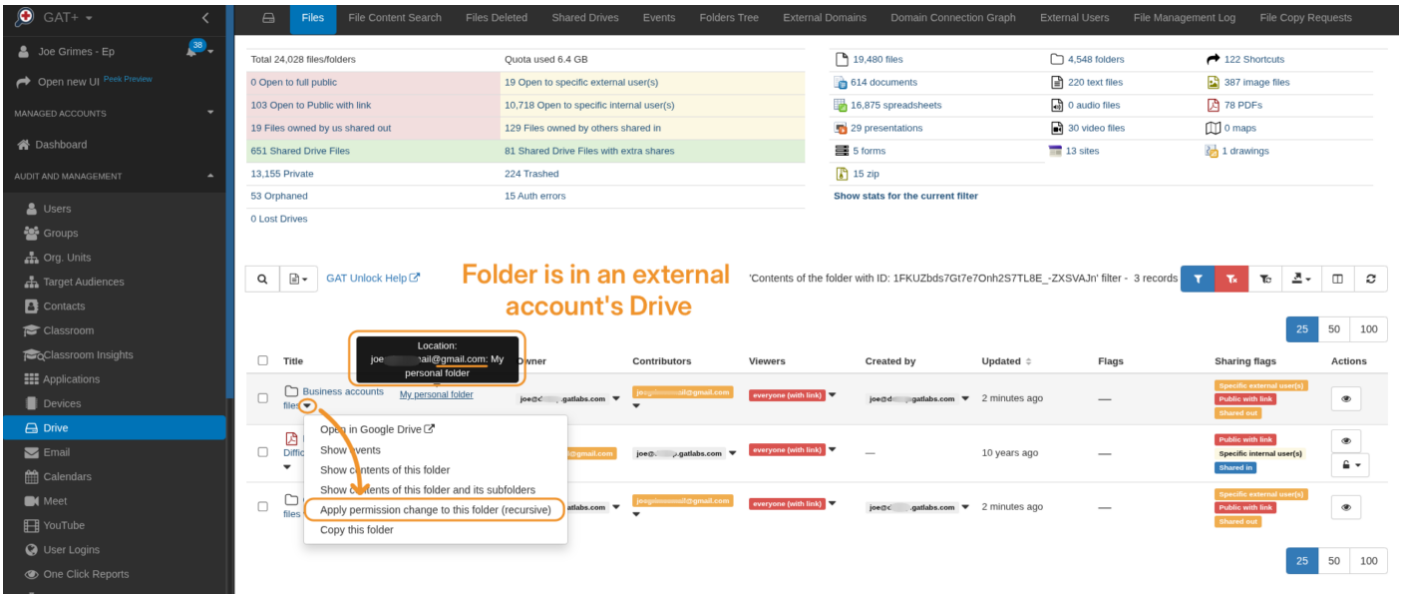
You create a sub-folder (‘Project A’ containing a ‘Spec Doc’) inside a parent folder owned by an external user, such as paul@external.com.

Because the Parent Folder is owned by an external user, **you do not have permission to change its sharing settings**. Due to strict inheritance, you cannot remove or downgrade the external user from your own sub-folder, since they own the parent folder. Because the access is inherited directly from the external parent folder, the system blocks the ‘remove’ action on the sub-folder level. You’re stuck, and the external user retains access to your work.

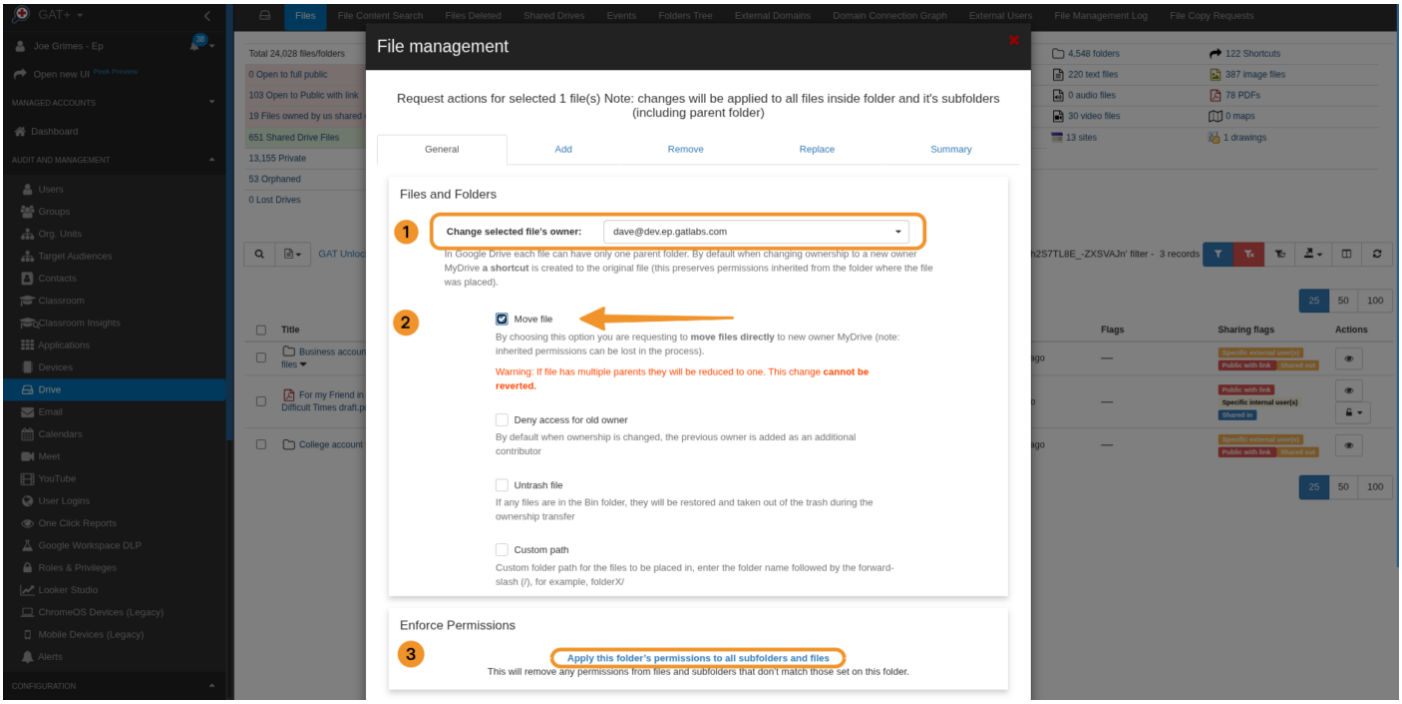
The Escape

To resolve the external owner trap, you must physically bypass the inheritance rules by relocating the affected files and folders to an internal user's My Drive.

First, find the record of your file or folder in GAT+

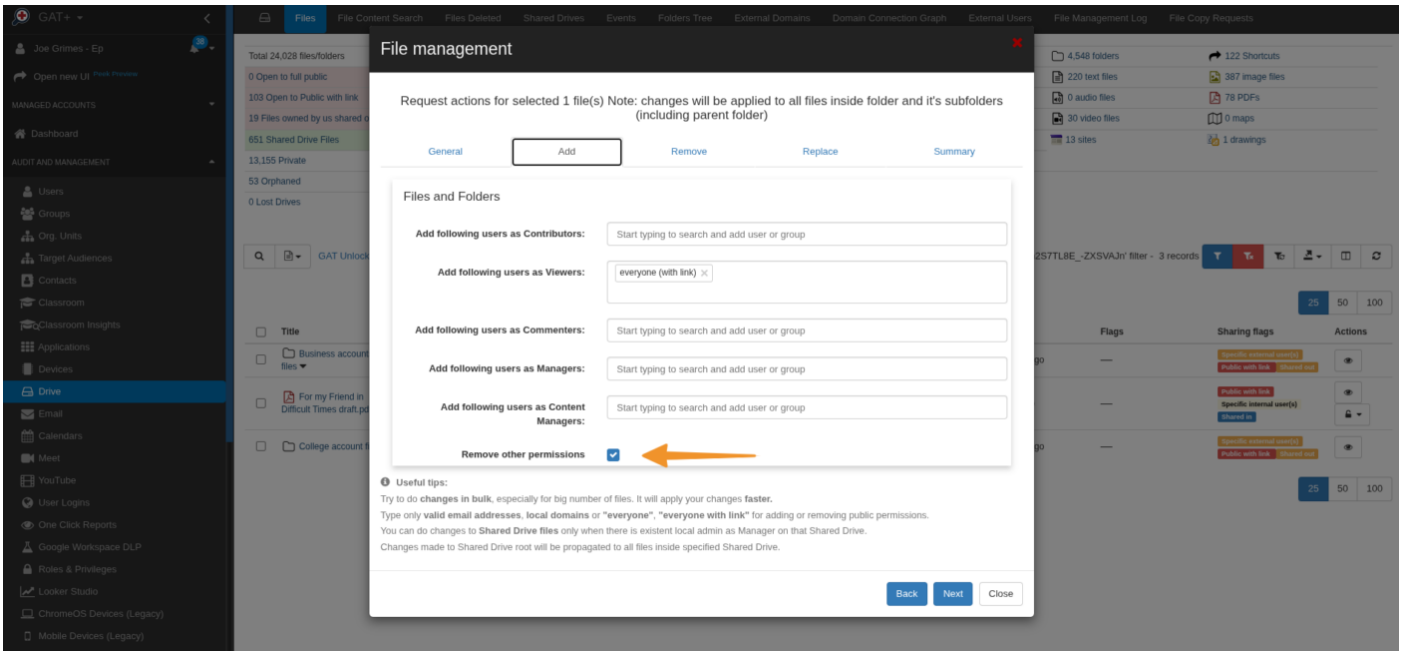


Move your sub-folder entirely out of the external parent's hierarchy, by changing ownership, and opting for the ‘Move file’



Next, click the ‘Add’ tab. This shows you who will have access to the relocated files and folders. You can remove your external account here along with anyone else you would like to remove from this menu.

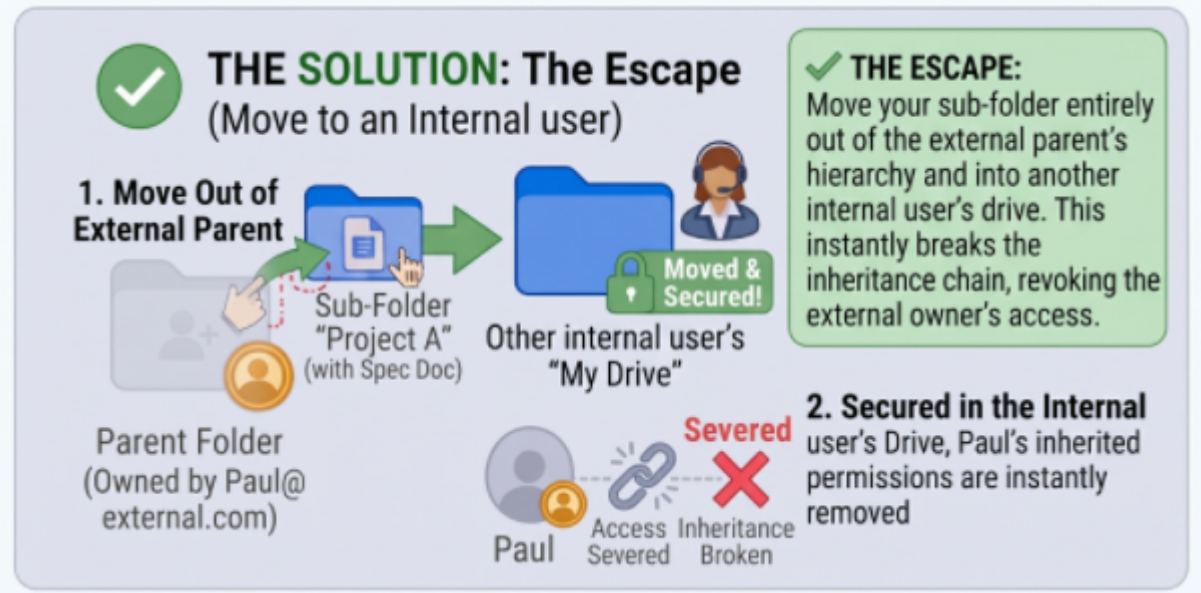
Select the ‘Remove other permissions’ checkbox, to ensure only accounts on this page have access to the files and folders after the move.



Click the ‘Summary’ tab, and click ‘Send request’ to begin processing. Once approved by the Security Officer, the changes will be made.

The Result

Moving the folder instantly breaks the inheritance chain, revoking the external owner's access. Once secured in the new internal owner's My Drive, the external owner's inherited permissions are instantly removed, and their access is severed.



Frequently Asked Questions

Why can't I remove inherited permissions in Google Drive?

Google Drive inherits sharing permissions from parent folders. If a user has access through a parent folder, you generally cannot remove that inherited permission directly from an individual file. You may need to change the parent folder's permissions or move the file to a different location.

What happens when I remove a user's access from a parent folder?

Removing a user's access from a parent folder can also remove their inherited access to its subfolders and files. Administrators should review the affected folder hierarchy before making changes.

How can I resolve inherited permission errors in GAT+?

Navigate to **Drive > File management log** and open the failed task's **Error summary** tab. Select **Resolve request inherited permission errors**, review the available options, and click **Request Changes**.

How can I remove an external owner's inherited access to a Google Drive folder?

When the required ownership and permissions allow it, administrators can use GAT+ to relocate affected content to an internally owned location and review the permissions that will remain after the move. The article describes this process using the **Move file** option and the **Remove other permissions** checkbox.