THE

Value Architects' **Club®**

Ambitious leaders turning vision into reality

Introduction Pack

The Value Growth Catalyst

Running and growing a business can be a hard, lonely, thankless pursuit

What we do is no mean feat.

Finding customers, delivering for them, building a team, and keeping it going year after year is difficult. If someone's never experienced it, they've no idea, really, what it takes and what it takes out of us. Our employees don't get it. Our families don't get it. Our friends don't get it. And so, we battle on by ourselves.

Expensive, irreversible, business-critical decisions rest solely on our shoulders, and we rightfully fear getting it wrong. Without a trusted, impartial sounding board, we double guess ourselves and go round in circles, getting ever more frustrated.

And we do all of this while projecting confidence and success to our team, our customers and our suppliers – because that's what the role demands. The problems and frustrations stay where no one can see them. Buried, but not gone. Building up. Bursting out eventually – in the places we'd least want and with the people who least deserve it.

Worse, battling these challenges by ourselves is a tragedy.

Because there's a community out there who get where you're at, know what it takes to do what you do, who understand your challenges and frustrations, and have already solved many of them.

That community is the **Value Architects' Club®**.

> *"It's not just about the group helping me think through and solve my biggest issues, although that's been brilliant. I've become a better leader and better person by helping other people solve their issues, and by reflecting on those learnings. You see your position more clearly, and the learning is embedded because you've processed the issue.*
>
> *I'd say it's given me foresight. I'm more likely to see future challenges in my own life or business, and head them off before they become major issues, by preparing myself, my team and the business for those challenges and the growth to come. And it's not just been my business, it's been my health and relationships, too."*
>
> **Aran Blackbourne**, MD, Karl Asset Management

Here's what that looks like in practice…

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What you get from being in the room

Some questions you can answer with Google or AI. The ones that matter most, you can't.

> *Should I let this person go? Is now the right time to take on debt? Is my number two really up to it? Do I sell now or push for another three years?*

These are the questions that go round in your head for weeks because there's no clean answer – only judgement. They depend on context only people running similar businesses would understand, and the stakes are high enough that getting them wrong matters. This is the room where you bring those.

But here's what most people don't expect when they join.

The biggest learning often doesn't come from the meeting where the group is working on *your* issue. It comes from the meeting where you're helping someone else work through theirs. Sitting at the table, listening to another owner describe a problem you've never had, you start to see your own business differently. The pattern in their situation reveals one in yours. The blind spot you've been ignoring becomes visible because someone else has the same one. You leave with insight you didn't know you needed – about a business you thought you understood.

That's the compounding effect of the room. A room of owners, each working on their own thing, each helping the others work on theirs. Every meeting, you contribute and you receive. In a single day, you might work on three or four complex issues across three or four different businesses. Over a year, that's dozens. Over the years you stay in the room, hundreds. Different sectors, different stages, different pressures. And after a while, you start thinking about your own business with all of those perspectives in your head, not just the ones you came in with. That's when your decisions get sharper, your blind spots get smaller, and your surprises get fewer.

Beyond the issues, there's the rest of it. Three meetings a year include an expert speaker chosen to stretch your thinking, not sell you something – exposing you to ideas, frameworks, and approaches you wouldn't meet otherwise. The two-day annual retreat gives you time to step back from the business properly, and a chance to work on what you want your life to look like, not just your P&L. And underneath all of it, there's the energy of being around eleven other ambitious owners who are striving for something – inspiration, confidence, momentum, and the quiet pressure of not wanting to be the one who didn't deliver on what they said they would.

That's what membership of the Value Architects' Club gives you. Not just answers to your hardest questions – though that on its own is worth the seat. It's also a different way of seeing your business, your decisions, and what's possible.

> *"It started as one day a month to work on the business, which led to thinking strategically about the business and then working full time on it. As a result, my business grew. Being in this environment has helped me to grow, too. The group provided the challenges to my blind spots without which I'd be stuck. It has created, and continues to create, a mindset of possibilities, whereas before I would have been focused on the seemingly insurmountable barriers."*
>
> **Richard Moore, MBE**, ex-MD Linden Foods, and Chair / Founder of One Equine Trust

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How we run it

THE CALENDAR

Eleven meetings a year, one per month. Seven are full-day member working sessions, where the group works through whatever members have brought to the table. Up to three include an expert speaker. One is a two-day retreat in a beautiful setting, away from the business, with time to think about more than just the next quarter.

THE EXPERT SESSIONS

The members choose the topics. Each year, the group identifies what it needs to learn about – the issues it sees coming down the line, the gaps in its own thinking, the areas where outside perspective would help most. I then go and find the right speaker for each topic. The sessions exist to stretch the group's thinking, not to sell to it.

THE ROOM

A maximum of twelve members per group. No competing businesses in the same room. Membership is by invitation or referral only, and new members join only after unanimous approval from existing members. We carefully control who gets in the room because the value of the room depends on it.

WHAT IT COSTS

£400 + VAT per month, paid quarterly in advance by direct debit.

Speaker session fees are split between the group members. Members cover their own hotel costs for the retreat.

Your first three months are a trial. After your second meeting, you decide whether to continue. If you do, membership rolls quarterly from there. Two months' notice to leave before your next renewal date. If a member needs to step away temporarily for personal reasons, we work it out.

Introduce someone who joins, and you get 10% off your fees for as long as they stay.

BEFORE YOU COMMIT

Before you pay for a quarter, you come along to a meeting as a guest. You take part in the full day exactly as a member would – bring an issue if you have one, contribute to others' issues, and experience first-hand how the group works. No fees, no commitment. If it works for you, we'll take it from there. If it doesn't, no harm done either way.

> *"Being a member has changed how I run my business. I am more knowledgeable about certain business matters which gives me confidence in what I'm doing. I probably don't worry as much as I know I'm only a meeting away from getting help on a big issue or problem."*
>
> **CEO, Manufacturing Business**

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Who we're looking for

The room only works if the people in it are right for it. Members are owners or MDs of established Northern Ireland businesses – typically with five or more employees and £500k+ in revenue. Beyond that, these are the qualities every member shares.

Reliable

- We do what we say we'll do
- We put in the time and the work the group needs
- We're there for each other when it matters

Optimistic and good-natured

- We're warm, approachable, and good company
- We enjoy what we do and we want to be in the room
- We face problems head-on, solve them, and look for the opportunity in them

Courageous

- We say what we think and we don't tolerate BS
- We're brave enough to be vulnerable with the group
- We set ambitious goals and hold each other to them

How we operate together

These are the commitments every member makes to the others.

Confidential – What's said in the room stays in the room. Always.

Prepared and present – We read each other's monthly summaries before we arrive. We bring real issues, properly thought through. When we're in the room, we're in the room – phones off the table, undivided attention.

Honest with each other – We challenge constructively, we say what needs to be said, and we call out backsliding when we see it. We tell each other what we need to hear, not what we want to hear.

Accountable – We follow through on what we commit to. We report back to the group on what we did and what happened.

In it together – We're committed to each other's success, professionally and personally. We celebrate the wins. We have the craic.

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Why I built this

I joined Vistage years ago because running a business taught me something I hadn't expected. The loneliness of being the leader is real, gets worse as your company scales, and the people around you can't help fix it. Family, friends, employees – none of them are in your shoes, and most of the time you can't tell them what you're actually wrestling with anyway.

What I got from Vistage, and from groups like it, was something I'd needed for a long time: a room of people who got it. Who'd run businesses, who'd made the mistakes, who could push back without an agenda. I learned more in those rooms than in any other professional setting – and I came to love being in them.

Over time, I came to love facilitating them more than being a member. There's something deeply satisfying about watching an owner walk in with a decision they've been going round in circles on for weeks, and walk out with clarity on what to do. That's the work I love doing.

The Value Architects' Club is what I built when I decided to do it on my own terms. For NI businesses specifically. More focused than the bigger groups I'd been part of. Without the corporate overhead. Run by someone who's done the work, not someone who's been certified to run a meeting.

The next step from here, if it sounds like it might be a fit, is to come along to a meeting as a guest. You take part in the full day exactly as a member would – bring an issue if you have one, contribute to others' issues, and experience first-hand how the group works. No fees, no commitment. If it works for you, we'll take it from there. If it doesn't, no harm done either way.

Richard McMullan
Founder, Value Architects' Club

WhatsApp: 07973 308054 **richard@valuegrowthcatalyst.com**

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