EBOOK

HOW TO RUN A VALUE LAB: *COLLABORATE TO GROW YOUR KEY ACCOUNTS*

Your 4-Stage Framework to Grow Key Accounts

Most teams serve their accounts' known needs well enough, but few set aside structured time to co-create new value for these clients. That's where Value Labs come in. In a focused, facilitated session (internal, or with account stakeholders), your team clarifies a growth challenge, explores what will make or break success, generates bold ideas, and commits to an action plan with owners and dates. The results are stronger relationships, bigger deals, and faster expansion inside current accounts.

What Is a Value Lab?

A Value Lab is a facilitated working session bringing together participants with different perspectives that moves an account from assumptions to shared insight to prioritized initiatives to, ultimately, committed action.

Assumptions → **Shared Insight** → **Prioritized Initiatives** → **Committed Action**

Think of it as account planning reinvented. A Value Lab goes a step beyond pipeline updates and forecast reviews to a strategic collaboration that produces measurable results.

Why Value Labs Work

RAIN Group research shows that 72% of sellers say their accounts are willing to collaborate, but most lack the structure or tools to do it effectively.

> 72% of sellers say their accounts are willing to collaborate—but most lack a structured way to do it.

Buyers reward sellers who:

1. Educate clients with new perspectives
2. Collaborate to design solutions
3. Persuade that results will happen

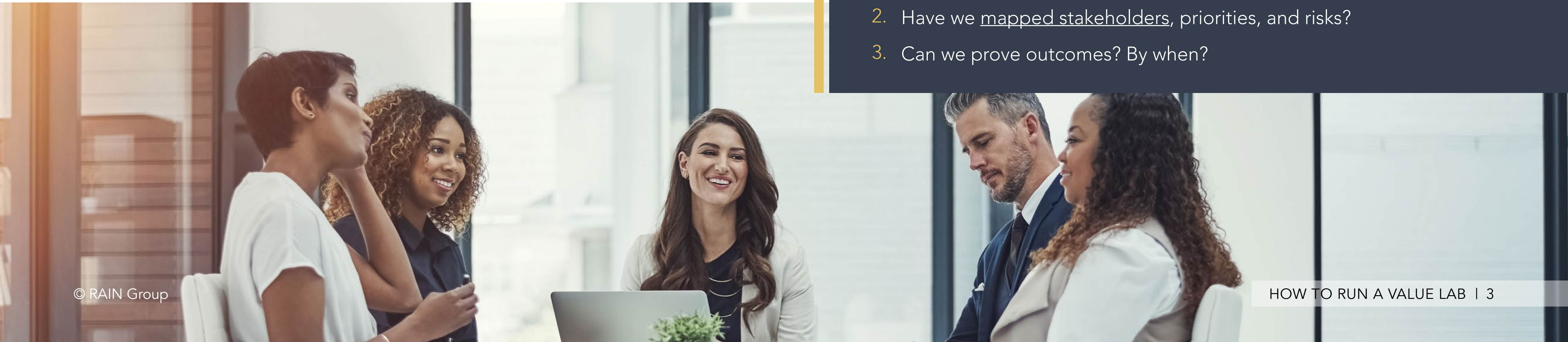
Value Labs formalize these behaviors and connect them to a clear value proposition, resulting in ideas that:

- **Resonate**, or align with the client's strategic objectives
- **Differentiate**, or co-create unique approaches to meaningful problems
- **Substantiate**, or are supported by evidence, metrics, and next steps

In short, Value Labs help you surface ideas, structure collaboration, and link every discussion back to measurable client outcomes.

3-Question Idea Evaluation

1. Do we have a shared "How do we..." growth question?
2. Have we mapped stakeholders, priorities, and risks?
3. Can we prove outcomes? By when?



Internal vs. External Value Labs: Choosing Your Approach

Value Labs can be either internal or external. When do you use each type?

- **Internal:** When you need alignment, messaging, and value hypothesis before engaging with a client.
- **External:** When you have executive access, trust, and a shared objective, which optimizes psychological ownership.

Internal Value Labs bring your team together to develop strategic account plans and bold ideas before engaging clients. Use these when you need to align internally, develop your value proposition, or prepare for a major client engagement.

External Value Labs bring clients directly into the collaboration process. In these sessions, you and the client work together to define opportunities and develop a shared action plan. The goal is to create shared ownership. When buyers help define the challenge and design the solution, they become invested advocates for action.

Use external Value Labs when you have:

- Executive-level access and sponsorship
- A collaborative relationship with mutual trust
- Clear alignment on business objectives
- Client willingness to invest time in co-creation

The same four-stage framework applies to both formats, but external labs have the added impact of emphasizing participation and psychological ownership. When clients co-create, they champion the outcomes internally.

Read the Leading External Value Labs article in our toolkit

The 4-Stage Value Lab Framework

Both internal and external Value Labs follow the same proven approach for turning collaboration into concrete action.

4 Stages of Structured Problem Solving℠

1. Download → **2. Exploration** → **3. Ideation** → **4. Action**

1. Download

- ***Name the issue you need help with.***
  Ask, "How do I/we…?"
- ***Summarize the situation.***
  State, "Here are the relevant assumptions."

2. Exploration

- ***Examine the issue.***
  Ask, "What else?"
- ***Create healthy conflict.***
  Ask, "What's debatable?"
- ***Continue to state new or different relevant key assumptions.***

3. Ideation

- ***Explore options.***
  Ask, "What's possible?"
- ***Provide ideas.***
  Ask, "Why not consider…?"

4. Action

- ***Summarize an action plan.***
- ***Test the action plan.***
  Ask, "Will it solve the issue?"
- ***Drive accountability.***
  Ask, "Will we implement this?"

General Guidelines

One stage at a time • Balance advocacy and inquiry • Ask clarifying questions • Encourage diverse points of view

Stage 1: Download Frame the Opportunity

Start by clarifying what you're solving for. The best problem-framing conversations begin with "How do we...?" because this phrasing invites collaboration and focuses on opportunity.

Strong problem-framing questions are specific, measurable, and actionable:

- How do we double the size of this account in 12 months?
- How do we secure C-level executive sponsorship?
- How do we expand from IT into marketing and operations?

Weak problem-framing questions lack specificity and action:

- How do we get more revenue from this account?
- What do we do with this client?

Strong problem-framing questions work because they give the team a clear target rather than a vague aspiration.

Give all participants a chance to speak and confirm everyone agrees on the problem before moving on. Don't try to jump to solutions; your goal here is to establish a shared starting point.

Download the 4 Stages of Structured Problem Solving worksheet

Stage 2: Exploration Identify Success Factors

Next, you'll explore the factors that could impact success or failure. Ask probing questions:

- What value have we delivered to similar accounts?
- Have there been major changes in the client's priorities or key stakeholders?
- Where might we not be living up to expectations?
- Are solution impacts being tracked and reported in the dashboards clients see?

Encourage healthy debate—diverse viewpoints surface the best insights. Capture key assumptions such as:

- We don't have an executive sponsor yet.
- We could expand globally but haven't tried.
- We may not know all buying influences.

Facilitators should:

- Seek out diverse perspectives by including participants beyond the account owners.
- Define before you design; don't jump ahead to solutions.
- Highlight critical points and unanswered questions before moving on.
- Balance intuition with data. Both matter when understanding an account.

Stage 3: Ideation — Generate New Value Ideas

When you're ready to shift into creativity mode, open the discussion to questions like:

- How can we support the client's agenda using our offerings?
- Can we co-create new approaches together?
- Have we reverse-engineered our solutions to uncover untapped value?

Encourage volume and diversity. Don't filter ideas yet. Use "Yes, and..." thinking to build momentum. Capture ideas visually using whiteboards, digital sticky notes, or shared documents. Build on each other's contributions and avoid dismissing thoughts too soon.

Stage 4: Action — Prioritize and Commit

Once you've captured a broad array of ideas, you'll turn to execution. Select three to five initiatives that deliver the greatest impact. Test each one:

- If we implement this plan, will it achieve both our goals and the client's?
- Can we realistically implement this?

Assign owners, timelines, and next steps. Create forcing mechanisms, such as client presentations or internal checkpoints, to ensure accountability.

Tip: Only commit to actions that are attainable and likely to yield measurable results.

Leading a Successful Value Lab

Before you schedule your Value Lab, you need to do some prework to ensure you have a clear vision for what you want to discuss, who should be there, and what you want the outcomes to be. You should:

1. **Define Your Objective**

   Successful Value Labs start with purpose and focus. Decide:

   - What business outcome are you targeting?
   - Will an internal or external format better match your goals?

2. **Gather Context**

   Maximize productive time during your Value Lab by organizing relevant numbers and status information in advance. To prepare:

   - Pull key data, such as spend, stakeholders, initiatives, risks, and wins.
   - Summarize recent conversations and account trends.

3. **Frame Your Problem**

   Setting specific and measurable goals keeps stakeholders aligned during Value Lab explorations. Find your focus in three steps:

   - Draft your "How do we...?" question:
     - "How do we...[verb] [result] by [timeframe] for [stakeholder]?"
     - Ex: "How do we cut average order fulfillment time by 15% for ShipCo's warehouse team?"
   - Test it for specificity and measurability.

4. **Assemble Your Team**

   Include a mix of roles for diverse perspectives, such as:

   - Results Driver for business outcomes focus
   - Relationship Lead for client understanding
   - Innovator for creative thinking
   - Project Manager for execution focus

5. **Define Success Metrics**

   Set measurable targets. For example:

   - Renewal %
   - Expansion $
   - Sponsor secured by date
   - Adoption KPIs

Facilitation Best Practices

Running a Value Lab is about creating an environment where everyone's best ideas surface; it's not about delivering your own answers. Be sure to:

- Keep groups small (5-7 participants)
- Ensure everyone contributes (e.g., round-robin sharing format)
- Move through one stage at a time without skipping ahead
- Balance advocacy (making a case) and inquiry (asking, testing)
- Ask clarifying questions ("Can you say more?", or, "Did I get this right?")
- Visualize everything (use whiteboards or screens)

And, if senior leaders dominate discussions, appoint a neutral facilitator to maintain balance and encourage participation from all team members.

Sample Value Lab Agenda

Here's how a 60-minute internal Value Lab might flow:

- **Download:** Define success, align on objective (10 minutes)
- **Exploration:** Identify factors and risks (15 minutes)
- **Ideation:** Brainstorm and capture ideas (20 minutes)
- **Action:** Prioritize and assign owners (15 minutes)

When you get several people into a room, it's easy for time to get away from you. It may help to introducing the four stages via email or in the calendar invite with questions to get participants thinking ahead of time. To stay on track, set a timer for each stage to ensure you save enough time for the action phase.

Watch our video with tips for leading an internal Value Lab

Avoiding Common Pitfalls

Even skilled facilitators can fall into traps that derail Value Labs. Here are some of the most common mistakes and how to avoid them.

- **Pitfall: Skipping Straight to Solutions**
  Fix: Enforce stage discipline. When someone jumps ahead, pause with: "Let's capture that for Stage 3."
- **Pitfall: Dominant Voices Drown Out Others**
  Fix: Use round-robins or silent brainstorming to ensure full participation.
- **Pitfall: No Clear Ownership**
  Fix: In Stage 4, always assign specific owners, deadlines, and follow-up dates.
- **Pitfall: Momentum Dies After the Session**
  Fix: Schedule follow-ups, client reviews, or check-ins within two weeks.

Leading Companies Use Value Labs to Drive Growth

Across industries, leading organizations have adopted Value Labs to drive stronger collaboration, uncover new opportunities, and achieve meaningful business outcomes. These sessions are transforming how teams engage clients.

"I coached teams on running Value Labs, which was incredibly insightful. Bringing the team together intentionally fostered a cross-pollination of ideas."

– Director, Learning & Talent, Global Technology Consulting Firm

"The Value Labs are amazing. I love the collaboration and ideas that come from different people and groups. We've made 'Value Labbing' a go-to within our organization. We've witnessed incremental to transformational gains—a wonderful improvement in how we engage clients and grow business."

– EVP, Americas, APAC, and Europe, Automotive Consulting Firm

"A competitor came in and told our client they could replace our services for a fraction of the cost. Rather than get into a price war, we ran an internal Value Lab to explore how we could increase the client's value. Then we hosted an external Value Lab with them. The session revealed new challenges we could solve—and we not only secured the renewal but built internal champions who now advocate for us."

– Participant, Professional Services Firm

"The Value Lab brought out the best team discussions among peers."

– Strategic Account Manager, Industrial Operations Provider

These stories show how Value Labs create a repeatable structure for insight and innovation. Teams move beyond routine account management to genuine partnership, building trust and driving sustainable growth.

Co-Create, Innovate, Deliver: Grow Your Accounts with Value Labs

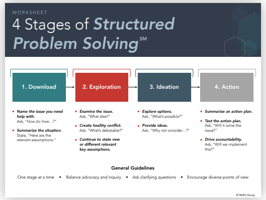
Internal Value Labs are powerful tools for identifying and pursuing revenue growth opportunities. Top-performing sales teams use these action-oriented workshops to proactively bring new ideas to key accounts, positioning themselves as partners in value creation.

Adopting Value Labs is a strong tactical move because:

- Your biggest growth potential lies within your current accounts
- Collaboration differentiates winners; Value Labs make it repeatable
- The 4 Stages of Structured Problem Solving framework turns ideas into measurable action
- Top performers don't wait for insight; they create it through structured collaboration

When diverse perspectives engage in structured problem-solving with the goal of delivering exceptional value, account relations thrive.

More Value Lab Resources – [Click to Access]

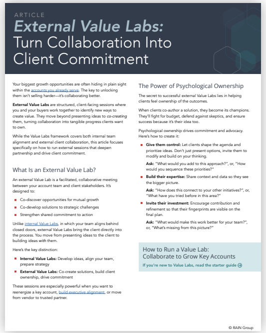


[Worksheet] 4 Stages of Structured Problem Solving

This template helps Value Lab participants turn challenges into action plans. By framing opportunities, defining success, strategizing for execution, and locking-in next steps, this proven approach ensures Value Labs drive real results.

[Video] Tips for Leading an Internal Value Lab

Prepare to lead an internal Value Lab that sparks creativity and momentum. Get 6 pro tips in under 4 minutes on Value Lab setup, facilitation, and follow-up.



[Article] How to Lead an External Value Lab

External Value Labs bring account stakeholders into the value co-creation process. Learn how to leverage cross-org collaboration to build psychological ownership and investment in account stakeholders.

RAIN Group Strategic Account

Discover and Drive Growth with Value in Every Sales Conversation

Top performers in strategic account management have clear processes for creating, reinforcing, and expanding the value case at every stage of the sales relationship. Those structures are a major factor in their ability to achieve higher revenue growth, profit, and customer satisfaction than the rest.

Top organizations adopt a systematic approach to account planning that identifies:

1. **How** to drive value for their accounts
2. **Who** is important in driving this value
3. **What** to do to make additional value come to life

Strategic Account Management training from RAIN Group gives your team the knowledge, skills, tools, and action plan they need to grow your key accounts.

Learning modules include:

- Growing Strategic and Key Accounts
- Driving Maximum Value: Leading a Value Lab
- Analyzing Stakeholders and Decision Making
- Filling Your Account Pipeline with New Opportunities
- Account Mission and KPIs
- Selecting Key Accounts for High Pursuit Intensity
- Competitor Analysis and Planning: Taking the Pole Position
- Plays and Big Plays: Action Planning to Ensure Account Strategy Success
- Deepening and Strengthening Relationships
- Succeeding with Account Research
- Making Account Plans Rock Solid: The VC Test

In addition, with solutions like Train the Trainer and Total Access (licensing), you can reduce the time out of the field, equip leaders to support sellers, and embed a proven sales method in your organization.

Click here to request a complimentary consultation →

RAIN Group Delivers World-Class Sales Training

- Modular, multi-modal, and purpose-built for the **modern learner**.
- Unique approach to driving **behavior change** through training that we call Execution Assurance.
- Focused on driving the **business results** important to you.
- A **transformational experience** that ensures the development, adoption, and implementation of new skills.
- Action-oriented **coaching** prepares sellers for real situations and provides direct feedback.

About RAIN Group

Drive Transformational Change through Award-Winning Sales Training

RAIN Group is an award-winning leader in sales transformation, with over 20 years of researching and enabling top sales performance. Recognized by Selling Power, Training Industry, and Brandon Hall, the company's modular, multi-modal approach to sales training provides flexible and customizable solutions for complex global teams.

Organizations worldwide turn to RAIN Group to:

- Identify capability gaps and uncover growth opportunities for sellers and sales managers.
- Optimize sales strategies and processes to drive measurable improvements and business impact.
- Build elite sales teams with research-backed training proven to drive success in competitive markets.
- Equip sales leaders and managers with coaching and management skills to maximize team performance.

RAIN Group partners with clients to ensure learning is adopted, drives lasting behavior change, and delivers measurable results.

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