

The Scalability Framework[®]

*The Five Proven Disciplines that
Accelerate the Path to Scale Successfully*





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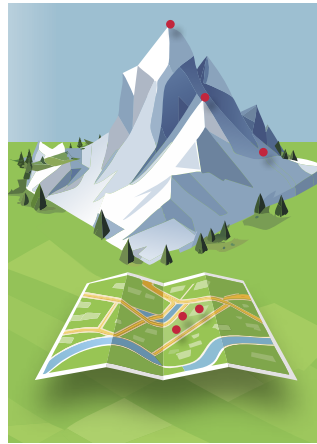
1. The Problem: Growth Outpaces Capability

The story begins by framing a universal founder challenge: early traction is achieved, but scaling becomes chaotic without systems, discipline and leadership evolution. Founders face strain, bottlenecks and an inflection point, should they continue with reactive growth or evolve deliberately?



2. The Solution: An Integrated System

The Framework is introduced as the first coherent system combining five disciplines. Instead of treating leadership, strategy, product, execution and performance separately, scalability integrates them into one pathway.

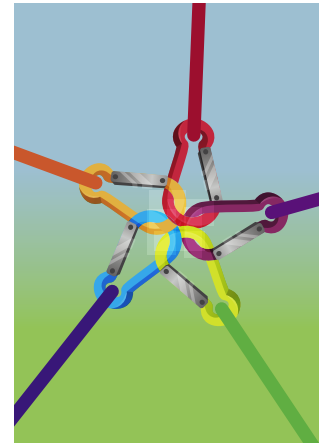


3. The Journey: Three Stages of Maturity

Scaling is positioned as a journey up a mountain. Organisations move from:

- Signalling → intuitively operating, loosely structured.
- Building → clarity, systems, shared leadership emerge.
- Embedding → discipline, predictability and resilience.

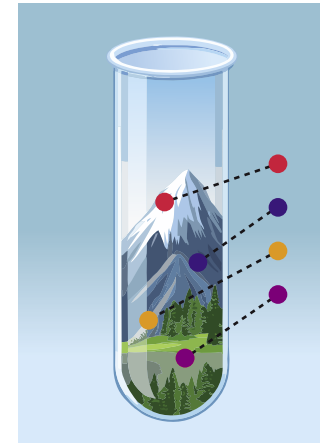
These stages give the reader a map, helping them locate their current position.



4. The Method: Five Disciplines

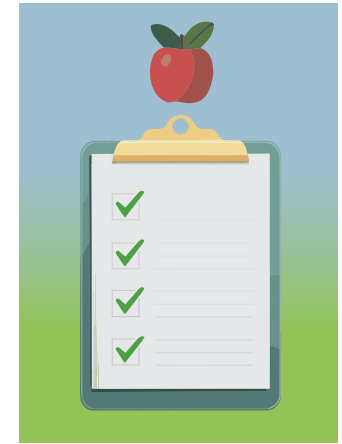
The core of the story introduces each discipline as a lever that transforms ad hoc growth into scalable capacity. Each discipline answers a different part of the scaling equation:

- Leadership → who leads and how.
- Strategy → what direction we scale into.
- Roadmap → what we build.
- Execution → how we deliver.
- Performance → how we measure and fund the journey.



5. The Proof: Case Studies

Real world examples from Select Strategies illustrate the patterns, bottlenecks and inflection points. These stories make abstract principles tangible.



6. The Call to Action

The narrative closes by returning to the reader: “What are your bottlenecks?” Scaling is positioned not as theory but as a system leaders can build with support, signalling readiness for deeper engagement.



1 The Scalability Framework® is the first integrated system of its kind, combining five proven disciplines into a coherent pathway to scale.

Scaling is hard. You've validated product-market fit, momentum is growing and the opportunity is real. But as growth accelerates, familiar strains begin to surface. Systems that once worked start to creak. Leadership becomes stretched. Strategy loses sharpness. The business feels busy, but not always aligned.

Through our work and research, we saw the same pattern repeatedly: most companies don't stall because of a lack of ambition. They stall because the organisation wasn't designed to scale.

We developed the Scalability Framework® after studying companies that scaled successfully, and those that plateaued despite similar potential. The difference wasn't luck or resources. It was maturity. The companies that scaled had clearer leadership alignment, more consistent systems and a stronger sense of direction. Those that stalled were working just as hard, but without the structures needed to support their next stage of growth.

We created this framework to bring clarity to that challenge. We want to give leaders a practical way to understand where they are on the journey, what typically stalls growth and what needs to evolve next.

Running a business can feel unpredictable and demanding, and even strong teams lose alignment as growth accelerates. We created a simple, effective framework that helps leadership teams:

- stay aligned as the business grows.
- improve predictability.
- support clearer decision making, and...
- turn ambition into focused, disciplined action.

The Scalability Framework® exists to make scaling intentional, not reactive.

We believe scalability isn't a moment, it's a capability. Teams that scale do so because they build clarity early, strengthen leadership, put structure around execution, revisit strategy with discipline and use a shared language to prioritise and align.

That's why we designed the Scalability Framework® to be:

- Simple: It's easy to understand and use.
- Comprehensive: It's covering the core disciplines that matter most.
- Repeatable: It's something teams can revisit at key milestones through the life of the business.
- A shared language: It's helping leadership stay aligned as complexity increases.

Our goal was to improve the odds of scaling success. This framework is one of the first integrated systems to unify leadership, strategy, product, execution and performance into a practical, repeatable approach to scaling. It gives leaders a steady, consistent framework they can rely on, one that helps identify bottlenecks early, focus on what matters and build the foundations for sustained, predictable scale.

As Ireland's trusted partners for ambitious leaders on the path to international scaling, this framework reflects our commitment to guiding teams with practical structure, clarity and confidence at every stage of their journey.

Select Strategies, June 2026



“We define scalability as an ordinary organizational capability developed by managing and achieving coherence among a firm’s technological architecture, organizational architecture, and business model”

– (Coviello et al., 2024)



Scalability is hard, but a framework makes it achievable



You've cracked product-market fit.

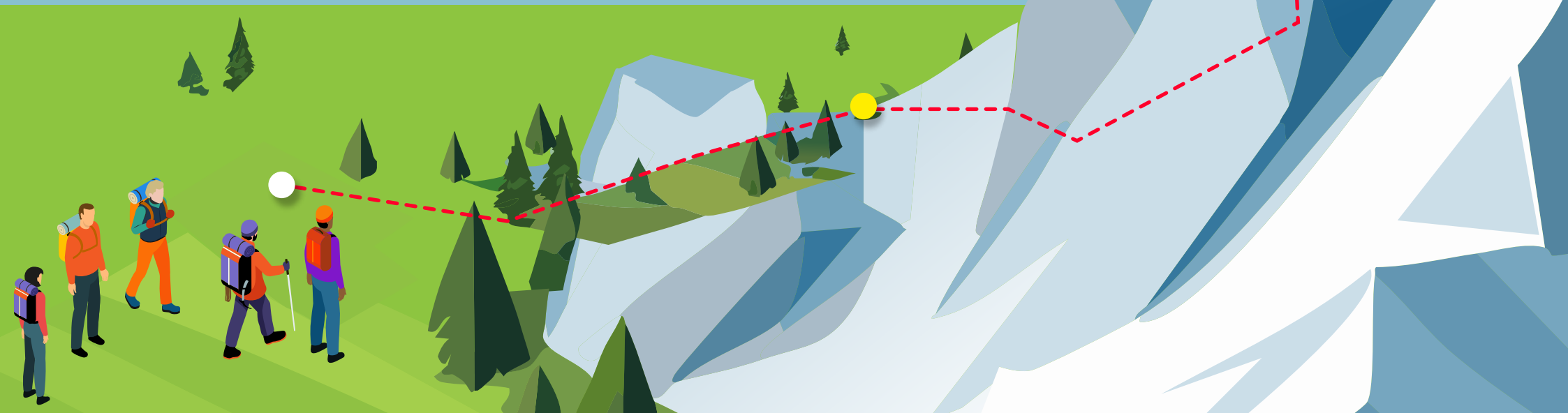
- Your team is growing. Your market is responding. Now comes the real question: “Can your business scale without breaking?”
- If you're not regularly using a scalability framework you're flying blind – growth without alignment leads to chaos, not scale.

Build the disciplines to reach your potential.

- Inside, you'll find the five disciplines that separate reactive growth from intentional scalability.
- We'll help you diagnose where growth stalls, align your team and embed the systems that make scaling not just possible but inevitable.

Embed the right systems to deliver at Scale.

- Scaling is about capacity and the ability to unlock your venture's full potential.
- The Scalability Framework® helps identify the systems, strategy and leadership steps required to deliver at scale without compromising quality, culture or control.
- Let's build a business that grows stronger as it grows bigger.



“What gets you to product-market fit is not what gets you to scale”

– (Hoffman, Yeah & Kessler, 2021)



3 From the founding spark to the scaling surge – it's time to build scalability

If you're thinking about scaling, you've likely achieved product-market fit – your solution resonates, your market responds and traction is building. You may be refining your go-to-market, growing your team and streamlining operations. But a deeper question emerges: What's your ambition? What's the real potential over the next 3, 5 or 10 years and are you ready to lead it there?

This is where many ventures stall. Scaling demands more than momentum. It requires a shift in mindset, leadership and systems. It means evolving from founder to CEO, product-first to market-led and local execution to global scale. These aren't tweaks. They're transformations.

Scalability unfolds in three stages

1. **Signalling Scalability (First Basecamp):** Traction is visible, but maturity is uneven – leadership is reactive, strategy emergent, systems informal.
2. **Building Scalability (Ascent):** Core disciplines take shape – leadership sharpens, strategy clarifies, structured execution supports growth.
3. **Embedding Scalability (High Camp):** The organisation operates with coherence – leadership is strategic, culture embedded, systems integrated for sustained performance.

For many founders, success isn't about chasing €100m or €1bn revenue or unicorn status, it's about building a purposeful, adaptable business with lasting impact.

True scalability lies in crafting a clear plan and executing it with discipline. Whether your ambition is Everest-sized or more grounded, growth can come from profitable niches, regional expansion, or long-term value creation without needing a billion-dollar valuation.



“Scalability is an ordinary organizational capability ... while scale-up is a phase of development during which the firm is actively engaged in scaling”

– (Coviello et al., 2024)





4 An Introduction to the Five Scalability Framework Disciplines

Across our client engagements, we've identified consistent patterns; recurring signals, pivotal shifts and common challenges, that shape the scaling journey. These insights are grounded in hands-on experience with companies from market leaders to rising challengers. The following case studies (pg. 6-7) illustrate how these dynamics play out in practice. They are also underpinned by peer reviewed academic research.

While every journey is unique, these patterns highlight critical actions in planning and execution that help leaders progress to the next level.

The five disciplines of Scalability are essential to building the structure, rhythm and resilience required for scale. They enable leaders to scale intentionally, not reactively.

Together, these disciplines offer a clear lens to assess readiness, identify gaps, guide investment and embed the capabilities needed to grow. We share an introduction to the disciplines here, which we build on during client engagements, through customising the Scalability Framework® for business models i.e., AI driven software as a service, medtech, lifesciences, engineering etc.

The Scalability Disciplines	Why it matters	Scalability Lens
Shared Leadership 	Without clear vision, governance and cultural cohesion, growth becomes chaotic. Leaders must evolve to strategic enablers.	Empowering others to lead fosters agility, deepens engagement and builds resilience.
Strategic Growth Planning 	Scaling without a plan is just acceleration without direction.	This discipline ensures your growth is intentional anchored in market opportunity, value proposition clarity and measurable goals. It's ambition translated into executable strategy.
Product/Service Roadmap 	Offerings must evolve with the market.	A scalable portfolio is differentiated, responsive and aligned with customer needs. It enables innovation, adaptability and relevance as you grow.
Robust Execution Capability 	You can't scale what you can't execute efficiently.	Ensures your operations are predictable, automated and resilient. It is about building infrastructure that supports growth – leveraging data, automation and AI-enabled decision support to increase capacity, responsiveness and scalability.
Predictable, Competitive Performance 	Financial health fuels scalability.	Monitoring key metrics, planning for scenarios, ensures outcomes are reliable. Leaders can make decisions with confidence and sustain momentum through uncertainty.

Founders must transition “from direct operational control to orchestrating scalable systems, structures and leadership capacity” as the venture prepares for scaling

– (Van Lancker et al., 2023)



5 The Scalability Framework® pinpoints how to accelerate maturity

		← Maturity →	
Disciplines	Signalling Scalability	Building Scalability	Embedding Scalability
Shared Leadership 	Leadership is reactive & founder-centric. No clear plan to build a leadership team. Decision-making is concentrated. Leadership behaviours are inconsistent.	Shared leadership is emerging through global ambition and purpose. Role definition, cadence & cross-functional alignment are taking shape. Integrating seasoned leadership hires with founding team.	Leadership team with proven scaling experience role-models scaling behaviours. Culture reinforces shared ownership & accountability. Succession & development pathways are embedded.
Strategic Growth Planning 	Early traction and market opportunity requires further validation. Strategy is founder-centric. Value proposition & product-market fit are becoming clearer. Go-to-market efforts are reactive.	High-growth market opportunity is pursued. Proven go to market and delivering above peer CAGR. Senior leadership commit to regular growth planning reviews.	Deep value proposition, category leadership & key marquee customers. Growth goals & capital allocation are aligned & embedded. Scenario modelling & trade-offs guide strategic decisions.
Product/Service Roadmap 	Product decisions are reactive & founder-led. Customer feedback/usage data not consistently used. Products lack differentiation.	Market intelligence shapes product decisions. Capability is differentiated, with criteria for strategic priorities. Tools, repeatability & automation are emerging.	Capable to deliver product at scale. Roadmap balances core, adjacent & breakthrough industry leading innovation. Scalable business model proven.
Robust Execution Capability 	Heroic execution is hands-on but inconsistent. Systems are informal, with limited documentation, review rhythm or performance analysis.	Organisation capable of delivering strategy. Infrastructure (e.g. systems, dashboards, SOPs) drive consistency. Dependencies are managed. Execution system implemented. Overcoming inhibitors to scale.	Durable execution system drives strategy. Change management reduces execution risks. Scalable infrastructure & cross-functional problem-solving are embedded supporting growth. Performance gaps are proactively addressed.
Predictable, Competitive Performance * 	Financial reporting is basic & ready for professionalisation. Investment strategy is ad hoc, with limited metrics. Key growth drivers are unclear & board/investor engagement is minimal.	Core assumptions are stated, tested and monitored, improving predictability of business. Financial analysis supports key decisions (e.g. margins, pricing, breakeven). Investment strategy & funding plan aligns with business goals. High performance board with global experience.	Strong unit economics logic & pricing support profitability. KPIs drive performance improvement across teams. Capital readiness as a strategic weapon. Serial acquirer mindset. Integration playbook ready. Risks monitored with mitigating actions identified.

* Note: Metrics are recommended in the Appendices on Pg. 12

Scaling ventures “must develop organizational structures and routines that allow growth without losing control, quality or responsiveness”

– (DeSantola & Gulati, 2017)



6 Fintech Success Story – A Journey along The Scalability Framework® from First Basecamp



	First Basecamp: Signalling Scalability Years < 5 < 20 Staff	Ascent Begins: Building Scalability Years 5–8 < 100 Staff	High Camp: Embedding Scalability Years 8+ 500+ Staff
Mindset	Founder-led hustle, chasing a big idea.	Structure starts to matter.	Execution becomes strategic.
Focus	Market fit, secure next phase funding.	Build leadership, define strategy, introduce accountability. Improve SaaS Metrics i.e. LTV, CAC, Growth Efficiency Ratio.	Mature systems, deepen culture, scale operations.
Challenges	No repeatable model, reactive decisions, informal systems	Tension between speed and process, high cognitive load.	Specialist transition, stretched teams, integration pains.
Scalability Actions	Test and learn rapidly. Start building a core team with complementary skills. Begin documenting what works.	Formalise leadership roles and decision rights. Implement disciplined product roadmap approach Introduce metrics and secure large funding.	Shift founder to strategic relationships. Invest in scalable systems and talent. Strengthen cross-functional execution and accountability.

Success depends on mastering “the extrapolation stage, when start-ups begin to focus on profitability, not just growth”

– (Rayport et al., 2023)



7 Data Centre Winner – A Journey along The Scalability Framework® from First Basecamp



	First Basecamp: Signalling Scalability Years < 5 < 150 Staff	Ascent Begins: Building Scalability Years 5–8 < 250 Staff	High Camp: Embedding Scalability Years 8+ 500+ Staff
Mindset	Founder sets ambition.	Customer pain points drive innovation.	Vision sharpens, team buy-in grows.
Focus	Emerging product-market fit, initial go-to-market strategy.	Hyper-scaler clients love the service, strong brand signals emerge, product-market fit confirmed.	Executable plans, embedded systems, scalable go-to-market strategy, predictable revenue.
Challenges	Fragile financial model, limited predictability, early traction but not yet scalable.	Revenue remains lumpy, forecasting is shaky, scaling still elusive.	Balancing new incentives, evolving leadership roles, execution risk.
Scalability Actions	Anchor the leadership transition. Validate product-market fit with real usage. Begin shaping a repeatable go-to-market motion.	Deepen customer partnerships. Build scalable delivery and forecasting systems. Strengthen product-market alignment through feedback loops.	Embed metrics & accountability. Align CRO & CFO strategies. Invest in scalable talent & culture.

Scaling reflects a transition from entrepreneurial improvisation to structured, system-driven expansion, where returns to scale arise not just from size but from organizational design and capability maturity

– (Bohan et al., 2024)



“Scaling involves building the organizational scaffolding necessary for sustained expansion”

– (DeSantola & Gulati, 2017)



9 Meet Select Strategies

We are Ireland’s trusted partners for ambitious leaders on the path to international scale. Since 2000, our team of founders, scaling leaders, board members, coaches, and researchers has guided over 130 ventures from traction to scale, without losing what makes them exceptional.

At Select Strategies, we work end to end. We help leaders embed the systems, behaviours, and practices that advance the maturity of scalability, moving growth plans from paper to disciplined execution where scale is achieved with resilience and predictability.

Through the Growth Roadmap®, we align vision, strategy and measurable goals. Through the Growth Execution System®, we embed rhythm, accountability and capacity so progress is visible and sustainable. Together, these offerings connect ambition to outcomes.

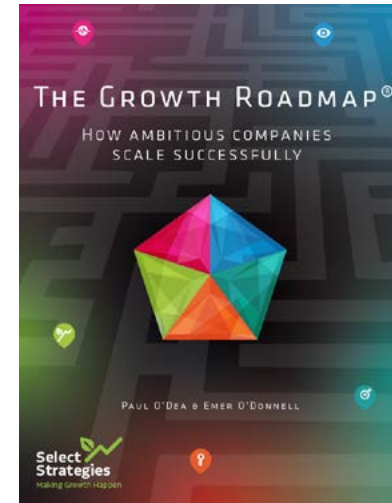
We diagnose where ventures stall, identify accelerators and bottlenecks, and co-design systems that build resilience and predictability for our clients. Our methodology is grounded in real world scaling patterns and bottlenecks we’ve solved with companies that now lead their categories.

Get in touch at www.selectstrategies.com to learn how we support leaders on their journey of scalability.



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“Scalability is the oxygen that fuels long-distance ascent, enabling your business to climb steadily, grow stronger and endure new heights sustainably.”

– Select Strategies



10 A More Detailed Quantitative Lens on Scalability

Each of the five Scalability Framework® disciplines can be assessed through clear, quantitative measures that indicate the maturity and resilience of a growing organisation. While providing a full, discipline by discipline metrics model is beyond the scope of this paper, the SaaS examples in this section give a sense of how these measures can be applied in practice.

In our work, we find that leadership teams benefit from establishing a small number of consistent, high signal metrics that track whether scaling is occurring efficiently, predictably and in line with long term value creation. The Bain Rule of 40 is a particularly useful first pass indicator, especially when viewed as a multi year trend. It balances growth and profitability to assess whether a company is scaling sustainably over time, and has become a widely used benchmark in evaluating software and SaaS performance. 40% is the point at which a SaaS or software business is usually demonstrating scalable, efficient growth, either through high growth, strong margins or a balanced mix of both.

For example, a company growing revenue at 30% with a profit margin of 15% achieves a Rule of 40 score of 45 (30 + 15), signalling healthy, efficient growth. In contrast, a business growing at 55% but running at a -20% margin scores 35, suggesting its growth may not yet be sustainable. Tracking this score over several years provides a quick, high level view of whether the company is strengthening or weakening its scalability profile - in both growth and profitability.

Used alongside more granular operational, product, execution and financial indicators, the Rule of 40 offers a clear, high level test of scalability maturity, one that aligns closely with the five disciplines outlined in this framework.

Metric	What It Measures	Why It Matters for Scalability
ARR (Annual Recurring Revenue)	Predictable subscription revenue over 12 months.	The foundation of SaaS valuation and growth tracking.
NRR (Net Revenue Retention)	Revenue retained from existing customers after churn and expansion.	Shows if your base is compounding; NRR >100% signals scalable growth.
Gross Margin	Revenue minus cost of goods sold.	High margins prove SaaS can scale profitably.
CAC (Customer Acquisition Cost)	Cost to acquire a new customer.	Efficiency of growth; must stay stable or decline as you scale.
LTV (Lifetime Value)	Total value of a customer relationship.	LTV/CAC ratio indicates sustainability of acquisition.

Digital firms “should outsource complementary activities to avoid diverting resources away from their scalable core, and to enhance their ability to grow exponentially”

– (Giustiziero et al., 2023)



11 Acknowledgements

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Thanks also to multiple senior executives in Enterprise Ireland, who are leading the scaling conversation with a bold ambition to make exporting Irish companies the primary driver of the Irish economy.

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Finally, thanks to Alastair Keady at Hexhibit who created the design and visual language.



12 Glossary

Ascent Begins (Building Scalability): Structure starts to matter; leadership, strategy and metrics begin to formalize.

Business Model: The structured approach a company uses to create, deliver and capture value. It outlines how the organisation generates revenue, serves customers and sustains operations which form the foundation for scalable growth.

CAC (Customer Acquisition Cost): Cost of acquiring a new customer; used to assess marketing and sales efficiency.

CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate): The average annual rate at which a company's revenue, investment, or metric grows over a specified period, assuming growth is compounded each year. It smooths out fluctuations to show consistent year-on-year progress.

Change Management: Guiding organisational transitions to reduce risk and improve adoption.

Dashboards: Visual tools for tracking performance metrics and operational health.

Embedded Culture: A mature organisational culture that reinforces shared values, leadership and execution discipline.

Execution Risk: Potential for failure due to weak systems, unclear roles, or overstretched teams.

First Basecamp (Signalling Scalability): Early traction, founder-led hustle, informal systems.

Founder-led Hustle: Early-stage energy driven by the founder's vision and effort, often reactive and informal.

Go-to-Market Strategy: Plan for reaching customers and delivering value effectively.

Growth Efficiency Ratio: A measure of how effectively a company turns investment into growth.

Growth vs. Scalability: Growth increases size or revenue; scalability increases capacity and resilience without losing control or quality.

High Camp (Embedding Scalability): Execution becomes strategic; systems, culture and accountability are embedded.

Intentional Scalability: Growth that is planned, structured and supported by systems and leadership.

KPIs (Key Performance Indicators): Metrics used to track strategic and operational performance.

LTV (Lifetime Value): Projected revenue a customer will generate during their relationship with the company.

M&A (Mergers and Acquisitions): Strategic transactions where companies combine (merger) or one company purchases another (acquisition). In a scaling context, M&A can accelerate growth, expand capabilities, enter new markets and/or consolidate industry position.

Minimum Viable Scalability (MVS): The minimum set of leadership behaviours, systems and strategic clarity required for a business to scale without creating bottlenecks or instability. MVS helps teams identify what must be in place before accelerating growth and ensures scaling is built on a sustainable foundation.

Predictable, Competitive Performance: Financial and operational yet intentionally tracked metrics that enable confident decision-making and sustained momentum.

Product-Market Fit: Degree to which a product satisfies strong market demand.

Product/Service Roadmap: Structured approach to aligning offerings with customer needs and market evolution.

Reactive Growth: Expansion without strategic alignment, often leading to chaos or bottlenecks.

Robust Execution Capability: Building predictable, resilient operations through systems, documentation and process discipline.

Scalability Lens: A perspective used to assess readiness, identify gaps and guide investment. **Scalability Moves:** Recommended actions tailored to each stage of scalability.

Scalability: An internal capability to grow impact without multiplying complexity, enabled by leadership mindset, systems and strategic design. If strong scalability is embedded, it will result in Scaling, where revenue is growing at a faster rate than costs.

Scaling Plan: A 3–5 year roadmap that aligns strategy, systems and leadership for sustained growth.

Scaling: An outcome of building and embedding strong Scalability which expands the business's capacity, reach and performance in a repeatable, resilient and strategic way, where revenue is now growing at a faster rate than costs.

Shared Leadership: Leadership distributed across the team, enabling agility, resilience and cultural cohesion.

SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures): Documented processes that ensure consistency and scalability.

Strategic Growth Planning: Translating ambition into executable strategy, anchored in market opportunity and measurable goals.

Succession Planning: Preparing for leadership transitions to ensure continuity and strategic alignment.

Unit Economics: Financial metrics that assess profitability at the customer or product level.

Value Proposition: The clear articulation of the unique value a company delivers to its customers. It defines why customers choose your product or service over alternatives and anchors differentiation, relevance and strategic focus.



13 Further Reading on Scalability & Scaling

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