STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

THE FOUNDER PLAYBOOK SERIES · 03

How to scale your startup

A practical guide to building your team, systems and resources



startupireland.com

00

WHAT'S INSIDE

→ Introduction
The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

A SIX-STEP APPROACH TO SCALING YOUR BUSINESS

01 Confirm you're ready to scale 7

02 Build the team and leadership 9

03 Put the right resources and systems in place 11

04 Protect your culture 12

05 Choose your growth strategy 14

06 Fund and manage your growth 16

ALSO IN THIS PLAYBOOK

Tools to help you scale 18

Check your progress 19

Your next step 20

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

01 These playbooks and accompanying templates are provided by Enterprise Ireland for general information and guidance only. They are intended as practical resources to support your own research, planning and decision-making and should not be relied upon as professional, legal, financial, tax, investment or other specialist advice.

02 Every business and market is different, and the information, examples and templates provided may not be appropriate for your specific circumstances. You are responsible for how you use or apply the content and for any decisions or actions taken as a result. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility or liability for any loss, damage or other consequence arising from the use of, or reliance on, these materials.

03 Users are encouraged to conduct their own research, verify information relevant to their circumstances and seek appropriate independent professional advice where required, particularly before making significant financial, legal, contractual or commercial decisions.

00

ABOUT THIS PLAYBOOK

→ Introduction
The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

A business is scaling when it can increase revenue without requiring a proportional increase in people, costs or operational effort.



This playbook looks at the people, processes and foundations that can help you grow in a more sustainable and manageable way. This stage can bring new challenges because scaling is not simply about doing more of what worked before. As the business grows, founders need to delegate more, informal ways of working start to break down, and pressure builds across cash flow, culture, quality and customer experience.

The challenge is finding the right balance. Scale too slowly and you may miss opportunities; scale too quickly and the business can become overstretched. Done well, scaling helps you grow a larger business without losing the strengths that made it successful in the first place.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

01

Six steps to scaling your business

From confirming you're ready to funding and managing growth.



STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

Introduction
→ The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

THE 6 STEPS TO SCALING YOUR BUSINESS

01
Confirm you're ready to scale



02
Build the team and leadership



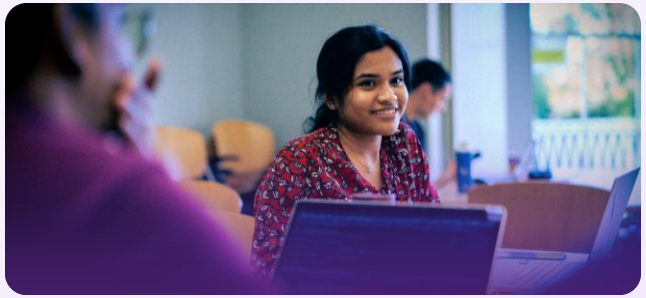
03
Put the right resources and systems in place place



04
Protect your culture



05
Choose your growth strategy



06
Fund and manage your growth

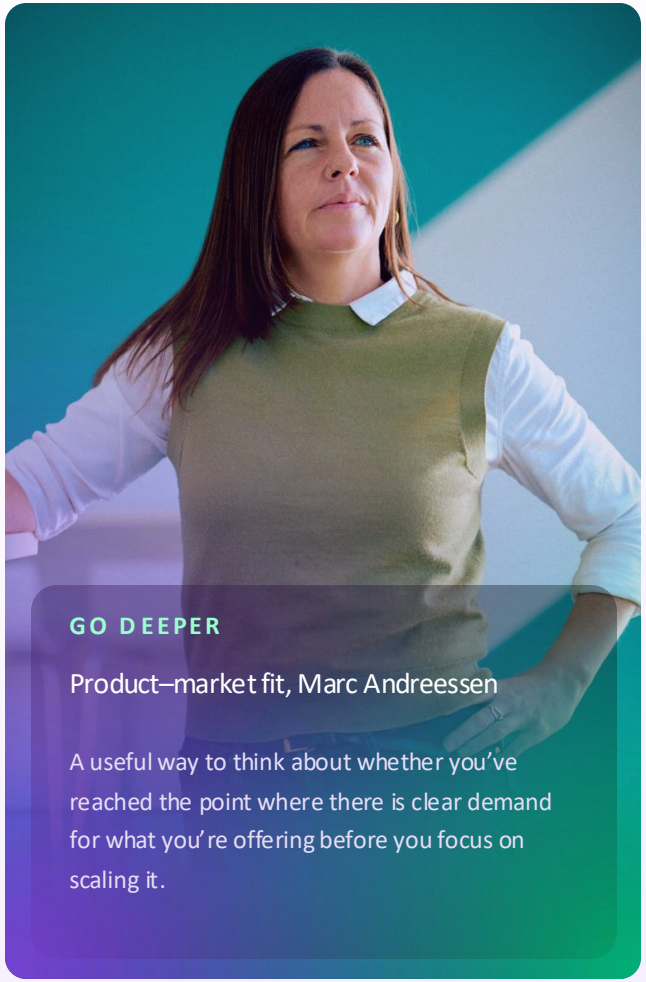


STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

STEP 1 OF 6
CONFIRM YOU'RE READY TO SCALE

Introduction
→ The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step



GO DEEPER

Product–market fit, Marc Andreessen

A useful way to think about whether you've reached the point where there is clear demand for what you're offering before you focus on scaling it.

WHAT

Look for evidence that the business is ready before committing significantly more time, funding and resources to growth.

HOW

Look for clear signs that the business is ready, including repeatable revenue, strong evidence of product–market fit, healthy unit economics and growing demand. Scaling tends to magnify both strengths and weaknesses, so it helps to have strong foundations in place first.

WATCH OUT FOR

Scaling before the core business model is working.

If the economics do not work at a smaller scale, growth is unlikely to resolve the underlying issue. Make sure the core model is working before you invest heavily in growth.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

Introduction
→ The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

TOOL
UNIT ECONOMICS METRICS

Test whether growth creates sustainable value at the level of one customer or transaction.

CAC

Customer acquisition cost

Sales + marketing cost ÷ new customers won

LTV

Customer lifetime value

ARPU × gross margin % ÷ churn rate

LTV : CAC

Return on acquisition

LTV ÷ CAC. A common benchmark is 3 : 1 or more

Payback

CAC payback period

CAC ÷ (monthly ARPU × gross margin %)

ARPU

Average revenue per user

Revenue in period ÷ average customers

Gross margin

Gross margin %

(Revenue – cost of sales) ÷ revenue

Contribution

Contribution margin

Revenue less all variable costs

Churn

Customer churn rate

Customers lost in period ÷ customers at start

Benchmarks vary by sector; use them as a guide, not a target.

Core check LTV : CAC should improve as the model becomes more repeatable and efficient.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

Introduction
→ The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

STEP 2 OF 6
BUILD THE TEAM AND LEADERSHIP

WHAT

Build the team and leadership structure you need to support the next stage of growth.

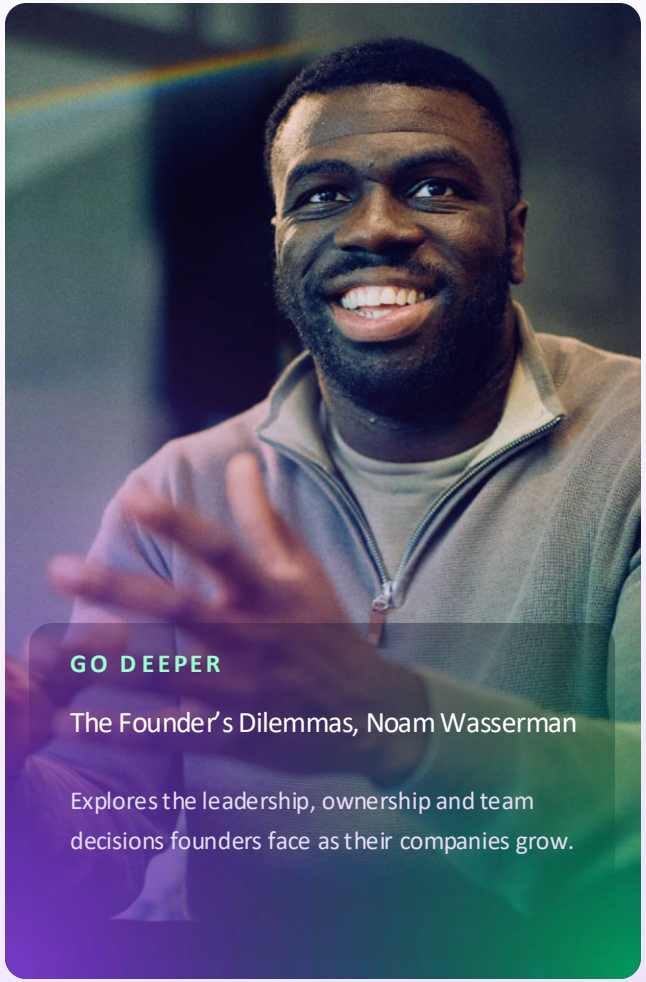
HOW

Hire for the roles and capabilities the business needs for its next stage, bring in experienced leaders and make responsibilities clear across the founding and leadership team. As the business grows, the founder's role often needs to shift from doing everything to enabling people to take ownership.

WATCH OUT FOR

Becoming the bottleneck.

In the early days, it's normal for the founder to be involved in almost everything. As the business grows, that can start to slow decisions and limit progress. If every approval, problem or decision still lands with you, it may be time to delegate more and strengthen the leadership around you.



GO DEEPER

The Founder's Dilemmas, Noam Wasserman

Explores the leadership, ownership and team decisions founders face as their companies grow.

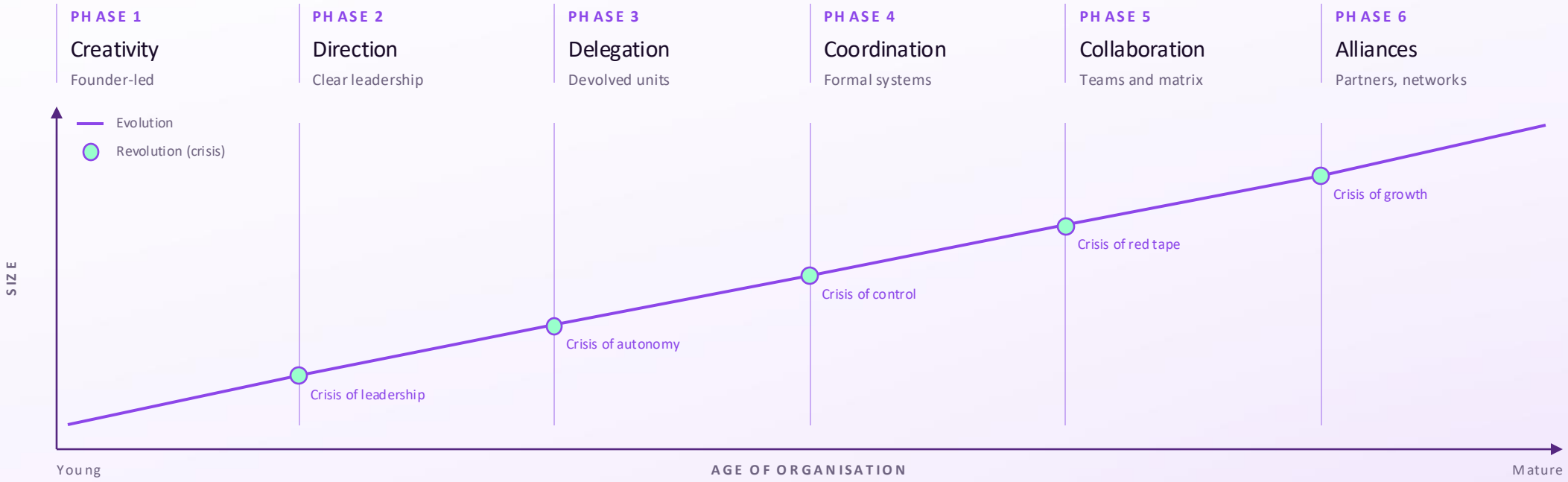
STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

Introduction
→ The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

TOOL
GREINER' S GROWTH MODEL

Deliberately structure teams, leadership and reporting as you move through the growth phases.



Source: Greiner (1972); phase 6 (alliances) added in Greiner (1998).

Core check

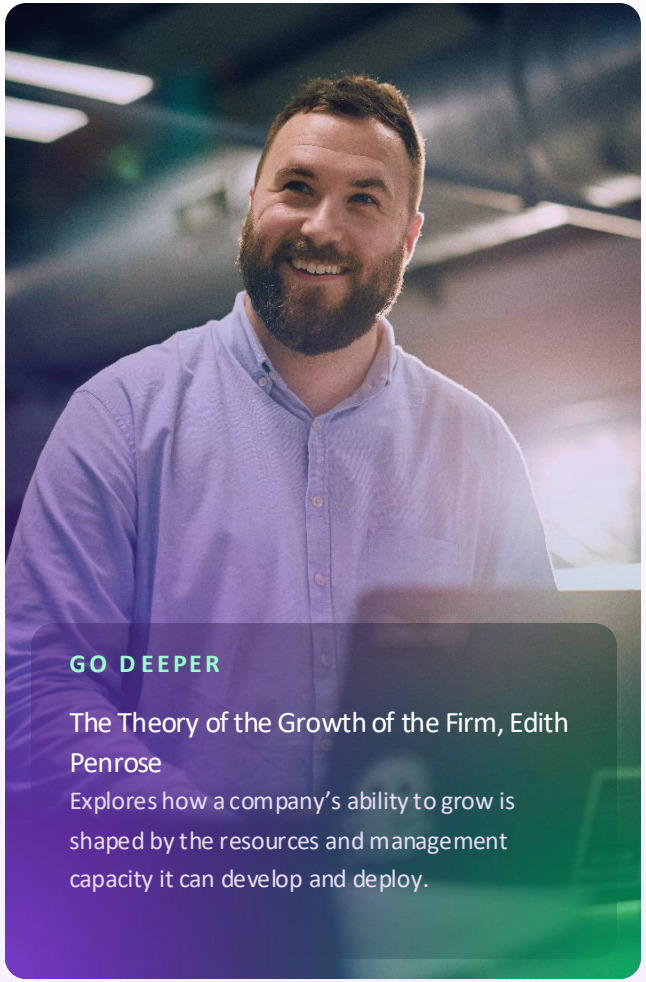
Each phase of growth ends in a crisis that the next way of organising has to solve.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

Introduction
→ The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

STEP 3 OF 6
PUT THE RIGHT RESOURCES AND SYSTEMS IN PLACE



GO DEEPER

The Theory of the Growth of the Firm, Edith Penrose

Explores how a company's ability to grow is shaped by the resources and management capacity it can develop and deploy.

WHAT

Put the systems and processes in place to support growth without adding unnecessary complexity.

HOW

Invest in the systems, processes and tools that help the business run smoothly as it grows, across areas like finance, operations, technology and hiring. What works for a team of five may not work for 50, so expect to upgrade how work gets done as the business becomes more complex.

WATCH OUT FOR

Getting the timing wrong.

Too much structure too early can waste time and money, but waiting too long can leave you relying on manual workarounds and constant founder involvement. Introduce more structure as the business needs it, not before.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

Introduction
→ The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

STEP 4 OF 6
PROTECT YOUR CULTURE

WHAT

Keep the values and behaviours that matter as the team grows.

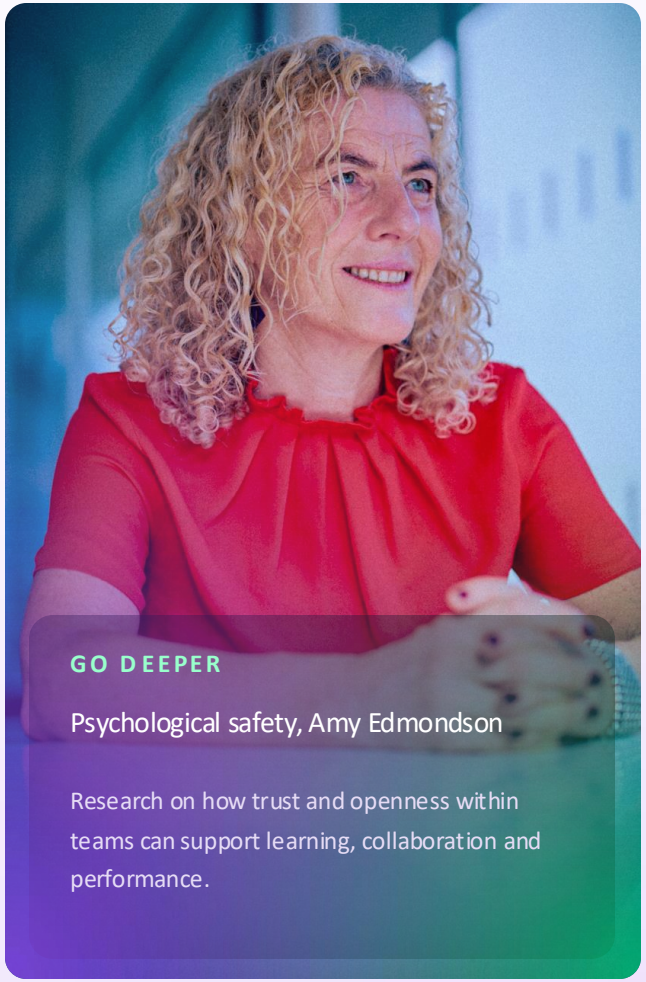
HOW

Be clear about the culture you want to build, hire with those values in mind and reinforce them through how people work and make decisions. As direct founder oversight becomes less practical, culture helps keep a growing team aligned.

WATCH OUT FOR

Assuming culture will look after itself.

It can be relatively easy to maintain when the team is small, but rapid hiring can quickly change how the company feels and operates. Be clear about the behaviours you want to maintain as new people join.



GO DEEPER

Psychological safety, Amy Edmondson

Research on how trust and openness within teams can support learning, collaboration and performance.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

Introduction
→ The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

TOOL
VALUES AND CULTURE FRAMEWORK

Make values explicit and build them into how you hire, onboard and reward people.

01	02	03	04	05
Define	**Translate**	**Hire**	**Embed**	**Reinforce**
Core values	Observable behaviours	Values-based screening	Onboarding and rituals	Reviews and rewards
3–5 values you will not compromise on, even when costly	What each value looks like in daily work	Structured interview questions and scoring for each value	Stories, recognition and routines that teach the values	Assess how results are achieved, not just what

Values and culture framework. Core values concept from Collins and Porras (1996).

Diagnose first

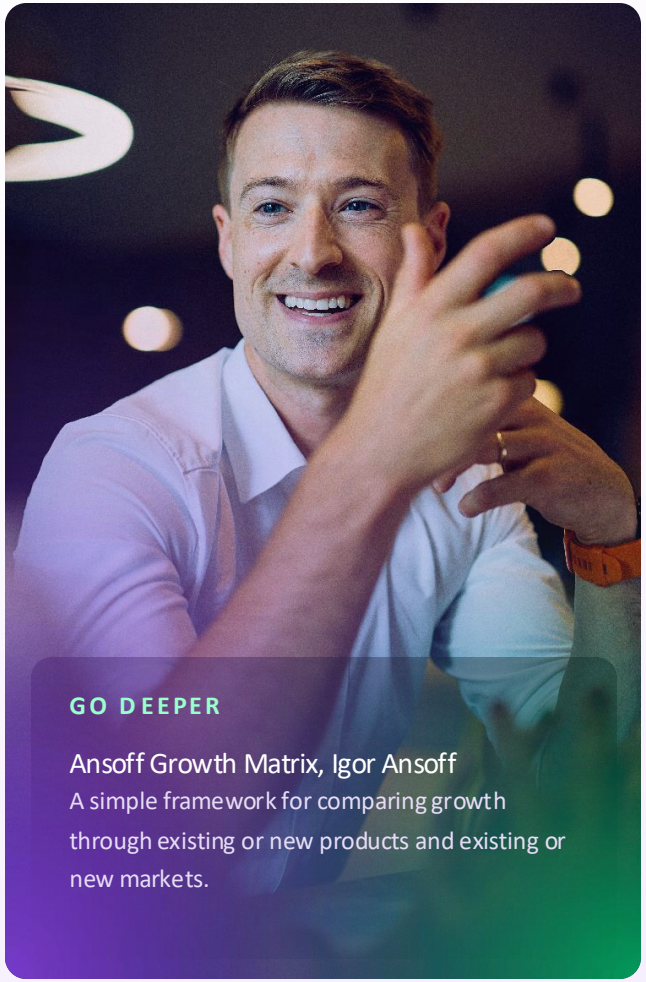
Use the cultural web to map the culture you have today before defining the culture you want.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

Introduction
→ The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

STEP 5 OF 6
CHOOSE YOUR GROWTH STRATEGY



GO DEEPER

Ansoff Growth Matrix, Igor Ansoff
A simple framework for comparing growth through existing or new products and existing or new markets.

WHAT

Decide how you want to grow. Different routes carry different levels of risk, cost and complexity.

HOW

Consider the main ways your business can grow and choose the route that best fits your stage and goals: grow in your existing market, launch new products or services, enter new markets or explore new models or channels.

WATCH OUT FOR

Expanding into new products or markets too quickly.

When growth slows, it can be tempting to assume the answer is something new. Before branching out, make sure you have made the most of what is already working.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

Introduction
→ The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

TOOL
ANSOFF GROWTH MATRIX

Map your options by product and market, and weigh their relative risk.

	EXISTING PRODUCTS	NEW PRODUCTS
EXISTING MARKETS	**Market penetration** Sell more of what you have to the customers you already serve. RISK Low	**Product development** Build new products for your existing customers. RISK Medium
NEW MARKETS	**Market development** Take existing products into new markets, countries or segments. RISK Medium	**Diversification** New products for new markets: the least familiar territory. RISK High

INCREASING RISK AND UNFAMILIARITY →

Source: Ansoff (1957).

Core check Make the most of what is already working before you branch out into new products or markets.

STARTUP IRELAND BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

Introduction
→ The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

STEP 6 OF 6
FUND AND MANAGE YOUR GROWTH

WHAT

Make sure you have the resources to support growth without putting the business under unnecessary financial pressure.

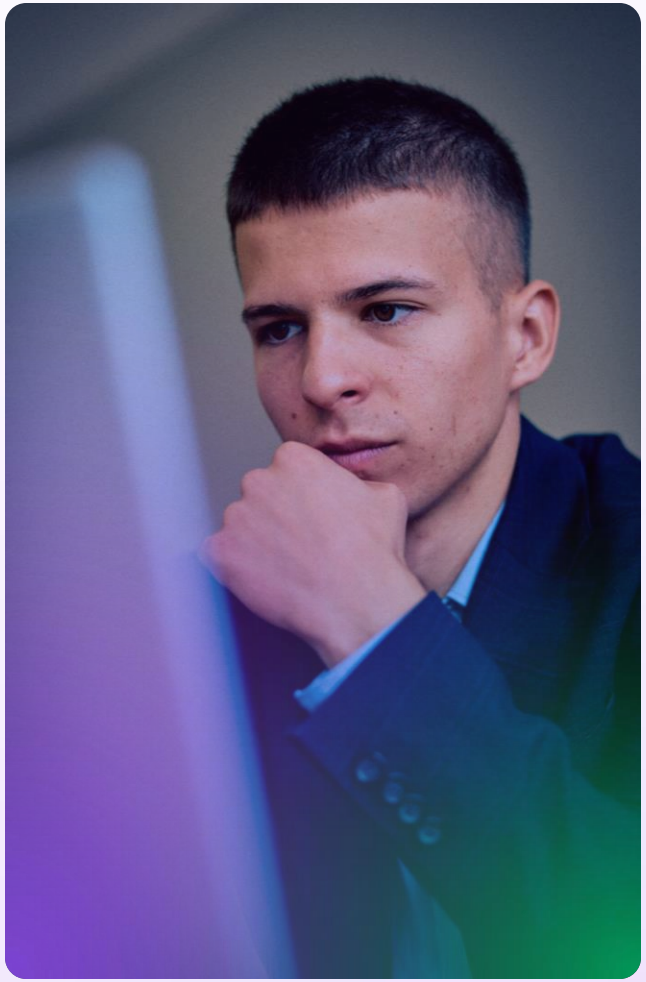
HOW

Scaling often requires investment in people, systems, technology, marketing or inventory before the additional revenue arrives. Plan those costs in advance, understand how much funding you may need and keep a close eye on your cash position as the business grows.

WATCH OUT FOR

Confusing revenue growth with financial health.

A business can be growing quickly and still run into trouble if it does not have enough cash to support that growth. Monitor your runway, burn rate and funding needs alongside your sales and revenue.



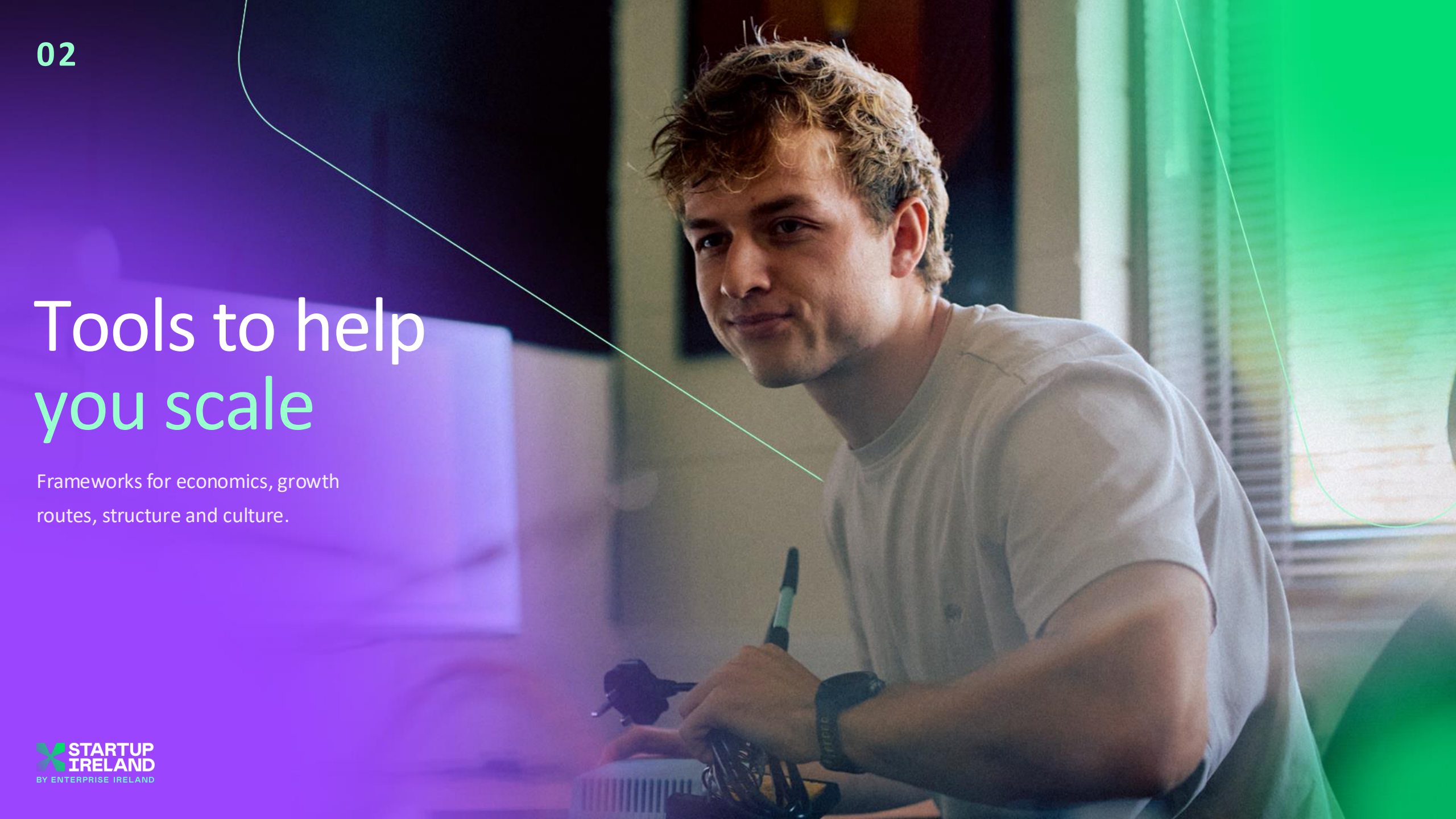
STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

02

Tools to help you scale

Frameworks for economics, growth routes, structure and culture.



STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

TOOLS TO HELP YOU SCALE

Introduction
The six steps
→ Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
Your next step

Five tools to check the economics, choose a growth route and shape the team and team and culture around it.

Step 1

Unit economics

Use measures such as customer acquisition cost (CAC), lifetime value (LTV) and margin to understand whether growth is improving the business financially.

Step 5

Ansoff Growth Matrix

Compare different growth routes, from deeper penetration of existing markets to new products and new markets.

Step 2

Organisational design

Think deliberately about how teams, leadership, roles and reporting need to change as the business grows.

Step 4

Values and culture framework

Define the behaviours and values you want to protect, and use them to guide hiring, leadership and decision-making as the team expands.

Step 6

Cash flow planning

Forecast the cash you'll need to fund hiring, systems, marketing and other growth costs before the expected revenue arrives.

Remember

Use the tools together: the economics tell you if you are ready, the matrix tells you where to grow, structure and culture tell you how.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

WHAT A BUSINESS READY TO SCALE LOOKS LIKE
CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Introduction
The six steps
Tools to help you scale
→ Check your progress
Your next step

Before you scale, you should be able to say:



- ✓ I know the business is ready to scale, with demand, revenue and unit economics that support growth.
- ✓ I have the leadership and team structure needed for the next stage.
- ✓ I have systems and processes that can support growth without everything depending on me.
- ✓ I'm clear on the culture and ways of working I want to protect as the team grows. team grows.
- ✓ I have a focused growth strategy rather than trying to pursue every opportunity at opportunity at once.
- ✓ I understand the funding, cash and resources needed to support that growth. growth.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Introduction
The six steps
Tools to help you scale
Check your progress
→ Your next step

Once you're ready to scale, the next step may be to look beyond beyond Ireland and work out which international markets offer the offer the strongest opportunity for your business.

Read the playbook: How to enter a new international market →



NEED SUPPORT?

Startup Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and your Local Enterprise Office can give you practical advice and support, including programmes and funding that can help you scale your business.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

For general guidance only. Enterprise Ireland accepts no responsibility for decisions made using these materials. Users should conduct their own research and seek appropriate professional advice.

STARTUP IRELAND
BY ENTERPRISE IRELAND

Thank you!

Find more playbooks and supports for founders at

startupireland.com