



- **Multi-product or multi-market operations** — Each product line or market segment creates its own coordination demands, decision rights, and resource allocation tensions.

### Factors That Keep You in an Earlier Stage Longer

These reduce complexity and allow simpler structures to work effectively at higher headcounts:

- **Co-located, single-product team** — Everyone in one place working on one thing reduces coordination overhead significantly.
- **Homogeneous technical team** — When most of the team shares a similar skill set and work style, less formal structure is needed.
- **Operationally strong founder** — A founder who naturally builds systems and delegates well can stretch earlier-stage structures further than most.

*The goal isn't to calculate a precise adjusted headcount. It's to recognize when your company's complexity has outpaced—or hasn't yet reached—what the headcount alone would suggest, so you invest in the right systems at the right time.*

## Where Are You Now?

Check the statements that are true for your company today:

### Founder-Operated Signals

- The founder is involved in most decisions
- There's no formal meeting rhythm—people just talk when needed
- Everyone knows what everyone else is working on
- Hiring is based on gut feel and personal network

### Foundation Building Signals

- New hires don't understand the full picture without being told
- The founder is the bottleneck on decisions and approvals
- People are asking 'who's in charge of that?'
- Meetings are inconsistent—some weeks they happen, some they don't

### Early Scaling Signals

- There are managers managing people who manage people
- Culture feels different than it did at 20 people
- Teams are making decisions the founder didn't know about
- The company has formal processes for some things but not others

### Scaling Signals

- The founder can be out for a week and nothing breaks
- Leaders are developing other leaders, not just managing
- Board governance is active and adds value
- The system runs on rhythm, not heroics

## Assessment

Based on the signals above, what stage best describes where we are today?

What complexity factors shift our effective stage up or down?

What are we doing that belongs to a different stage (too early or too late)?

What's the single biggest structural gap holding us back from the next stage ?

What IDEA System tools should we prioritize for our current stage ?