THE WAKE-UP CALL

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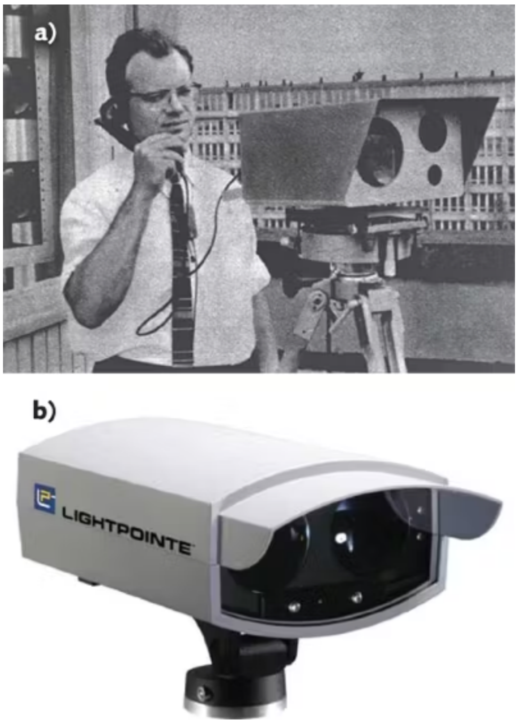
Growth Isn't Always Good – Why Many Tech Companies Collapse Under Their Own Success

By Christian Rook

I remember my time at LightPointe Communications well—a high-tech startup in the field of free-space optics in the early 2000s. We had just acquired the technology and patents of a nine-person engineering team in a Series B funding round. The founder supported us for a while longer but gradually stepped back. Our mission was clear: scale—and fast.



We had to establish locations, hire teams, industrialize production and development, professionalize processes, and simultaneously win and support customers in Germany and the US. What had once been a technically driven founding team full of pioneering spirit suddenly became a company with HR responsibilities, delivery obligations, product roadmaps, and global ambition. The transition was intense—and instructive.

Because as steep as the growth was, its course was unpredictable: products were delayed, customers dropped out, internal processes reached their limits. And that's where it became clear: **technology alone does not carry a company**.

What many underestimate: growth changes everything

Many technology-driven companies start out with a strong idea, excellent technical expertise, and a tight bond between founders, team, and product. But with success comes complexity: order volumes, customer expectations, delivery responsibilities, team size. What once worked quickly, directly, and personally now requires structure, coordination, and leadership.

At this stage, founders and technical CEOs often report that things are "getting out of hand." They experience stress, decision fatigue, and a loss of control—not because they're making mistakes, but because the system is evolving faster than their leadership logic.

Organizational models help explain what's happening

This isn't an individual phenomenon. Back in the 1970s, Larry E. Greiner described the typical phases of growth and crisis in organizations. Especially relevant is the threshold between the founding and growth phases—when personal leadership must give way to structured management.
This shift isn't just technical—it's emotional:

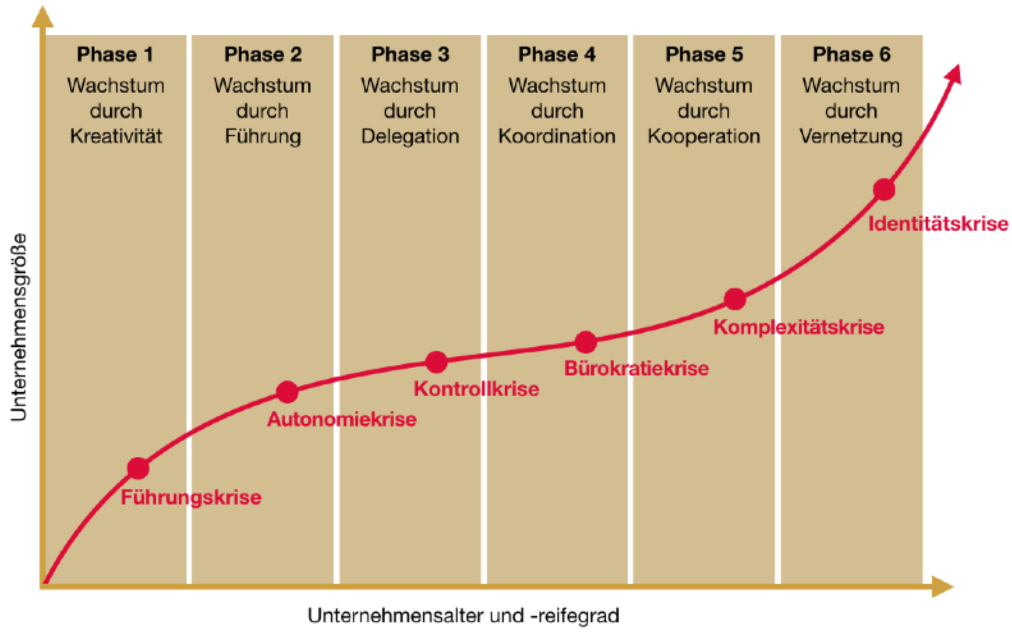
- **Control becomes coordination**
- **Closeness becomes distributed responsibility**
- **Decisions become slower—but more sustainable**

Why so many fail at this point—and how to avoid it

In my work with tech companies, I've seen time and again how this phase becomes a turning point. Some try to keep running the company "from the engine room"—and burn out. Others withdraw too early—leaving the organization in a vacuum. Both are risky.

What's needed now is a new kind of leadership role:

Wachstumskurve nach Greiner



Quelle: Britta Katharina Kiefer

A CEO or COO who brings structure, sets priorities, establishes processes—without breaking the culture. Someone who understands technology but can also run an organization. Who takes ownership for customers, ensures results, empowers the team—and, at the same time, earns the founders' trust.

Conclusion: Growth is a developmental path, not an automatic process

Technology creates demand. But only good organization creates satisfaction—for customers, teams, and stakeholders alike. If you want to shape growth, you need leaders who see more than just solutions—they build systems. And they're willing to step up during this critical transition phase to provide structure and ensure stability.

Christian Rook

Christian Rook

info@christianrook.com
www.christianrook.com