

Who this is for

This document is written for three types of readers:

- Partner and alliance managers who notice that their partner programme demands more than it returns.
- C-level and partner leadership steering on ecosystem health as a strategic growth driver — not just partner counts and revenue.
- Vendors, SIs and ISVs looking to shift their ecosystem from transactional to value-creating.

What you'll find here

Three components of the APEX framework:

- A thinking framework that makes partner ecosystems measurable — the eight dimensions.
- A map showing where you stand — the five maturity levels.
- An approach that treats ecosystems not as a project, but as a cycle — the five phases.

This overview contains no scoring formulas or ready-made recipes. Those belong in execution — not in a thinking framework that serves as a basis for conversation.

The eight dimensions

Ecosystems are multidimensional by nature. A single KPI rarely tells the whole story. A dimension clusters ten to twenty related signals into one readable area — much like a health check combines different values into an overall picture of vitality.

The APEX framework distinguishes eight dimensions. Together they make the health of a partner ecosystem readable. Not a Christmas tree of separate metrics, but eight recognisable areas.

On the following pages: per dimension, what it encompasses and what a strong versus weak dimension typically yields.

The eight dimensions — D1 to D3

D1 — Strategy & Vision

Why you have a partner ecosystem at all and what direction you want to take with it. Key questions: which business outcomes drive it, how does the ecosystem fit into your broader strategy, and how explicit is that for both your internal organisation and your partners?

Strong: all other dimensions become coherent — partners know where they stand. · **Weak:** the ecosystem drifts on individual deals and project work.

D2 — Governance & Steering

Who decides what, how responsibility is assigned and which forums exist for making decisions. Key questions: is there one clear owner of the ecosystem, or does it fall between sales, product and partnerships? How does escalation work in case of conflict?

Strong: the ecosystem is manageable. · **Weak:** nobody feels ownership of the whole, so nobody makes it better.

D3 — Partner Portfolio

The composition of your partner base — which types, what ratios, what dependencies. Key questions: do you know which partners play which role? Do you have a healthy mix, or a monoculture that makes you vulnerable?

Strong: intentionally built; partners fit your strategy and each other. · **Weak:** grown opportunistically and sustaining itself out of habit.

The eight dimensions — D4 to D6

D4 — Enablement

What partners need to work successfully with you — knowledge, materials, training, certification, support. Key questions: can partners deliver value independently, or are they dependent on direct intervention from your team?

Strong: scalability becomes possible. · **Weak:** every new partner becomes its own project.

D5 — Joint Value Creation

What you and your partners deliver together that neither can deliver alone. Key questions: are there joint propositions, co-marketing, co-innovation? Or do you stand next to each other instead of with each other?

Strong: the ecosystem effect emerges ($1+1=3$). · **Weak:** pass-through work where the sum is at most 2.

D6 — Performance Management

How you measure whether the ecosystem is working and how you steer on it. Key questions: are you measuring the right things, or mainly the easily measurable things? Do partners get feedback they can act on, or just scorecards?

Strong: improvement becomes possible. · **Weak:** dashboards nobody looks at.

The eight dimensions — D7 and D8

D7 — Operations & Tooling

The practical infrastructure — PRM systems, integrations, data flows, processes. Key questions: can partners work easily with you, or do they have to jump through bureaucratic hoops for every deal?

Strong: collaboration is effortless. · **Weak:** even well-intentioned partners drop off.

D8 — Culture & Relationships

The least tangible but often most decisive: trust, shared language, long-term commitment. Key questions: do your people really know their partners? Is there room for open feedback in both directions?

Strong: the ecosystem stays intact when things go wrong. · **Weak:** partners disappear at the first setback.

The eight dimensions make the ecosystem readable. Only together do they give the full picture — separately they don't yet say everything.

Not everything weighs the same

Eight dimensions sounds like a formula with which you can objectively score every partner ecosystem. It is not. The dimensions are the same for everyone, but the weights differ greatly per situation.

An early-stage ISV bringing on its first ten partners has a different centre of gravity than a mature SaaS vendor with five hundred partners and a global footprint. For the first, enablement may be the lever — the large vendor has invested in that for years and must now steer on governance and performance management.

What is 'good' for a growth-stage organisation is often irrelevant for a mature player. And conversely: a mature player still being managed as growth-stage is optimising for the wrong model.

That's why the APEX framework works with weights that fit where you stand. Not to make everything measurable, but to clarify which dimensions are the lever in your situation — and which you can park until other priorities arise.

Concrete weighting rules belong to execution. The framework shows that not everything weighs the same — execution determines what weighs heavily for you.

The five maturity levels

Maturity in a partner ecosystem is not a ranking. It is a diagnosis. Level 5 is not 'better' than level 2 — it is only more relevant for organisations operating at that level. A level-2 organisation that wants to jump straight to level 5 misses the steps required to get there.

The APEX framework distinguishes five levels: Fragile, Reactive, Structured, Optimised, Optimising. Each level has its own pattern — its own strengths, its own blind spots, its own typical pitfalls.

What we often see: organisations score themselves higher than they actually stand. Not from bad faith — from a lack of honest comparison basis. A level-2 organisation that only knows level-1 organisations feels excellent. Only with an external view does it become visible where the work lies.

Five levels, five patterns

Level 1 — Fragile

Ad-hoc partner deals without framework, high churn, energy disappears in damage control. No conscious partner strategy — partners arise by chance or because they present themselves. No clarity on who does what.

Level 2 — Reactive

There are agreements and processes, but reactive. The ecosystem responds to market movements rather than anticipating them. Partners are maintained but rarely activated. Many ad-hoc decisions on gut feeling.

Level 3 — Structured

A recognisable partner programme with tiers, processes and tooling. Supporting systems are in place. But value still comes mainly from transactional relationships — joint value creation is incidental, not systematic.

Level 4 — Optimised

The programme steers on multiple dimensions simultaneously and actively applies the weighting model. Joint propositions are intentionally designed. Performance management drives real decisions, not just dashboards.

Level 5 — Optimising

The ecosystem learns continuously. Feedback loops run on all dimensions. Partners are co-strategists, not just suppliers. The system generates new value propositions faster than an internal organisation can alone.

What level it is determines which interventions work — and which are pure energy waste.

The methodology cycle

A healthy partner ecosystem is not a project. Projects have an end. Ecosystems do not. What there is: a recurring cycle of five phases that you go through continuously — not once, but again and again.

The APEX framework distinguishes five phases: Assess, Design, Build, Measure, Optimize. After Optimize you go back to Assess — not from zero, but with the new context you have created in this cycle.

Every phase transition requires a different mindset. Assess is reflective and analytical. Build is operational and executing. Measure is patient and data-driven. The mistake we often see: organisations sit too long in one phase. Four months in Design without building anything. Or jumping straight into Build without proper Assess.

Five phases, five core questions

Assess — Where do we stand?

Core question: how healthy is our ecosystem at this moment, across all eight dimensions? Output: an honest picture of strengths, weaknesses and the two to three dimensions that give the most leverage for the coming period.

Design — Where do we want to go?

Core question: given our current situation and strategy, what change do we want to design? Output: a focused approach with clear priorities — not everything at once, but the two to three most impactful dimensions.

Build — How do we make it?

Core question: how do we bring the designed change to execution — in processes, tooling, training, propositions? Output: concrete building blocks embedded in the organisation, not just on paper.

Measure — Is it working?

Core question: are we seeing the expected movement in the dimensions we have invested in? Output: factual progress against the design — what works, what does not, what surprises.

Optimize — What do we adjust?

Core question: given what we have learned, what do we adjust in design, build or measurement? Output: adjustments that improve the cycle — and a starting point for the next Assess round.

What APEX is — and what it is not

APEX exposes structure — it is not an audit

An audit assesses whether you meet predetermined criteria. APEX is something else: it helps you see what lies beneath the surface. The difference lies in the purpose — APEX is meant to make conversations sharper, not to judge people. Those who use it as an audit miss the value.

APEX is a map — not a recipe

A recipe gives step-by-step instructions. A map shows where you stand and which routes are possible — but the route choice depends on your context, your means and your urgency. APEX shows what the possible paths are. Which one you choose remains your decision.

APEX is a dialogue tool — not a judgement

Most of the value of the framework arises in the conversation it provokes. What do we agree on? Where are the sharp differences of opinion between leadership and operations? The score itself is secondary. The insight from the conversation is the main thing.

Working with 2Scale Alliances

2Scale Alliances helps partner-oriented organisations take their ecosystem seriously — not as a cost item, but as a growth engine. We work with the APEX framework as a shared language and starting point, so that clients and we measure and mean the same things.

Our role

- External view and sparring
- Methodology and framework
- Assessment and diagnosis
- Design and advice
- Implementation guidance

Your role

- Daily execution
- Decisions on direction and priorities
- Getting your team and partners on board
- Landing changes on the work floor

Fits organisations that

- See ecosystems as a strategic growth axis, not a channel detail.
- Are willing to look honestly at their blind spots.
- Want to bring their leadership team into the conversation.

Three ways to get started

Option 1 — Alliance Check (10 minutes)

The Alliance Check is an online quick scan that gives you a first indication of where your ecosystem stands in 10 minutes.

→ 2scalealliances.com/alliance-check

Option 2 — Introductory conversation (30 minutes)

A no-obligation conversation with one of us — to see whether the framework fits your situation and which next steps make sense.

→ 2scalealliances.com/contact

Option 3 — Full APEX assessment

For leadership teams who want to engage with it seriously. A complete diagnosis across all eight dimensions, plus a Partner Programme Design Guide with concrete priorities for the next twelve months.

→ 2scalealliances.com/contact

Reading this as a partner manager? Feel free to share this PDF with your leadership team. A good conversation often starts with the same starting point.

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