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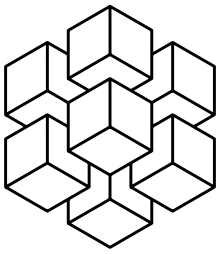
scaling science

Four guiding principles for scaling impact



1. Justification

- → Scaling is a choice that must be justified.
- → The choice is made by the balance of evidence alongside values.
- → The choice to scale is shared.

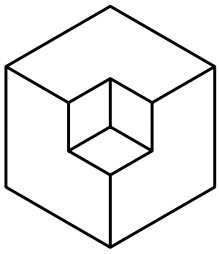
To make the principle of justification practical, it begins with the question "why scale?" The answer should include:

- Technical evidence that scaling will produce positive impacts that outweigh negative impacts; and
- A description of the values (including whose) that inform the decision to scale.

These responses can help you articulate a value proposition as a basis for decision-making about scaling. Sometimes, however, it is better not to scale.

Scientific evidence can help you understand whether an innovation *can* scale. But the values of those impacted will inform whether an innovation *should* scale.

Articulating both evidence and values can help you enlist various stakeholders in the scaling process since they can see the justification for the scaling efforts. Doing so encourages participation and stakeholder endorsement.



2. Optimal Scale

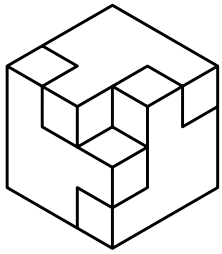
- → More is not necessarily better.
- → Scaling produces a collection of impacts.
- → Impact at optimal scale balances dimensions of magnitude, variety, equity, and sustainability.

Optimality challenges the "bigger is better" logic of scaling.

Simply because a solution works at a local level doesn't mean that implementing it nation-wide or beyond will multiply the benefit. Likewise, if a solution proves ineffective at a local level, we cannot automatically conclude it won't produce desirable impacts at broader scales.

Determining optimal scale requires ongoing considerations of the trade-offs between magnitude, sustainability, equity, and variety of impacts. For example, improving efficiency for hospital visits may not always correlate with better patient outcomes; just like technological innovation in agriculture may or may not mean concomitant benefits for the environment.

Optimality also raises the question of who defines this 'right' scale. Numerous stakeholders, including researchers, funders, and beneficiaries, may all have different views. Considering different perspectives, and setting out a process to determine optimal scale that stakeholders endorse is key to successfully scaling impact.



3. Coordination

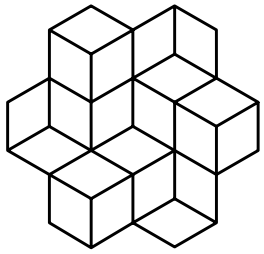
- → Scaling occurs in complex systems.
- → Complexity requires a flexible scaling process.
- → Coordination connects an evolving set of actors to the scaling process.

Coordination refers to the need to plan and adapt for the many actors involved in bringing impact to scale. This principle reminds researchers that scaling takes place in complex systems and that complexity demands a flexible scaling process.

Accordingly, coordinating a scaling journey requires a strong understanding of the system in which one operates, while acknowledging that unintended impacts are possible and therefore require ongoing monitoring. This includes, for example, the understanding and accommodation of gender dimensions when coordinating with various actors in your scaling effort.

Coordination implies that researchers consider the wider range of initiators, enablers, competitors, and impacted. These groups may affect, or be affected, by scaling in ways that alter intended impacts.

Such broad engagement may occur within a single project, or as a part of a longitudinal series of coordinated research projects and activities are coordinated to work together. At the same time, organizations may use a 'portfolio approach' to coordination, whereby they syndicate projects or innovations for greater impact from the portfolio, than would be produced by the individual parts.



4. Dynamic Evaluation

- → Scaling is an intervention that can be evaluated.
- → Scaling generates dynamic change.
- → Dynamic evaluation is a stance that is held before, during, and after scaling.

Because scaling generates dynamic change, it necessitates dynamic evaluation. It can use a collection of tailored learning strategies to examine how scaling transforms a holistic concept of impacts – assessing the magnitude, variety, equity, and sustainability of change.

Dynamic evaluation goes beyond asking whether impact was achieved at a certain date, and instead asks how, why, under what conditions the impact was achieved, and how this might change over time and place.

Dynamic evaluation is not a method, it is a stance. It aims to measure the collection of impacts of scaling as an intervention. Not just the impact of the innovation or research at a single level of scale. This implies a body of tools for rounding rapid learning cycles that can be used strategically before, during and after scaling and the choice of tools relies on the judgement of those involved in the scaling system.

Learn more:
www.idrc.ca/scalingscience

Source: McLean & Gargani (2019) Scaling Impact - Innovation for the Public Good