Scaling and Systems Change: Overview

Dr. Richard Kohl, Strategy and Scale LLC
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Dimensions of Scaling and Systems Change

Scaling and Systems Change have in common they are both approaches to affecting large-scale change

1. Starting points: Innovation vs. System
2. Role of innovations: Focal point vs. One of many change levers
3. Extent of systems change
   • Depth: working at only micro/retail level, or meso or macro? (scale)
   • Breadth: number and range of interconnected/interrelated systems
   • Amount of Change
4. Locus of Systems Change: Micro, Meso, or Macro
5. Types of Systems Change: Organizational vs. Institutional (rules, power relations, beliefs, mindsets, social norms)

❖ Choices have implications for participation, systems analysis
## Typology of Large-Scale Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Breadth &amp; Amount of Systems Change</th>
<th>Depth of Systems Change</th>
<th>Type of Systems Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Scaling</strong></td>
<td>Large Numbers</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Micro (Meso)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scaling from a Systems Perspective</strong></td>
<td>Large Numbers, Sustainable Impact</td>
<td>Sufficient to Create Space for Scaling</td>
<td>Meso/Macro</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Transformational Scaling</strong></td>
<td>Sustainable, Optimal Scale</td>
<td>Maximal given resources: address equity, reach</td>
<td>Meso/Macro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrow Systems Change</strong></td>
<td>System Strengthening Effectiveness</td>
<td>One system Maximal Efficiency</td>
<td>Meso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Broad Systems Change</strong></td>
<td>Transformational Change, Optimal Scale</td>
<td>Multiple Systems, Maximal Change</td>
<td>Depth: Meso/Macro</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critiques of Scaling and Systems Change

• Critique of Scaling
  • Traditional Scaling often not sustainable, unintended consequences
  • Scaling without systems perspective ignores and can reinforce existing inequities, aligns with system constraints but doesn’t expand them
  • Ignores complexity of many urgent issues; leading to limited impact
  • Systems change allows for transformative change, greater depth, breadth and transformation, focus on institutions, interrelationships, equity

• Critique of Systems Change
  • Too ambitious given systems, funding and time constraints in low resource environments
  • Overemphasizes participation and systems analysis; paralysis by analysis
  • Scaling (with systems perspective) already hard enough, broad systems change impractical, not feasible, takes decades
  • Scaling, when done right, eventually will lead to systems change once sufficient scale is reached
Conclusions

• Scaling and Systems Change are a continuum

• Traditional scaling approaches pay inadequate attention to systems, clearly more is needed; how much more is the question, or even when to start with systems?

• More systems change increases likelihood of greater (broader, deeper) impact at scale, sustainability, and addressing questions of equity, indirect effects, complexity

• BUT require extra time, effort, resources. How much more is feasible, practical or desirable depends on:
  • Goals, Context, Time and Resources available
  • WHO you are. Where you are situated in the system, makes a huge difference in terms of how you frame these questions, the resources you have, the goals (and incentives) you have
THANK YOU

Dr. Richard Kohl
Strategy and Scale LLC
richardkohl@strategyandscale.com
(510) 502 – 6196
www.strategyandscale.com