



The Art of Scaling Deep

Research in Summary

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Introduction

Over the last 15 years the concept of scale has become a foundational part of the apparatus of the social and environmental change sector. A business mindset of growth has been seamlessly transferred to the social and environmental problems we are collectively trying to shift in the world. Scaling up, (influencing policy) has been considered the strategic pathway to systems change. Scaling out (spreading new models) is seen as a pathway to success¹. The allure of these scaling theories lies, in part, in their tangibility, and the easy way in which they can be measured.

However this focus on growth has shifted our attention away from a series of messy truths.

Sometimes bigger isn't better.

Endless growth is not sustainable and our urgency to try to fix the problem and seek solutions may be part of the crisis we are in.

One unintended consequence of this has been that another type of scale has been devalued and as a result, under-resourced. It's a scale that values the slow steady work of deepening relationships. It recognizes the significance of context, building connections that bridge diverse communities and it prioritizes inner work and healing as integral components of the scaling process. We call this type of scale 'Scaling Deep'² and we believe that adequately supporting it, and funding it, holds the greatest potential for long lasting systemic change.



The purpose of this research has been to delve deeper into the art and craft of Scaling Deep. Ultimately, our goal is for it to become firmly ingrained within the recognized realm of social change, alongside the well-established concepts of scaling up and scaling out. We want practitioners who are Scaling Deep to be able to harness the wisdom and power of this work and to talk about it openly, with confidence and credibility. We want understanding of this approach to flourish and evolve and for it to be appropriately celebrated and supported. We want decision-makers to be informed and inspired by the principles and practices of scaling deep. For it to be embedded in theories of change as an essential component of decision-making processes within the wider change discourse. Importantly we want leaders who are Scaling Deep to have access to sufficient resources and to receive the care from the field that they need to thrive.

We would like to see organisations that have the power to invest, to align their efforts with the profound impact that scaling deep aspires to cultivate in the world.

Before we begin, let us be crystal clear. We are not opposed to scaling up and out as strategies for change. Innovation and scaling what is working is part of how we evolve as humanity. As social entrepreneurs ourselves, we have both done this twice over. We value it and we know it's important. We recognize these are strategies for creating widespread impact and effecting positive change. Our intention

here is not to dismiss or undermine the value of scaling up and out, but rather to encourage a broader and more holistic perspective that includes other dimensions of scale. There is a need to understand how the different scaling approaches can work together, rather than seeing them as hierarchical and disconnected.

Our ultimate goal is to equip the change sector with a more inclusive, expansive, and powerful approach to tackling the myriad challenges we face, by exploring the potential of Scaling Deep as a transformational strategy for systems change.



Shifting power through Scaling Deep

DEEP TIME
CONTEXT

NEW SITES OF POWER

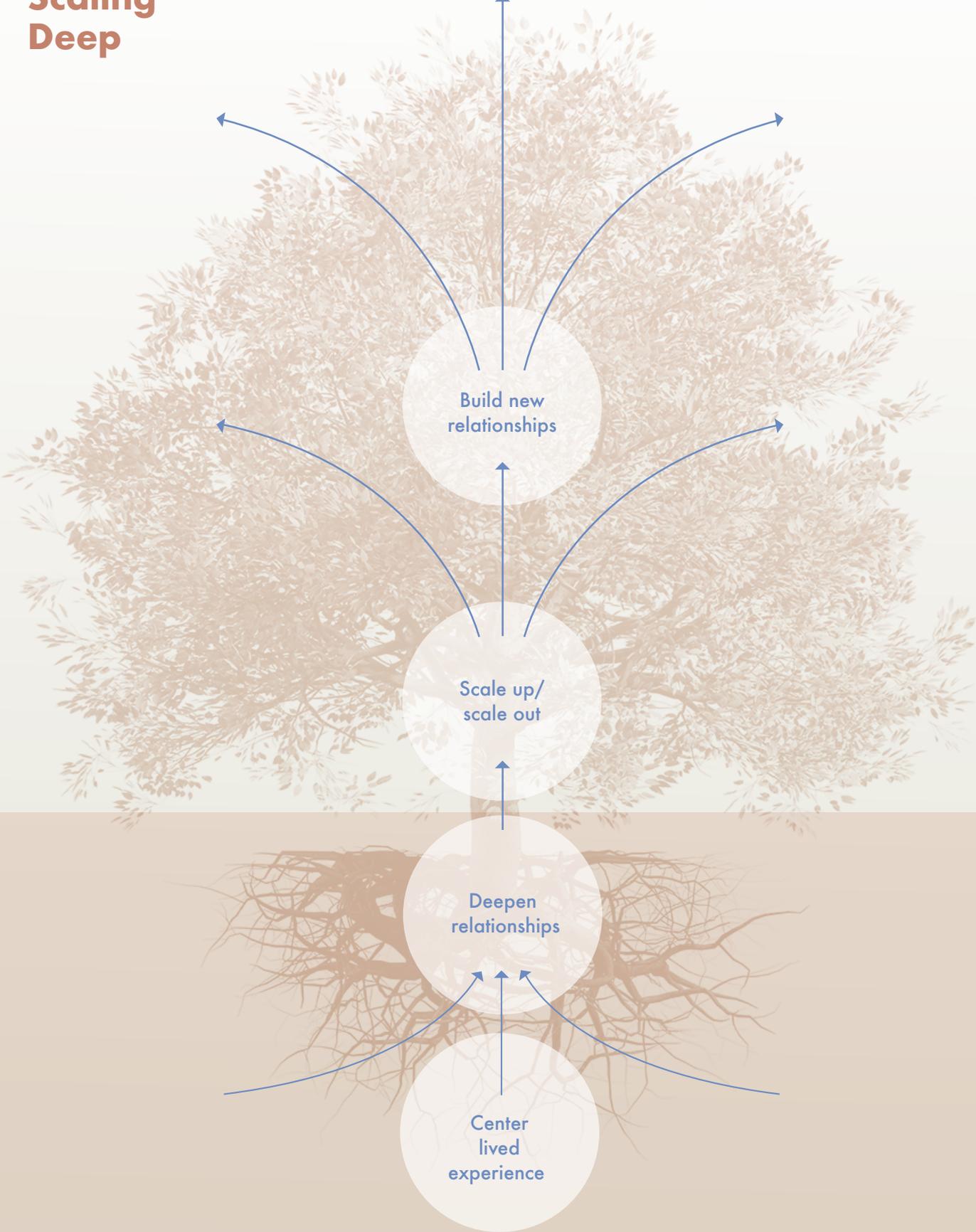
Shift narratives

Build new relationships

Scale up/
scale out

Deepen relationships

Center lived experience



Why Explore Scaling Deep Now?

Our inquiry found a number of trends that point to the opportune timing and importance of exploring Scaling Deep in the context of systems change.

“I also feel like it’s society we’re almost a little bit afraid of, of trusting work that is a little bit more modest. Our way of looking at it, we want the least to be fast and designed and extremely cool and interesting. Whereas the more thoughtful projects often tend to kind of disappear.”



They included:

- 1.** The climate change crises, divisiveness, and structural inequities are growing rapidly. These multiple crises necessitate a thoughtful approach to strategy that adapts to the complexity we all face.
- 2.** Culture-level change is required in systems change work, and there needs to be a recalibration in the way we approach systems change to acknowledge this.
- 3.** COVID-19 has impacted systems change work, making it more strenuous due to emergency support responding to crisis, mental health concerns, and staffing issues.
- 4.** Attracting and retaining staff in systems change work is a challenge. It is important to find people who both have the lived experience to do systems work and have healed enough to support others without burning out.
- 5.** There is an unclear recognition, definition, and language of Scaling Deep. People in the change field may be Scaling Deep, but not calling it that.
- 6.** Yet the practices of Scaling Deep are seen as both important and necessary by practitioners in Ashoka as well as in the broader field.
- 7.** Scaling Deep as a strategy for systems change is significantly under-resourced and not fully understood.



Our Research

In 2022, The Systems Sanctuary, led by Tatiana Fraser and Ashoka Canada collaborated to inquire into the practices of Scaling Deep in the context of systems change, changemaking and social entrepreneurship.

We were inspired to dive into the inquiry because after years of formal and informal research, tracking our own experience and talking to others about it. We became more confident in the significance of this approach to create meaningful change. We also knew that change leaders were frustrated because it is under-recognized and under-resourced.

The world calls us to shift our mindsets and values from outdated ways of being and doing rooted in dominance, hierarchy and harmful systems, to new ways rooted in relationship, collaboration and innovation.

At the same time, the change sector continues to learn and grapple with how to create the conditions for long term systemic change.

Tatiana coined the term and developed the concept of 'Scale Deep' in response to the gaps in the discourse and strategy around scaling up (influencing policy) and scaling out (spreading new models) as change theories.



In our definition, Scaling Deep is understood as the deep personal and broad cultural transformational work that is required to create durable systems change. Our sense was there was much more to learn, question and understand about how it contributes to change, how it is practiced and what impact it has. In this work we sought to unravel the intricacies of Scaling Deep and uncover its nuances and dynamics, so this can be built upon.

Our Approach

The first of its kind, this is a practice based research and inquiry into Scaling Deep. In partnership with Ashoka Canada, we facilitated an inquiry to surface patterns and collective insights around the concept and practices. Over the course of four months, we interviewed twenty-five systems leaders and facilitated four peer learning sessions with participants from diverse contexts. Many of the interviewees were Ashoka Fellows and leaders working in systems change. We also interviewed leaders and practitioners located in different systems and regions internationally including the Middle East and Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America and Indigenous lands. They ranged from academic, social entrepreneurs, directors of large and small organizations, network and coalition builders and systems change leaders. Our interviews were conducted virtually, audio recorded and transcribed. We then analyzed and synthesized the information, identifying key patterns and emerging themes that emerged from this rich tapestry of voices.



We aimed to distill the essence of Scaling Deep and shed light on its practical applications and transformative potential. The goals of this inquiry include:



Gain understanding and insights about the practice, strategy and impact of Scaling Deep.

Learn and deepen understanding about how leaders are Scaling Deep for systemic change.

Validate and illuminate practitioners who are using Scaling Deep and achieving impact.

Build appreciation and credibility for Scaling Deep as a success criteria for systems change.

Elevate how Scaling Deep is connected to and supports equity practices led by marginalized communities.

Share with the wider change field, to build capacity around this strategy for systems change.



Our Findings



What is Scaling Deep?

We define Scaling Deep as the deep personal and broad cultural transformational work that is required to create durable systems change¹, but there has been an absence of comprehensive tracking or scholarly investigation into the definition of the concept.

First, we invited participants into an exploration of their own understanding and experiences of Scaling Deep. Our intention was to crowdsource a definition, allowing it to emerge organically from the collective insights of those actively involved in this work. The following represents the key findings that emerged from this collaborative process.



1. Scaling Deep requires a fundamental change in the way individuals, organizations, and society perceive, think, and act in addressing systemic problems. It requires a shift in paradigm in the way people lead, organize, manage, and measure success.
2. Scaling Deep involves a process of personal transformation, healing, and growth. It is the work of building foundations for change. Participants emphasized the importance of addressing people's perceptions, mindsets, and behaviors to enable a systemic change that addresses the root cause of a problem.
3. Scale Deep is understood to be a continual process of reflection, renewal, and interconnected change that requires slowing down and getting better at what one does instead of growing exponentially.
4. Scaling Deep encompasses the domains of culture change and cultural influence on systemic issues. It was also expressed as: where change happens, how culture shapes us, and simply, the way people think about systemic issues.
5. It was defined as the work required to inform action at other levels in the system including how to scale 'up' or 'out'. The principles and belief systems behind the practice of Scaling Deep, influence the broader system and community.
6. Scaling Deep brings about transformative changes in incentives, conversations, and models governing traditional practices.
7. It encourages collaboration and challenges traditional thinking in academic institutions such as business schools and universities.
8. It provides a platform for collective conversations regarding the necessary changes needed on a societal level.

The majority of participants in this inquiry believed in the value and importance of Scaling Deep. They said it was a timely approach that strengthens efforts for sustainable change through working with complexity, preparing the conditions for change and decolonization of traditional change frameworks.



“Many times collaborative frameworks are changing the order of the chairs, but they are not changing the deep culture and supporting system that is enabling collaboration. And to me, that means that we need a radical transformation of innovation ecosystems.”

“It [scaling deep] changes the way you organize, the way you measure and define success. Now, what stems from this is not just shifting your goal, or expectations. Everything else shifts - from how you lead, how you organize, how you manage, and how you measure. It’s all different, because you’ve shifted this persona.”

“It is a process that needs to be renewed. It’s not like a stage and it’s done. You do it and then you scale up, and then you replicate the project or the model or whatever. It’s a step that needs to be replicated, that needs to be thought about as within the process, because often, it’s where change starts. It is where the adaptations to one environment or another actually show up. So it’s not a linear process, it’s continual. That’s something you do continually as you move.”

What does Scaling Deep look like? Practices, Methods and Strategy

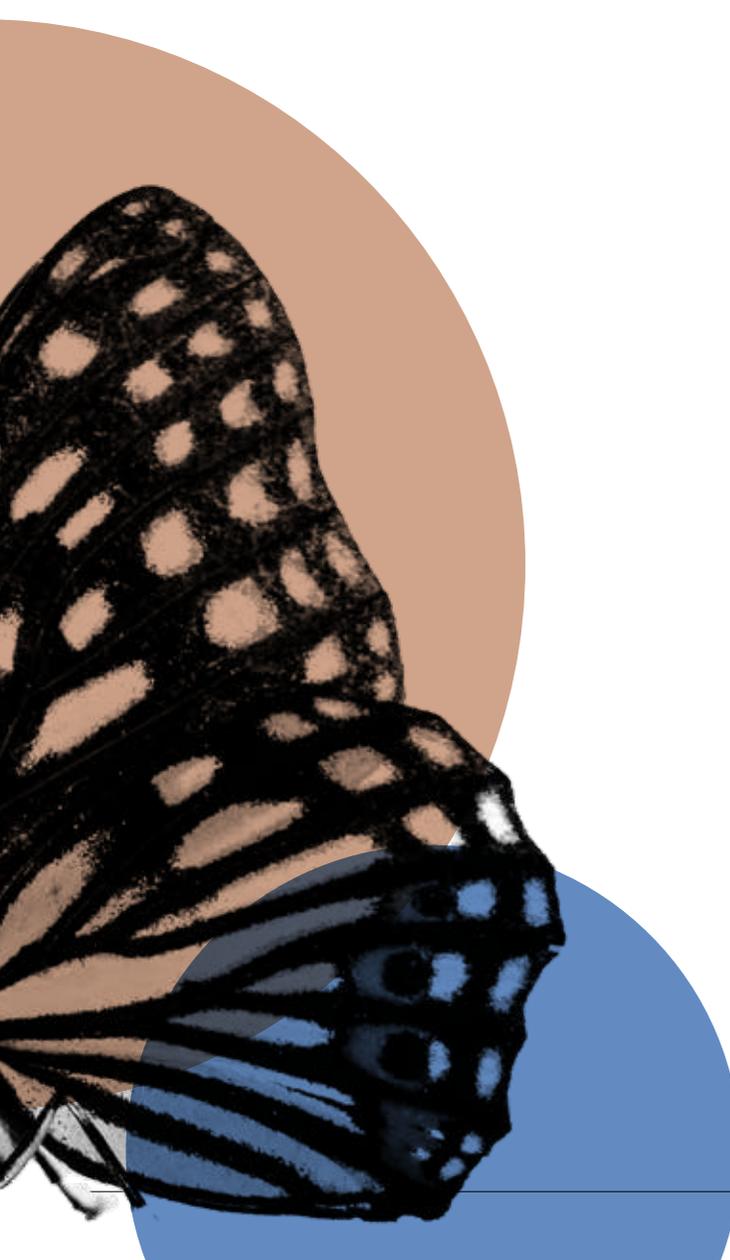
In order to gain a fuller understanding about the real world application of Scaling Deep, we asked participants about their actual practices. In this section, we present these along with shared methods and strategies that emerged from the interviews.

The practices highlighted by participants centred on inner work, fostering connections across communities, and engaging in narrative work. They emphasized the importance of the work being rooted in context, having an awareness of power and working with power dynamics. They were seen as preparing the conditions necessary for change. This level of work fostered an interconnectedness that challenged and reframed traditional notions of harmful hierarchies. Participants recognized the significance of this deep work in the context of both scaling up and scaling out strategies.

The methodologies that were reported focussed on experiential and action based learning, popular education, and creativity. In this way, Scaling Deep methods transcend boundaries defined by issues and organizations.

The strategies employed by the participants were rooted in collective action and emergence. They acknowledged the value of taking a long-term perspective, of taking “the long view”, recognizing that this type of work draws lessons from history and unfolds gradually over extended periods of time.

Ultimately, Scaling Deep represented a paradigm shift in how they approached their work. It embodied a commitment to doing things differently, as participants actively sought to



reorganize, redefine their work practices, reevaluate their priorities, and embrace new forms of leadership. As a result organizational structures, work processes, values, and leadership looked and felt different.

Identifiers, criteria and competencies

We know that Scaling Deep is difficult to measure. Drawing on our inquiry findings, we outline below strategies, practices, and the transformative change that can be achieved through the application of Scaling Deep as a tactical approach for driving systems change.

Our hope is that this summary table can be a valuable resource for practitioners and funders enabling them to effectively navigate the complexities of Scaling Deep. It is a practical tool for practitioners and funders to recognize, assess, and effectively support the work.

These practices come from diverse lineages, including embodiment, mindfulness, the arts, Indigenous worldviews, adult education, feminist praxis, complexity theory, cultural theory, spiritual practices, and social movements. By embracing these multifaceted approaches, practitioners can tap into a rich tapestry of wisdom and methodologies.

STRATEGY

PRACTICE/METHODS

TRANSFORMATION/CHANGE

Create the conditions for healing



New sites of power
Healing

Connection based practices



Healthy ecosystems
Trust, humility, respect in collaboration
Shift from human centred to relationships with earth & non-human
Creates the conditions for change

Working in emergence



Cascade effect
Durable change
Long term capacity for change

Collective learning



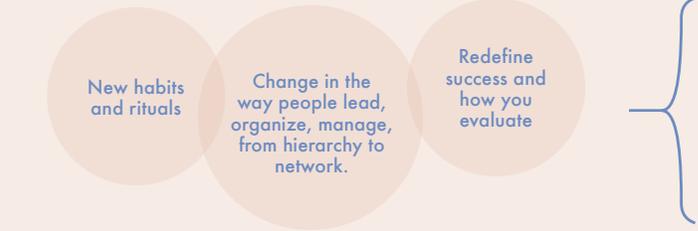
Wise and informed action
Collective intelligence

Shift power



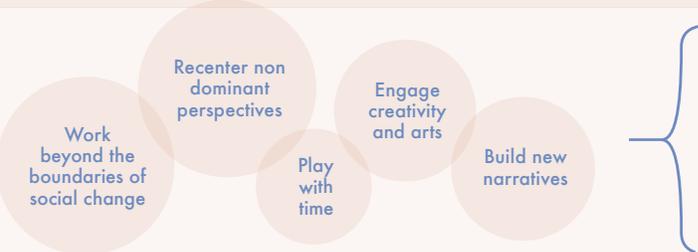
New power centres of gravity
New collaborations and alignments

Shift patterns and fundamental reframes



Cultures and ethics of care and love.
Validation, trust and value of relationship
Building and doing things differently

Shift narratives



New stories
New visions and perspectives

Highest potential and impact

When we asked participants about the highest potential of Scaling Deep, they consistently named the possibility of creating profound, transformative, and enduring change.

This change could occur on a generational and relational level, shifting mindsets, ways of thinking, and perception. It creates the conditions for change at different levels in the system. They saw that small shifts have the potential for cascading impacts.

"I think [the greatest potential] is creating new mindsets, creating new ways of thinking and perceiving and creating generational change. The greatest potential is a shift generationally, not just systematically and this is so much bigger than a system."

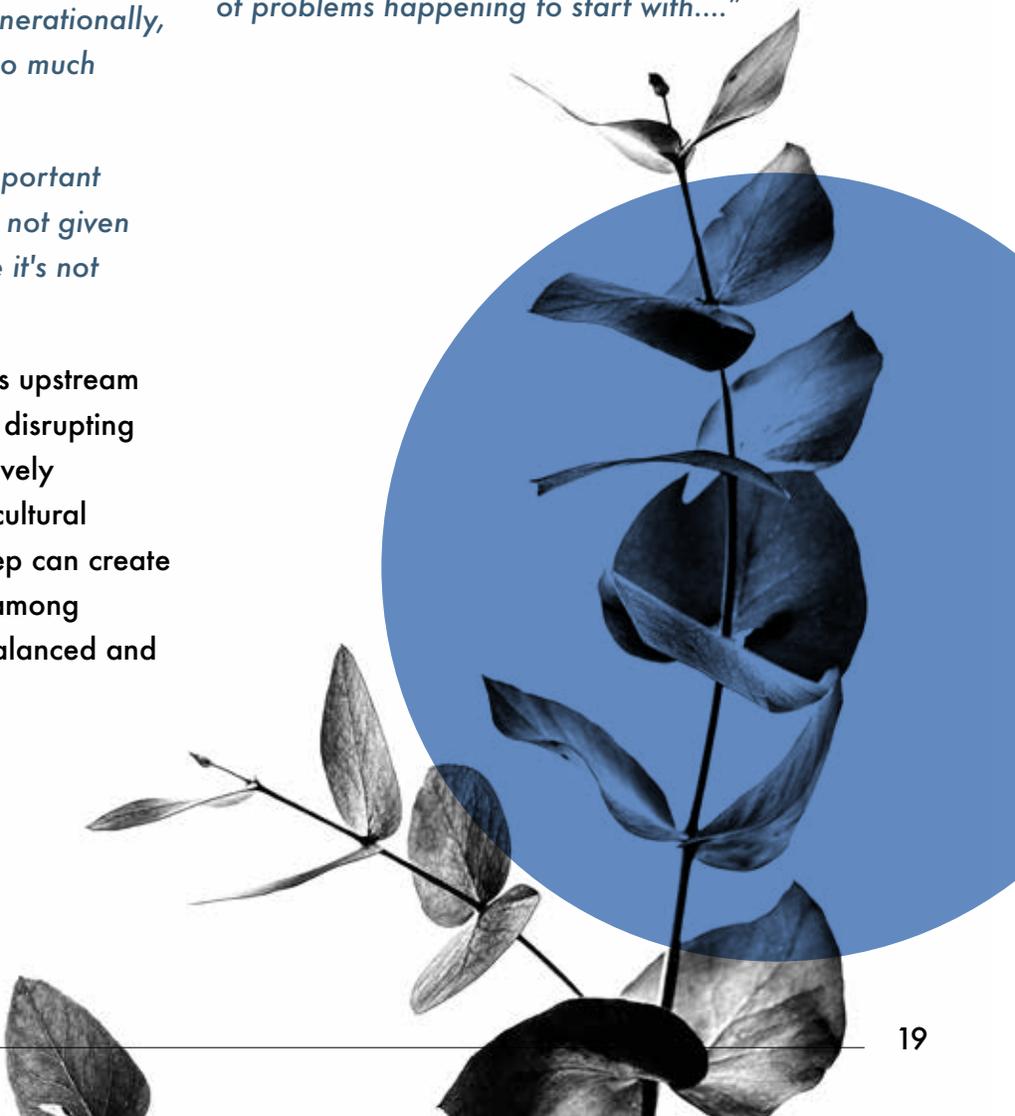
"I think scaling deep is the most important type of scaling we can do. It's just not given the respect that it should, because it's not quantifiable in traditional terms."

We heard that Scaling Deep works upstream and has a preventative nature. By disrupting harmful patterns and cycles, it actively addresses underlying values and cultural dynamics. As a result, Scaling Deep can create equity, justice, fairness, and trust among individuals, establishing a more balanced and inclusive societal fabric.

"Because trust is a big thing. It's a big, underlying value. Everybody trusts everyone, and nobody is going to save someone else. Nobody's oppressing someone else, because everybody's working on their own thing. So more equity, equality of justice, fairness. All those together."

Participants believed that Scaling Deep has the potential to fundamentally change cultural landscapes and bolster resilient systems. It serves as a catalyst for healthy systemic change. Although this relies on the presence of sufficient capacity—both individual and collective—to navigate and sustain the journey.

"That's what this kind of deep systems change is, solutions will be more doable, sustainable, real, better quality,... it will result in preventing a lot of problems happening to start with...."



Barriers to support: Why is it so hard to fund?

To understand the challenges faced by practitioners in Scaling Deep work, participants were asked about perceived barriers. The following barriers emerged from this inquiry, which were rooted in persistent western paradigms, modernity, and progressive worldviews. These barriers exist at the cultural level of society and impact the belief systems of individuals working on social and environmental change.

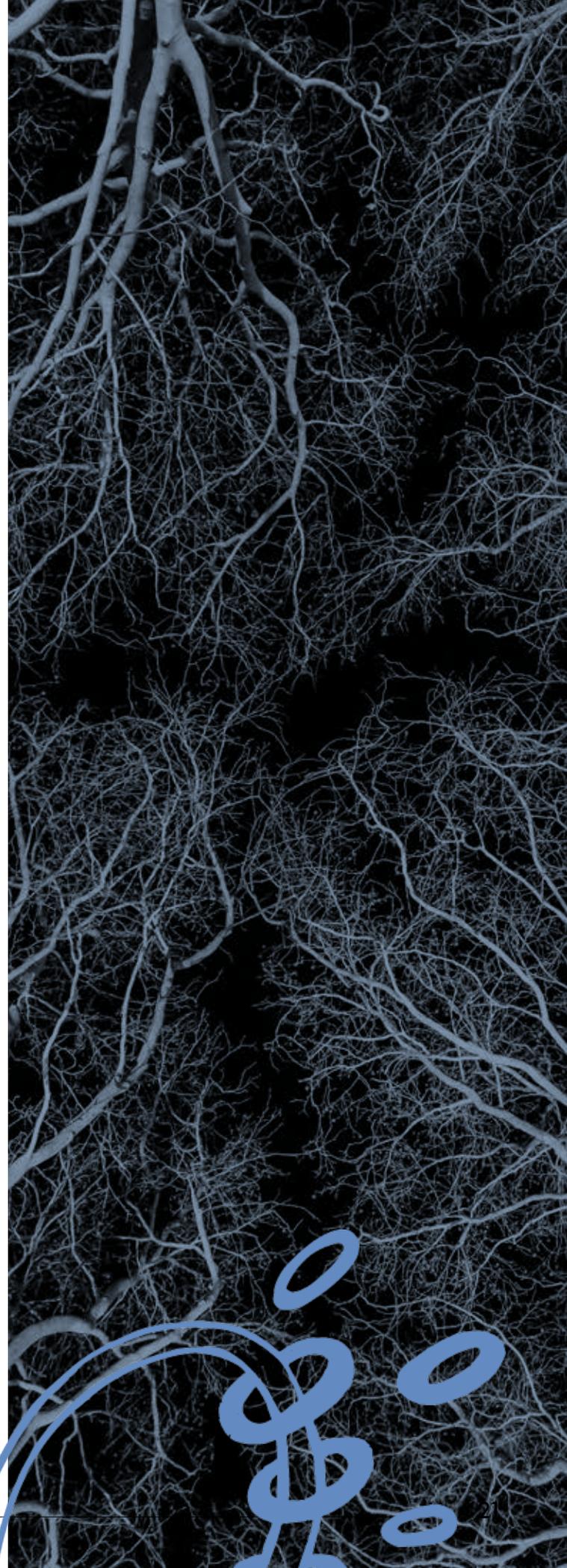


Unconscious frames and bias play a role.

Deeply ingrained frames and values within societal structures hinder the recognition and acceptance of alternative approaches, limiting the potential for Scaling Deep practices to receive the necessary support and resources. Furthermore, participants spoke about how deep change often requires individuals to confront their own biases, assumptions, and beliefs, which can be uncomfortable and lead to conflict within groups. They shared that establishing trust and empathy among individuals and groups is crucial for laying the foundation to scale deeply.

“The first barrier is the unconscious frameworks that are already built in, that we don’t realize are there. And so there are biases. If you say a word, I understand it differently. And I don’t ask you to explain, and I build everything from my assumptions, my actions and comments and critiques are built on my personal understanding of that term, or that definition of that value. But I don’t share it with you. So we don’t know that we are coming from two different places, and hence the clash. This is where the disagreement or the barrier happens.”

“It’s actually not the barriers to this scaling deep approach, so much as the resistance to it. Because it does raise the notion of inequalities and power relationships, of lived experience and the ways people have been harmed by these systems. It allows us to pay attention to these. I think that’s important. Especially since a lot of the rhetoric around system change, is the importance of relationships.”



Funding constraints

Existing funding models tend to favor initiatives with immediate and measurable outcomes, which can disadvantage projects that explore deep change. Our research finds that dominant institutions continue to place high value on initiatives that demonstrate impact in linear and mechanistic ways and there is a resistance to seeing impact in new ways.

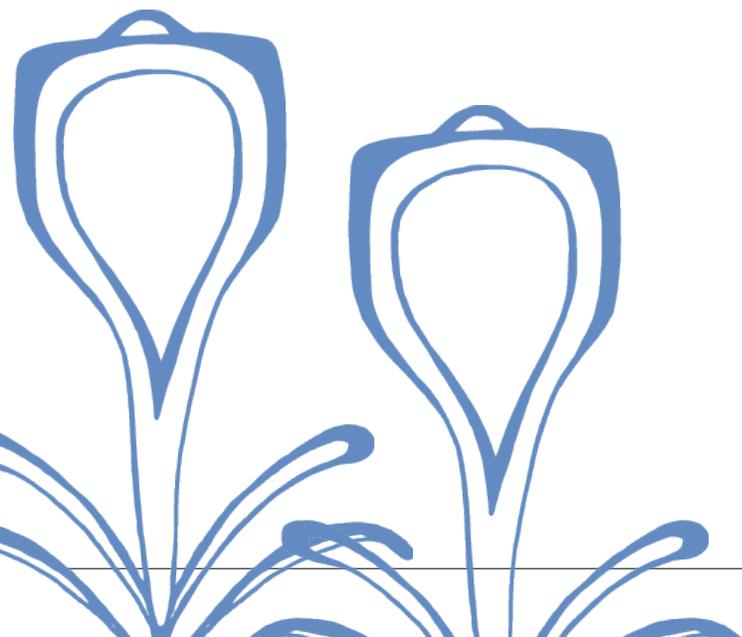
"I'm struggling with securing the funding for the project that does explore these topics [scale deep], which means that you come into this cycle where nothing really happens, because without some funding, you can't explore, you can't create a better or more concrete action plan. I think that's an enormous problem that I sit with. If you approach funders with other more technical digital solutions, coming back to the circular materiality, and things like that, it's so much easier to sell and to find collaborators willing to pay. But if we talk about mindsets, or like how we behave or like, deeper change, that's much harder."

A belief in the business mindset

In recent decades, the change sector has been heavily influenced by the world of business. Values that originated there have seeped into the collective water supply. This has had many benefits in that it has brought new ideas, tools and strategies to the world of social and environmental change.

However with it has also come a pervasive focus on growth, competition, a transactional approach, and a focus on measurable outcomes. This influence perpetuates barriers to Scaling Deep by emphasizing competition, individualism, and efficiency, focusing on short-term results. It has overshadowed the importance of care, appreciation, and the time required for deep transformation. This situation is compounded by the assumption that business models are inherently superior, which hinders Scaling Deep efforts. The prevailing belief in the superiority of business models restricts the recognition and support for alternative approaches to creating meaningful change.

"Most of the investors in social change are still trying to superimpose their view of scaling in the context of companies, and then, interpreting social entrepreneurs. I'm sure you have experienced this, and I have experienced that myself, we have to live in this world where what we are telling the investor and what we're really intending to do are two different things. And it's a waste of energy that is very ineffective, even for what the investors are looking for. ... But in the meantime, we haven't changed the way that financing happens in our sector. So right at the center of that, that means that we're all competing."



Business metrics

This emphasis on large-scale impact is evident in the metrics used to measure success. Participants spoke about measurement approaches that skew towards scaling up, large numbers, and broad impact, rather than embracing the pillars of Scaling Deep. Even discussions about culture change are accompanied by expectations of quantifiable outcomes, measurable impact, efficiency, and broad reach. They shared stories of funders who had neglected the significance of relationships, connections, and understanding, all essential ingredients for Scaling Deep. Ultimately these barriers have made it challenging for practitioners to secure the necessary financial support to thrive in their Scaling Deep work.

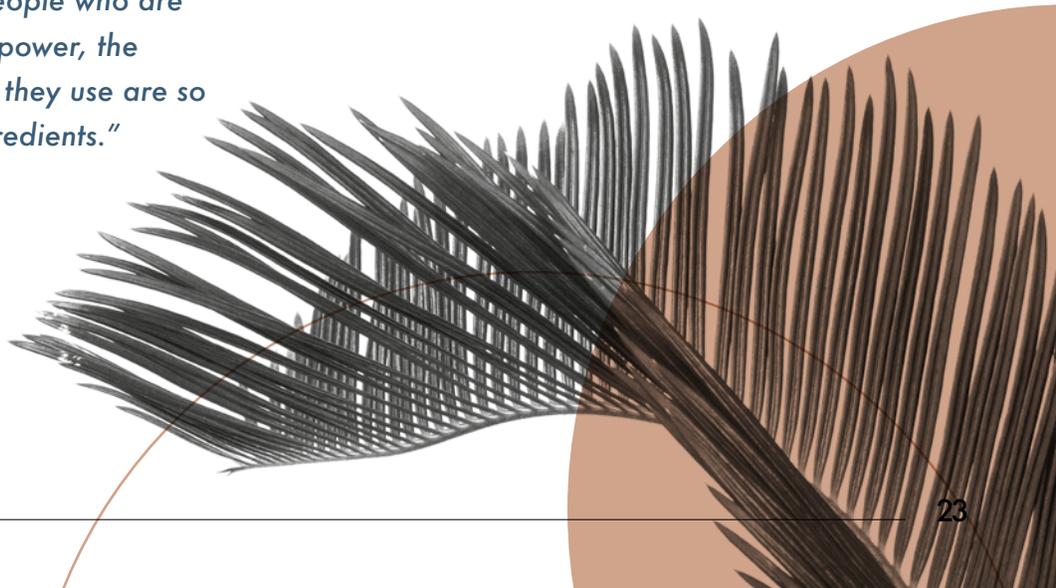
“They have created all these metrics and all these systems to evaluate how the money that they’re spending is having an impact and the blind spots live within those very metrics. They’re not considering relationships, connection, understanding. And when you’re not measuring it, you can’t even see it. It’s not even in your perspective. And so to me, that’s the biggest barrier - that the people who are decision-makers and who hold power, the sense-making tools and metrics they use are so devoid of the scaling deep ingredients.”

Traditional measures of success

Our research shed light on the challenges faced by change initiatives rooted in the business sector’s definition of success. The predominant focus on business-driven metrics makes it difficult for initiatives pursuing Scaling Deep to gain recognition and funding. Interviewees shared their experiences of having to conceal, downplay, or disguise their Scaling Deep approach to secure financial support or exposure. This lack of value and acknowledgment explains why the discourse around Scaling Deep as a strategy for systems change has been relatively neglected until now.

“So it’s like, why don’t we invest in this. And that’s one of the big frustrations. You have to disguise it - scaling deep, or the most effective strategies with cheap impact. I don’t know exactly why I get frustrated there.”

So the financial models, the training models, the war models are all about scaling, outcomes, scaling, number of scaling reach.”



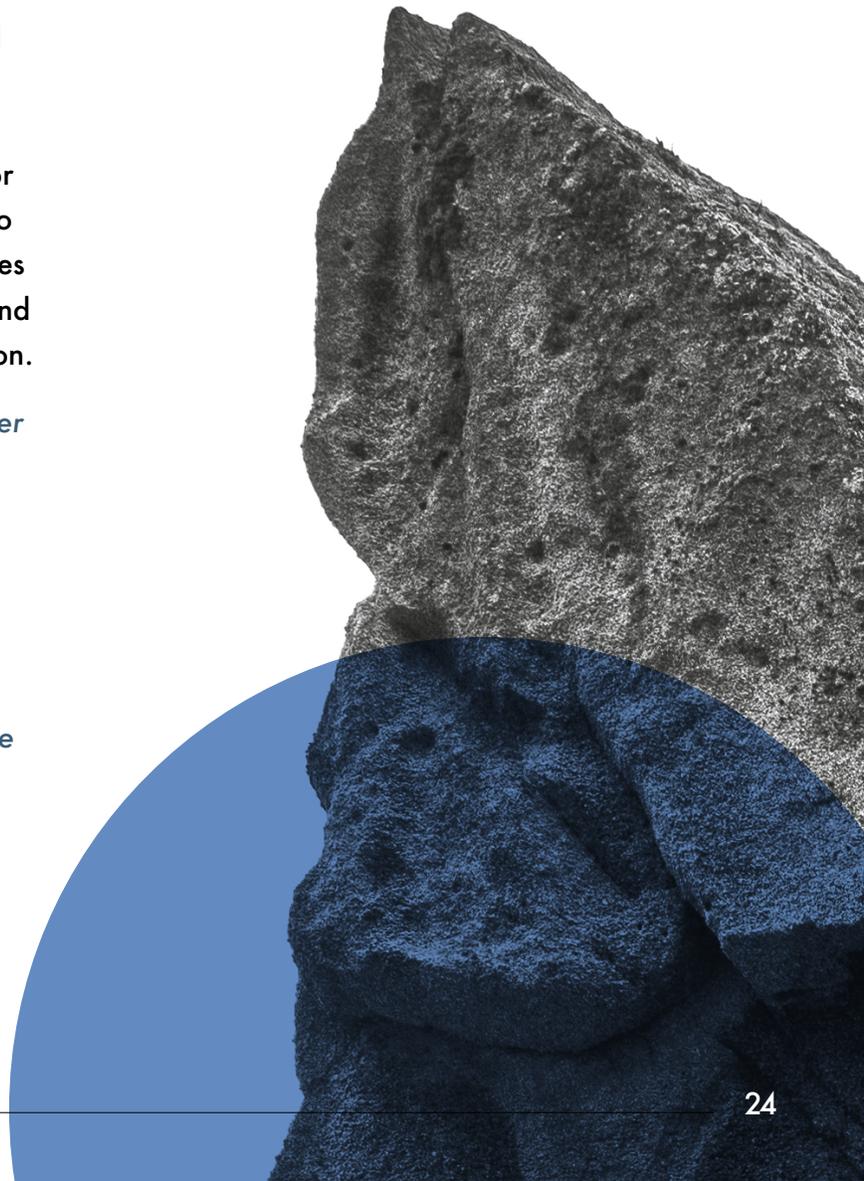
The impetus to speed up

In a fast-paced society where quick fixes and instant gratification are valued, deep change can be overlooked or dismissed as not effective. Participants shared the pace of change that can create barriers to Scaling Deep. Durable change often takes time and requires a significant amount of introspection, reflection, and personal growth. It necessitates a relational approach that values trust and connection and sometimes for individuals to confront their own biases, assumptions, and beliefs. This work can be uncomfortable and lead to conflict. Interviewees shared that establishing trust and empathy among individuals and groups is crucial for laying the foundations for Scaling Deep. This type of change cannot be rushed or forced, and tangible results may take longer to manifest. Participants highlighted the challenges posed by a society that values individualism and competition over collaboration and cooperation.

“So that, for me, is one of these types of gender issues where I do believe that if you want to work in a deep way, you have to be a little bit slower, and you have to take some time and truly think and look at what you’re doing rather than just pushing too fast. But I’ve also had other female friends and colleagues who have tried to kind of go for a slower and more emotional approach and then have given up and actually say that “No, I have to kind of wear this masculine power bank identification to have my voice heard”.

Lack of language to describe.

In our research, we discovered a lack of shared acceptance, understanding, and language surrounding Scaling Deep practice. Scaling Deep approaches often manifest in less visible, ambiguous, and uncertain ways, which can make it challenging for them to be recognized and supported. Hesitation and fear on both the part of practitioners and funders were highlighted.





Patterns, Implications and Key Insights



Patterns, Implications and Key Insights

What can we see about the power of Scaling Deep now? As this work advanced, some clear patterns and insights emerged which help us to characterize the nature and potential of Scaling Deep.

As we have been tracking and researching scaling deep for the last ten years, these insights build on our previous research and inquiries to summarize present new understanding together with implications for the systems change field.

“I mean, to care, you can easily care for someone materially or to make sure that they survive, but to love someone is to truly want someone’s best for their spiritual growth. What if we apply this to systems change or in society? I don’t feel that politicians want my spiritual growth. Put it that way. They care for me, but that’s where it ends. And maybe that’s what this whole scaling deep is trying to do. We’re trying to tip it over to actually be a love ethic, rather than just a care ethic.”

1

Scaling Deep creates the conditions for systemic change

Scaling Deep is the work at the deep roots level, nurturing life and enriching the soil from which change can flourish. It heals fragmentation and disconnection.

At its core, it is rooted in context, working deeply in localized contexts that encompass diverse cultural, regional, and community dynamics.

Like the mycelium and interconnected intelligence, Scaling Deep delves into alternative ways of knowing and being, embracing heart-centered and spirit-driven wisdom that is intuitive, embodied, and life-affirming. It recognizes the agency of humans but also of the Earth and the non-human and brings forth a holistic understanding of interconnectedness. By honoring the sacredness of all life, it paves the way for systemic change.



2

Scaling Deep is embodied change

Perhaps one of the reasons it's hard to support Scaling Deep is because it actually embodies the change we seek. Scaling Deep requires changing the way people lead, organize, manage, and measure success. In this way it disrupts outdated paradigms and establishes new patterns.

By Scaling Deep we facilitate a shift in beliefs, and mindsets, perceptions, and behaviors to enable systemic change. It is a fundamental change in the way individuals, organizations, and society perceive, think, and act.





3 Scaling Deep shifts power

Scaling Deep disrupts and shifts power. By placing community and lived experience at its core, it redirects the centers of gravity, uncovering untapped sources of power.

Traditional systems change interventions often target dominant powers at the system's center, such as funders or large institutions. However, **the work at the Deep Roots System level takes a different path. It involves decentralizing dominant power structures and fostering multiple centers of gravity within traditionally marginalized spaces.**

In this way, community, social movements and grassroots initiatives create an environment to experiment with approaches to doing this differently. Here new norms can emerge, offering alternative approaches, outside of dominant cultures and systems.

Scaling Deep disrupts the status quo and new sites of power emerge. It forges pathways that are reimagined and shared, attracts momentum and generates movement in new directions.

4

Scaling Deep cuts across division

Scaling Deep can help us find a middle path in a world that is increasingly divisive and polarized.

The concept of care, stewardship, and custodianship within Scaling Deep resonates deeply, transcending social and political divides. It calls for embracing a “love ethic” rather than solely a “care ethic” to propel transformative change within society.

Scaling Deep operates at the level of lived experience, inviting us to transcend disconnected labels, identities and boxes of professional performance and instead embrace the richness of our complexity and shared humanity. This “dropping down” moves us beyond the confines of othering and separation and generates opportunities that are life affirming and creative.



5 Scaling Deep transforms systems of inequity

The prevailing paradigms favouring scaling up over Scaling Deep are deeply intertwined with patriarchal ideologies, as well as larger systemic structures like colonization and capitalism.

These meta level systems act as barriers to the advancement of Scaling Deep. They perpetuate inequalities, particularly marginalizing women, racialized individuals, Indigenous leaders, and other marginalized populations who operate outside their parameters.

By supporting Scaling Deep, we actively challenge prevailing norms and dominant ways of thinking and acting and we transform hierarchical and oppressive systems of inequity.

Essentially, Scaling Deep entails unraveling these dominant paradigms and working in ways that move from traditional hierarchies towards interconnectivity and interdependence.



6

Scaling Deep supports traditional strategies of scaling up and out *Scaling Deep embodies wisdom in action.*

Learning emerges from a collective intelligence to inform next steps that can help us to move up and out, as well as deep. Scaling Deep can be the groundwork that creates the conditions for interventions at different scales.

There is no hierarchy between these dimensions of change, a dynamic relationship exists between them all. **If we Scale Deep, we are able to create more powerful strategies for scaling up and out.**





7 Scaling Deep can support alternative routes to scaling out

Often scaling out strategies follow concepts of replication, franchise and a top down approach to spreading a successful idea or niche innovation.

Scaling Deep can create different pathways to consider Scaling out.

Mycelium networks that grow underground are highly interconnected and able to transmit signals and information over long distances. Through this subterranean network, mycelium effectively communicates with other organisms, playing a crucial role in nutrient cycling and ecosystem functioning.

Similarly, nurturing deep relationships across difference, learning communities, and strategic networks can become a powerful approach to scaling out.

8

Scaling Deep directly connects to narratives

Often change theories are hierarchical in nature moving from individuals, to groups, to systems and eventually to culture/narrative. **However we see Scaling Deep in a circular relationship with narrative, that can interact directly with culture, values and belief systems.** It challenges the assumption that only large scale traditional power, influential institutions or media can work at this level.

In our world of systems change strategy, we at The Systems Sanctuary, think a lot about the stories we tell ourselves about the systems we are working with. We refer to this level in a system as the 'Landscape', the climate of ideas, our culture. It is part of our favourite systems change framework, The Power Shift Model. We see changing narratives as a powerful lever for cultural change.

We saw how this played out with the #metoo movement for example, where grassroots organizing, skipped the mainstream and went straight to social media - where #metoo became a hashtag that impacted our cultural landscape. As this grew in momentum it began to impact the mainstream institutions of business, markets and civil society, shifting policies and practices internationally.

9 Scaling Deep expands beyond institutional change

Scaling Deep and working in the deep root systems can be the work that is invisible to the dominant systems. **This work is rooted in relationships, healing, community, movement building and personal transformation.**

It is challenging to measure. However, with this framing, we can point towards it, value and learn from it. We can intentionally bring it into balance with other strategies for scale.

Scaling Deep is hard to support because it lives and breathes beyond the boundaries of organizations, coalitions and policy change. This work is multi-dimensional. It exists in human experience, connection, friendship and also in mystery, and the spiritual. It is work that can not be institutionalized. And it does require support for those who are tending to this dimension. Even if it is the point of departure.



10

Conflation and reification

Different ways of knowing, such as women's (for example relational, care based or intuitive ways of knowing), or Indigenous ways of knowing (for example earth based, spirit led) should not be conflated with Scaling Deep. Even though we observe common trends in scale deep research such as women tend to use scaling deep strategies, or that many Indigenous Ashoka Fellow candidates work at this level, it does not imply that women solely engage in Scaling Deep, or Indigenous people always adopt this approach. We recognize that gender and Indigenous ways of knowing can be both distinct, multidimensional and intersectional. We also noted that, in contrast to accepted beliefs about Scaling Deep work, men do apply these frames, practices and approaches.

It is important that we don't reify women, racialized communities and Indigenous people into deep only dimensions, and avoid blanket generalizations or absolutes.

"I don't want to reify Indigenous people as scaling deep. And that's the same thing with women. We don't want to reify that it's only Indigenous people or its only women who are doing this because it's not the case. And also there's lots of women who don't lead this way and lots of Indigenous people that don't. But the thing I think is, is that there are patterns around approaches. For example, I would say it resonates with different ways of doing the work that are seen as feminine or that women often identify with."

"I think another thing that would be helpful is to be more illustrative about those different levels and how they interconnect. So we challenge that kind of linear thing as well. And also the hierarchy. Because there's a tendency for people to categorize everything and then create a hierarchy between those levels.... Right.

So I think the biggest barrier is the idea that these three levels are, are completely separated, and that there are people that can only see one or only see the other and only work on one or the other. And I think the best way to overcome them is to understand that in every little thing that you do, even the smallest thing, those three dimensions are at play."



In summary

Scaling Deep is a transformative approach to systems change that goes beyond traditional scaling models.

It involves deep personal and cultural transformation to create lasting and sustainable change. Practices centre on inner work, connection across communities, and narrative work. It requires time, introspection, and personal growth, often confronting biases and assumptions. Rooting in context, and awareness of and working with power were critical. These practices were seen as preparing the conditions necessary for change. Scaling Deep informs strategies to scale up and out.

Scaling Deep challenges dominant paradigms and values rooted in concepts of endless growth, myths of progress and modernity. It reframes dominance and hierarchies; emphasizing relationships, collaboration, and holistic understanding of systemic issues. However, Scaling Deep faces barriers due to the influence of business sector influence, lack of shared language, and limited funding opportunities. Despite these challenges, Scaling Deep offers a pathway to address complex societal issues and create meaningful impact.



Moving Forward: Some Ideas

There were moments of inspiration where the discussion and interviews generated ideas for how to build on this inquiry.

Here are some of the ideas that came.

Scale Deep peer learning to share practice and insights across experiences

Scale Deep hubs - to support collaboratives to experiment with scaling deep in different contexts

Working with universities to break silos and deepen the research to inform practice

Sharing this framework through webinars, workshops and conference presentations

We look forward to continuing the journey!



About

The Systems Sanctuary works with leaders who are focused on social or environmental challenges, and are trying to create the conditions to have a deeper systemic impact.

We teach the art of systems practice and ecosystem building, all through the lens of intersectionality, considering race, class, culture, ability, and sexual identity.

Our programs, training, and peer-learning initiatives draw participants from around the globe, offering practical guidance rooted in real-world experience. We work individually and with cohorts across a Network, Cohort, Team or Ecosystem.

Working with us feels connected, compassionate and strategic. We embed a power and justice analysis in all the work we do and we listen, champion and care deeply about the people we work with.

With ties to the UK, US and Canada, we work internationally.

You can find out more about our work

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Thank you!

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