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## SCALING SOCIAL ENTERPRISES – A THEORETICALLY GROUNDED FRAMEWORK

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## SCALING SOCIAL ENTERPRISES – A THEORETICALLY GROUNDED FRAMEWORK



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### ABSTRACT

The authors develop a comprehensive framework to improve understanding of the complex causalities and interdependencies of the factors affecting the scalability of social impact. Examining the entire literature on scaling social enterprises and nonprofits, they single out 241 key drivers for scalability and 144 scaling strategies, then group the key drivers into coding categories and condense them into clusters. From these clusters, one precondition and seven key components are derived for scaling social impact. The 144 strategies are sorted into four types. By interlinking the precondition, key components, and strategy types, the framework responds to several calls in recent literature.

### INTRODUCTION

Scientific interest in social entrepreneurship is growing (Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010; Short, Moss, & Lumpkin, 2009; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009). Like traditional entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs see an opportunity to satisfy some unmet need, establish new organizations, develop and implement respective programs, and organize or distribute new products or services. They set themselves apart from traditional entrepreneurs primarily by following a social mission and by focusing on social needs — in areas such as education, welfare, the environment, and health care—that the state and the private sector do not or cannot adequately meet (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006). To accomplish their social mission, social enterprises generally aim to maximize their social impact (e.g., Sherman, 2006). They do so by maximizing social well-being of their targeted “underserved, neglected, or highly disadvantaged population” (Martin and Osberg, 2007: 35). The complexity of efficiently and effectively scaling social impact (the *raison d’être* of the firm), though, is a challenge for social enterprises (Bloom & Smith, 2010; Bradach, 2003; Dees, Anderson, & Wei-Skillern, 2004). This explains why the investigation into key conditions that enhance or limit the potential for scaling the impact of social enterprises has generated great interest in the theory and practice of social entrepreneurship equally (Bloom and Smith, 2010; Jenkins and Ishikawa, 2010; Sherman, 2006). The difficulty is compounded by the fact that scaling in the social sector diverges somewhat from that in the more comprehensively elaborated commercial sector because the organizational and contextual conditions of these two areas differ (Austin *et al.*, 2006). In the emerging literature on scaling social impact concepts discussed tend to oversimplify the complex relationships between the integral elements enhancing or limiting the potential for scaling the social impact of social enterprises. However, the literature does indicate growing complexity in scalability research, a trend that calls for a comprehensive structure within which to develop a multilayered process model of scaling. To our knowledge, there are no studies systemizing or classifying all theoretical insights regarding strategies, drivers, and barriers of scaling social impact. Therefore, the aim of this study is to fill this gap and to develop a scalability framework with which to classify, integrate, and relate the major theoretical and empirical findings in this field. The remainder of this article is organized as follows: We start with an overview of the relevant literature in order to identify all potential drivers, barriers, and strategies that have been considered important in the discussion of scaling social impact. In a subsequent coding procedure, we condense the resulting 241 key drivers to nine clusters, from which

we deduce key components of scaling social impact. In addition, the various scaling strategies suggested in the social entrepreneurship literature are categorized into four different types of strategies. We develop interrelations between the key components of the scalability framework and the four strategy types, exploring and pointing to alternative scaling paths for social enterprises. Our scalability framework is intended as a significant contribution to improving the understanding of the complex causalities and interdependencies of the various factors that bear on the scalability of social ventures in theory and practice.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

We based our review of the literature on those articles or book chapters whose titles or abstracts contain at least one word from each of two sets of vocabulary essential to our study. The first set consisted of *scaling, replication, growth, leverage, and expansion*; the second set, of *social enterprise or social entrepreneurship, social innovation, social mission, social change, social sector, social purpose, NGO, nonprofit, not-for-profit, social program, and social impact*. We chose the review period from 1992-2012 as this is the time span in which the number of publications grew most rapidly due to the increase of “social” actions of entrepreneurs (e.g., Desa, 2012; Dacin *et al.*, 2011; Zahra *et al.*, 2009). In the process of literature research we searched appropriate internet homepages like Google Scholar and the journal databases Science Direct, EBSCO, Emerald, and JSTOR as well as journal homepages and conference proceedings, looking for the respective combinations of the two sets of vocabulary. For the books and book chapters we scanned the library and the internet for sources matching our predefined vocabulary. To expand our initial list of relevant sources, we went through each reference list and searched for further publications which might fulfill our criteria. We eventually ended with 88 articles or book chapters that we integrated into our analysis. These studies appeared within the past 20 years – representing a steady increase of publications. Drawing on this literature, the today’s entirely existing literature on scaling social impact, we start with a review on the various ways researchers and practitioners have approached the topic so far.

This review revealed inconsistent understandings and definitions of the central terms *scalability, transferability, replicability, and adaptability*. The research questions in this literature can be roughly differentiated into two main research streams, one on scaling strategies and the other on success factors or drivers of scaling. All three topics are addressed in this article.

The discussion of the scalability of social enterprises is still relatively heterogeneous (Dacin *et al.*, 2010). Social enterprises mostly strive to maximize social impact by scaling their business model (CASE, 2006b; Dees *et al.*, 2004). Mulgan (2006) even explains that “many ideas fail not because of inherent flaws but because of the lack of adequate mechanisms to promote them, adapt them, and then scale them up” (p. 156). Hence, scalability of the business model is a core determinant of the growth and expansion of social enterprises. Although little theoretical and empirical work has been done on the scalability of social business models to date, a broad variety of definitions exists in today’s literature (see also the literature review from CASE, 2006a). Dees (2008) takes a broad approach by defining scalability as “increasing the impact a social-purpose organization produces to better match the magnitude of the social need or problem it seeks to address” (p. 18). For the purpose of this paper, we adopt his definition. Despite the range of definitions of scalability and scaling, the literature on social entrepreneurship seems to reflect a broad consensus that replicability, adaptability, and transferability of the operational model are key components of scalability (Bradach, 2003; Winter & Szulanski, 2001). This perception is also supported by commercial scalability literature (von Krogh & Cusumano, 2001; Zook & Allen, 2003). In this article we define replicability, adaptability, and transferability as follows. *Replicability* means the capacity to reproduce or adopting the social enterprise’s structures, processes, products or services, and habits (Dees *et al.*, 2004; Winter & Szulanski, 2001). *Adaptability* means the capacity to adjust the social enterprise’s structures, processes, products or services, and/or its habits (Chakravarthy, 1982; von Krogh & Cusumano, 2001). *Transferability* unifies replicability and adaptability on the

basis of the following reasoning. In keeping with previous research (Josiah, 2001; von Krogh & Cusumano, 2001; Zook & Allen, 2003), we state that pure replication (e.g., to new geographic locations without any adjustment) is comparatively rare because current knowledge and processes almost always have to be adapted to new conditions (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). We doubt that all determinants of a basic operational model can be copied to the social enterprise's new site. The replicability of the operational model to a new geographic area must therefore be considered first and only then the necessary adjustments for successful adaptation to the new site. Breaking transferability down into the two separate key components of replicability and adaptability thus allows us to analyze the scaling process in a more differentiated way. Beyond the various efforts to define the scalability of social entrepreneurship, several theoretically and empirically grounded approaches and models that suggest strategies and key components for determining the scalability of social impact have emerged in recent years. Nonetheless, literature focusing on the *strategies* that social enterprises use to maximize their social impact (scaling strategies) is scarce (Austin et al., 2006; Bradach, 2003; Weerawardena, & Sullivan Mort, 2006). Of the 84 articles or book chapters we identified during our literature review, 31 contribute to the discussion of scaling strategies and are presented in this article.

Besides scaling strategies, success factors and drivers of scaling are heavily discussed in the relevant literature. We found a wide range of terminologies for factors that accelerate the scaling process, expressions such as *scalers* (e.g., Bloom & Chatterji, 2009; Bloom & Smith, 2010), *drivers* (e.g., The Bridgespan Group, 2005), *success factors* (e.g., Ratliff & Moy, 2004), and *capacities* (LaFrance et al., 2006). Like Uvin, Jain and Brown (2000), we use the term *key component* to describe success factors of scaling social impact, emphasizing the integral elements of our scalability framework. In keeping with Bloom and Chatterji (2009), Bloom and Smith (2010), and Dees et al. (2004), we regard key drivers as accelerators and catalysts that indirectly facilitate the scaling of social impact by influencing the key components. 58 of the 88 scientific articles we reviewed address the issue of key drivers for the scaling of social impact. The various researchers differ not only in their particular scientific backgrounds and the key drivers they single out but also in the level of analysis on which they focus when developing their key drivers for scaling social impact.

Overall, the different approaches and models presented above provide a valuable overview of important dimensions of and effects on the scalability of social impact. However, all but one of the studies (Sherman, 2006) either focus from the outset on a few preselected variables influencing scalability or limit the number of variables that through some incomprehensible process enter the model. This lack of scope might be explained, though not justified, by the fact that most of the research is based on qualitative, primarily comparative, case study analyses. Nonetheless, such an approach seems somewhat problematic because important variables known from traditional scaling literature (Barringer & Greening, 2001; Uvin, 1995; von Krogh & Cusumano, 2001; Winter & Szulanski, 2001) have frequently not been discussed in the relevant studies. The dangers that cultural differences pose to scalability in the context of international expansion have also gone unaddressed in that literature (Zahra, Rawhouser, Bhawe, Neubaum, & Hayton, 2008). The interdependencies of these variables have not been considered, either. Not only are the key terminologies inconsistent and overlapping, the central components of scalability (e.g., replicability, transferability, and adaptability) and their different functions within the concept of scalability have not been clarified satisfactorily. For example, the scaling drivers have not yet been connected to the scaling strategies, and organizational and other contextual specifics have been disregarded. Therefore, in presenting our framework, we seek to rectify the omissions pointed out above and to contribute significantly to both theory and practice. Our goals are to (a) contribute to a common understanding of the key terminologies of scaling (in particular, replicability, transferability, and adaptability); (b) identify key components and specify their particular role in the process of scaling social impact; (c) illustrate the interplay between key components for scalability; (d) link key components with scaling strategies; (e) align the scaling strategies to the respective social enterprise's characteristics; and (f) identify similarities and differences for scaling in the social

rather than the commercial sector. We thus aim to add to the understanding of the causalities and interdependencies of the various factors involved in the scalability of social ventures.

## DEVELOPMENT OF A SCALABILITY FRAMEWORK

### Development of Key Components of the Scalability Framework

As mentioned above, 58 of the 8 scientific papers and book chapters deal with key drivers, scalars, or success factors in the context of social enterprises' scaling efforts. All in all, 241 key drivers were mentioned in the various articles. Many of them were entirely different; others were rather similar, overlapping, or even identical. To develop the scalability framework and reduce complexity, our aim was to bundle these key drivers into separate internally homogeneous clusters that are sufficiently heterogeneous between each other. All key drivers mentioned in the 58 articles were coded and assigned to conceptual coding categories that the researchers developed as this work progressed, comparing them for possible overlaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions. The analysis and categorization were undertaken separately—a measure of intercoder reliability. All data was recoded when necessary. When new data led to new or inconsistent information, the categories, the emerging key components, or both were modified to take account of it. The process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. An external professional participated in the coding stage, playing the role of questioner and devil's advocate. Nine coding categories resulted, which we eventually condensed to eight conceptual categories by merging two coding categories—resources and capital (financial, human, and social)—which we had kept separate until the last stage because of their importance. The final eight conceptual categories, our key components, inform, and guide the scalability framework (see Figure 1).

We elaborate on the interconnections and interdependencies between the previously identified elements (the precondition, key components, and key drivers, which are discussed below) by simultaneously exploring alternative types of scaling strategies in relation to the social enterprise's specific organizational and contextual characteristics. The discussion brings out more or less critical decision points and scaling paths for achieving the goal of scaling social impact. In the next section we “walk” through the scalability framework, starting in the upper left corner, to explain how the different components and key drivers informed our reasoning.

### Commitment of the Individuals Driving the Scaling Process

The process of scaling social impact starts with the individuals driving it. Through our review of Billis and MacKeith (1992), Bradach (2003), The Bridgespan Group (2005), Dale, Baker, & Racine (2002), DeJong (2003), Drumwright and Duchicela (2010), Grant and Crutchfield (2007), Hassel and Steiner (2000), Hodson (1992), Hynes (2009), Jenkins et al. (2010), LaFrance et al. (2006), Majeska (1999), Mulgan, Ali, Halkett and Sanders (2007), Robinson (1992), Sherman (2007), van Oudenhoven and Wazir (n.d.), and Waitzer and Paul (2011), we identified “commitment of the individuals driving the scaling process” as the first key component of our scalability framework. Individuals driving the scaling process might be the founder, the management, or both (LaFrance et al., 2006); involved staff and volunteers of the social enterprise; and members of the enterprise's network.

### Management Competence

Whereas our first component consists predominantly in the willingness of the individuals driving the scaling process, our second one is the ability to manage the scaling process professionally. We identified this component, labeled “management competence,” on the basis of Aspen Institute (2008), Billis and MacKeith (1992), The Bridgespan Group (2005), Campbell and Louh (2005), Curtis (2001), Dale et al. (2002), Datar, Epstein, & Yuthas (2010), DeJong (2003), Drumwright and Duchicela (2010), Harris (2010), Hassel and Steiner (2000), Hodson (1992),

Hynes (2009), Jenkins et al. (2010), LaFrance et al. (2006), Lister (2001), Mulgan et al. (2007), Robinson (1992), Sezgi and Mair (2010), Sherman (2007), Stone Foundation (2009), Taylor, Dees, & Emerson (2002), Trelstadt and Katz (2011), and van Oudenhoven and Wazir (n.d.). Generally, social enterprises are required more and more to act in a business-like manner (for example goal setting, monitoring, evaluating, reporting, and budgeting), so the adoption of management competence for social enterprises is particularly important (Bull & Crompton, 2006). Because failure to meet this expectation raises the likelihood that the scaling process will be unsuccessful (The Bridgespan Group, 2005), management competence is a key component of our scalability framework. Managing the scaling of social impact professionally implies constant preservation of the social mission (e.g., The Bridgespan Group, 2005; Hassel & Steiner, 2000; Hynes, 2009; Taylor et al., 2002; van Oudenhoven & Wazir, n.d.) representing a substantial component of the social enterprise (Dees, 1998).

### **Entire or Partial Replicability of the Operational Model**

Whereas our first and second components referred to the individuals driving the scaling process, our third one has to do with the replicability of the social enterprise's operational model. We base this component on Bloom and Chatterji (2009), Bloom and Smith (2010), The Bridgespan Group (2005), Campbell and Louh (2005), Drumwright and Duchicela (2010), Hodson (1992), LaFrance et al. (2006), Ratliff and Moy (2004), Stone Foundation (2009), Szegi and Mair (2010), Taylor et al. (2002), van Oudenhoven and Wazir (n.d.), and Waitzer and Paul (2011) and on the differentiation between replication and adaptation as discussed in our literature review. Once it has been determined that the social enterprise's operational model is viable, the complexity of its operations should be reduced in order to facilitate the replication process. One way of reducing complexity could be to have social enterprises focus on core elements of their operational model (The Bridgespan Group, 2005; Campbell & Louh, 2005; Waitzer & Paul, 2011). They might then replicate only those elements that induce the social impact most effectively (Bloom & Chatterji, 2009; Bloom & Smith, 2010; LaFrance et al., 2006). Support for the importance of focusing on core elements also surfaces in the literature on commercial scaling (e.g., von Krogh & Cusumano, 2001; Winter & Szulanski, 2001). That body of research, however, differs from the social-scaling literature, in that commercial enterprises do not center mainly on those elements that induce the social impact, but on elements that scale the business model most effectively.

### **Ability to Meet Social Demands**

In Bloom and Chatterji (2009), Bloom and Smith (2010), Bradach (2003), Campbell and Louh (2005), DeJong (2003), Grant and Crutchfield (2007), Ratliff and Moy (2004), and Taylor et al. (2002), we identified "ability to meet social demands" as the fourth component of our scalability framework. Whereas the component "replicability of the operational model" clarifies *which* elements of the operational model can be replicated, the ability to meet social demands determines *where* and *how* replication of the elements is able to scale the social impact most effectively. Just as the maximization of profit is a primary driver of commercial entrepreneurs (Wei-Skillern, 2003; Zahra et al. 2008), the maximization of social impact is the primary driver of social entrepreneurs. Accordingly, social enterprises constantly look for unmet social demands (Bradach 2003; Ratliff & Moy 2004; Taylor et al. 2002). These demands tend to be significantly greater than the scope of a social enterprise's activities, for social enterprises address persistent social problems not yet satisfactorily met by governments or the market (Santos, 2010). The process of scaling designed to alleviate social problems is thus constraint less by absolute social demand – as is often the case for commercial entrepreneurs – (e.g., Tuck, Boasberg, & Brennan, 2005), than by the ability to pursue the social activities. Obstacles that limit the ability to scale social activities might originate in operational difficulties such as a lack of distribution channels or in economic constraints, as when the sheer purchasing power of the target group interferes with the sustainability of the scaled social activities (Jenkins et al., 2010). To overcome these hindrances, social enterprises might be able to "stimulate market forces" (Bloom & Chatterji 2009: 115; see also Bloom & Smith 2010; Grant

& Crutchfield 2007) or partner with organizations that have complementary resources (Ratcliff & Moy, 2004; see the framework component “partnerships,” below). Hence, the ability to meet social demands depends on how effectively social enterprises surmount operational and economic barriers to the scaling of their social impact.

### **Ability to Obtain Necessary Resources**

Our fifth key component, “ability to obtain necessary resources,” contains two key driver clusters that we identified for the scaling of social impact. Considering the role of these clusters to be closely interlinked in the scaling process, we grouped them under the labels “resourcing” and “networks and supporters to obtain resources.” In the resourcing cluster we find key drivers discussed in almost every publication that investigates them in the context of scaling social impact. The cluster of “networks and supporters to obtain resources” contains key drivers discussed in Bloom and Chatterji (2009), Bloom and Smith (2010), Bradach (2003), Datar et al. (2010), DeJong (2003), Grant and Crutchfield (2007), Harris (2010), Hynes (2009), Lister (2001), Robinson (1992), Sherman (2006), Stone Foundation (2009), Taylor et al. (2002), Trelstad and Katz (2011), and van Oudenhoven and Wazir (n.d.). Because the scaling of social impact implies activities and efforts in addition to the continual operations of the social enterprise, pursuit of these additional activities requires the “right” amounts of the “right” resources, which the operational model does not necessarily provide (e.g., Hassel & Steiner, 2000). Hurdles already familiar from commercial entrepreneurship literature, such as the “liability of newness” (Stinchcombe, 1965) and the “liability of smallness” (Brüderl & Schüssler, 1990), generally confront enterprises with the challenge of acquiring resources necessary for growth. Unlike commercial enterprises, though, social enterprises cannot pay competitive prices for production factors (Oster, 1995). Social enterprises thus find it particularly difficult to generate the resources they need for scaling social impact such as financial or economic, human and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), so they rely on different channels to acquire them (Austin et al., 2006). It is apparent that our resourcing cluster of key drivers subsumes the first three ways to obtain resources (with Bourdieu financial and human capital) and that the cluster of key drivers called “networks and supporters to gain resources” contains the fourth alternative, the effort to mobilize resources from the environment (with Bourdieu social capital).

### **Potential Effectiveness of Scaling Social Impact with Others**

Our sixth component, “potential effectiveness of scaling social impact with others,” refers to bringing in other organizations, corporations, and/or institutions to help spread the social impact. We identified this component in Aspen Institute (2008), Bloom and Chatterji (2009), Bloom and Smith (2010), Datar et al. (2010), Drumwright and Duchicela (2010), Harris (2010), Hassel and Steiner (2000), Jenkins et al. (2010), Ratcliff and Moy (2004), van Oudenhoven and Wazir (n.d.), and Waitzer and Paul (2011). Social enterprises can scale their social activities on their own or rely on other organizations, corporations, and institutions to obtain necessary resources (e.g., Perrini & Vurro, 2006). Involving others to spread their social impact, social enterprises either provide support and advocacy only to their partner or actively take a stake in a partnership or strategic alliance that runs social activities (e.g., Bloom & Chatterji, 2009; Bloom & Smith, 2010; Hassel & Steiner, 2000). The social enterprise’s choice between scaling social impact on its own and relying on others is determined by the effectiveness of each strategic alternative to that process. We assume that social enterprises will opt for the one that promises to be the most effective for scaling social impact; after all, maximizing that impact is a primary driver of the social entrepreneur’s ambitions (see section 3.1.4). For the same reason we assume that social enterprises will not choose any strategic alternative if mission drift is likely. Hence, the scaling of social impact is determined by how effectively other organizations, corporations, or institutions are able to lever the social *impact* achieved by the social enterprise. This measure/leverage potential might vary from one social enterprise to the next and is determined by the replicability of its operational model, the ability to meet social demands, the ability to obtain the necessary resources (Ratcliff & Moy, 2004), the social

enterprise's attractiveness as a partner (Waitzer & Paul, 2011), and the existence of appropriate partners (Jenkins et al., 2010), among other components.

### **Adaptability**

Our scalability framework's seventh component, "adaptability," is drawn from Aspen Institute (2008), The Bridgespan Group (2005), DeJong (2003), Grant and Crutchfield (2007), Harris (2010), Hassel and Steiner (2000), Hodson (1992), Jenkins et al. (2010), Ratliff and Moy (2004), Robinson (1992), Sezgi and Mair (2010), van Oudenhoven and Wazir (n.d.), and Waitzer and Paul (2011). Depending on the social demands that social enterprises intend to meet by scaling their social impact as effectively as possible (see p. 12), they might reach out for geographies, target groups, products or services other than those they have previously served. In this case, socioeconomic market requirements for the activities of social enterprises might change, depending on the degree of similarities or dissimilarities between the context in which social enterprises are active before scaling and the context they aim to scale to (e.g., Dees et al., 2004).

According to the literature on social and commercial scaling, dissimilarities in socioeconomic requirements refer not only to geographic scaling, but also apply to "cultural, administrative or political, and economic dimensions that can make . . . markets considerably more or less attractive" (von Krogh & Cusumano, 2001: 138; see also Edwards & Hulme, 1992a; Welter & Smallbone, 2011). The social enterprise's operational model might therefore no longer fit to the "new" market or customer conditions. Output and outcome of the operational model simply might not meet social and economic demands, and there might be more efficient or more effective ways to pursue the market (Aspen Institute, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2010). Institutional barriers, such as strict regulatory or policy environment, may hinder the social enterprise's attempts to scale social impact (The Bridgespan Group, 2005; Edwards & Hulme, 1992a; Ratliff & Moy, 2004). Consequently, the scaling of social impact requires not only the replication of the operational model but also the adaptation of the replicated model to a targeted context (Grant & Crutchfield, 2007; Jenkins et al., 2010; Perrini & Vurro, 2006). If it is necessary to adapt the replicated model to a targeted context, then the scaling of social impact is determined by the ability of social enterprises to adjust their activities. However, for some social enterprises, adaptability is less an issue for they deliberately seek out hostile institutional environments in order to pursue their social mission of initiating a systemic social change in them (Austin et al., 2006). Systemic approaches to change environments aim to adapt contexts to new paradigms (e.g., Sherman, 2006). Therefore, the necessity of adapting the operational model attenuates (e.g., Barringer & Greening, 1998).

### **Types of Scaling Strategies**

Scaling strategies were gleaned from the relevant literature in much the same way as clusters of key drivers were derived. Of the 88 scientific papers and book chapters we examined, 31 were found to deal with scaling strategies. They encompassed 144 strategies in all. Several of the sources spell out particular scaling strategies, such as affiliation (CASE, 2003, 2006b; Dees et al., 2004) and thus seemed to convey the same message about how to scale social impact. Our second aim was therefore to group those scaling strategies into separate clusters to identify types of strategies that are similar and differentiate them from other types of scaling strategies. As in the process of developing clusters with specific key drivers, several researchers coded the scaling strategies and assigned them to coding categories so that intercoder reliability could be ensured. This coding procedure led to four types into which the 144 identified scaling strategies were categorized: (a) capacity-building, (b) relationship defined by an ongoing agreement, (c) diffusion of knowledge, and (d) one adjacency move. In the specified literature these four overriding types of scaling strategies resemble strategies mentioned by Alvord, Brown, and Letts (2004), Dees et al. (2004), and CASE (2003, 2006b). This theoretically grounded differentiation of scaling strategies into four categories means that any scaling strategy found during our research can be categorized into one of our mutually exclusive groups. For example, strategies such as the joint venture or franchis-



ing represent “relationships defined by an ongoing agreement,” whereas open-source strategies come under the strategy we call “diffusion of knowledge.” This categorization lends our scalability framework flexibility, for each of its four types can accommodate for other scaling strategies as well. Having analyzed and singled out the different key components, their particular key drivers, and the four types of scaling strategies, we now elaborate on the right type of scaling strategy and break it down into several individual points in the social entrepreneur’s decision-making process. The resulting path dependence narrows and clarifies the selection of scaling strategies that emerge as possibilities for the entrepreneur in his or her basic conditions. This procedure responds to Jenkins and Ishikawa’s (2010) call for “an effective segmentation of these different companies and models, and a highly nuanced understanding of behaviors and needs within each segment, [which] would enable partner organizations to provide the right services to the right businesses at the right time” (p. 16). Accordingly, it seems even more important to carefully match the strategy to the social enterprise.

### **Critical Decision-making Path**

We agree with Sherman (2006) that any scalability framework should be based on a viable operational model of the social enterprise, so it is necessary to ensure that the underlying operational model functions. Upon confirmation of the model’s proper functioning, the first decision to make, when using our framework, is to ascertain the degree of commitment of leading and executing individuals who drive the scaling process, otherwise the scaling process ends. The second point in the decision-making process is reached when the social enterprise has to verify that there is sufficient management competence in the scaling process. When that resource has been guaranteed, the third point in the process is to inquire about the extent to which the social enterprise is able to reduce the complexity of its operations. The answer to this question will determine the degree to which the operational model is replicable. If the operational model is rather not replicable, the scaling process terminates. Otherwise, the decision-making process in our framework proceeds to its fourth point, at which the social enterprise has to prove where replication of the elements should take place in order to optimize the scaling of social impact. If ability to meet social demands can rather not be verified, the scaling process terminates. Otherwise, one arrives at the fifth point in the decision-making process; ascertainment of the social enterprise’s ability to obtain necessary resources is reached. If the social enterprise has difficulties to obtain the resources necessary for increasing social impact, scaling will rather not take place. If necessary resources are available or at least accessible, the social enterprise has to decide whether to scale up its social impact on its own or, preferably, in collaboration and with partners, depending on which option is more effective. This decision marks the sixth point in the process described in our framework. The decision-making process continues with the seventh component, adaptability. This key component is divided into two sequenced steps: “adaptation necessary” and “adaptation possible.” First, a social enterprise assesses whether adaptation of its operational model is necessary at all. If conditions on the targeted market are so similar to the home market that they do not require any adjustment to the social enterprise’s operational model, then no adaptation of the operational model is necessary. The same is true if a social enterprise does not undergo the scaling activities on its own but instead scales social impact by teaching partners how to. If adaptation is necessary, that is, if conditions of the targeted market require adaptation of the social enterprise’s operational model (e.g., in order to bridge ethical, religious, demographic, socio-economic, or geographical differences between the targeted and the home market), then a social enterprise has to look into adapting its operational model. This adaptation can be undertaken alone or together with one or more partners. The decision-making process continues if adaptation of the operational model seems possible and terminates if adaptation is not possible.

Combining component six (collaborating and partnering) and component seven (necessary and possible adaptations), we find that four different scaling paths emerge from the decisions during the decision-making process and lead to the four possible types of scaling strategies identified

and discussed above (see figure 1). If the social enterprise intends to increase social impact on its own and does not have to adapt to the prevailing market conditions, then capacity-building is considered to be the only remaining strategy by which to scale the operational model. It becomes the first scaling path. If the social enterprise intends to scale into another adjacent area of activity (e.g., new target group, new product/service, new geographic context) or requires adaptation of any kind (e.g., geographical or cultural), the strategy of one adjacency move opens the second possible scaling path. However, if the scaling of social impact takes place through partnerships with others and if adaptation to particular market conditions is not necessary, the strategy of diffusion of knowledge paves the way to the third scaling path. If, on the other hand, adaptation is both necessary and possible, the social enterprise embarks on the fourth scaling path by turning to the strategy of entering into a relationship defined by an ongoing agreement. If the social enterprise must, but cannot, adapt its operational model to given market conditions, then the scaling process has to be resumed. Because social enterprises differ in their specific characteristics of their operational models and in their contextual embeddedness, these dissimilarities will be manifested in the choice of the scaling path the organizations take. At this final stage of the scalability framework, it is crucial for the social enterprise to question whether the planned scaling strategy is appropriate for the business model. Because of the number of scaling strategies, there is a tradeoff between the various alternatives of how to scale social impact (CASE, 2006b), so some scaling strategies are mutually exclusive (Edwards & Hulme, 1992a). Nevertheless, social enterprises can scale social impact by applying more than one strategy.

## DISCUSSION

In this article we set out to significantly improve the understanding of the complex causalities and interdependencies of the various factors bearing on the scalability of social ventures in theory and practice by presenting a framework for scaling social impact. For this purpose we defined the term scaling, we comprehensively reviewed the relevant scaling literature on social enterprises and nonprofits, and identified in it nine clusters of key drivers of scalability. From those clusters we derived one precondition and seven key components. We also suggested four major types of strategy for scaling social impact along the lines of partnership and adaptation. We interlinked the precondition, key components, and strategy types and pointed out four ensuing scaling paths. With this paper we aim to contribute to five current discussions in the literature: (a) the definition of key terminologies scaling social impact, (b) the key drivers that determine the scaling of social impact, (c) the interplay between key drivers and components of scalability, (d) the interrelation of key components and types of strategy, and (e) the differences of scaling in the social as opposed to the commercial sector. We elaborate on our findings in the following discussion.

*Segregation of Key Terminologies of Scaling:* We defined the three interrelated concepts of replicability, adaptability, and transferability, making the first two concepts mutually exclusive and rendering the third understandable as their unification. In the process we took into consideration that pure replication of the elements of a social enterprise's operational model occurs only rarely. That is, replicability of the operational model is a necessary, though not always sufficient, condition for scaling social impact. Adaptability is considered the sufficient condition. Hence, breaking transferability down into its two key components, *replicability* and *adaptability*, provides an even more differentiated way of analyzing the scaling process than has been hitherto available.

*Identification of Clusters of Key Drivers that Determine the Scaling of Social Impact:* To structure, aggregate, and systemize the numerous studies on the scalability of social impact, we clustered all the identifiable relevant key drivers and used overarching concepts to summarize the current state of discussion on what drives the scaling of social impact. This approach not only reduced complexity but also permitted the allocation of additional key drivers not noted in the relevant literature yet. Furthermore, our analysis revealed that some key drivers might be more central than others are to the scaling social impact.

*Interplay between Key Drivers and Components of Scalability:* The interplay between the drivers for scalability is illustrated by the paths that link the components of our framework to each other thereby reflecting the decision-making process that a social enterprise undergoes while trying to scale social impact. The paths show that each key component not only determines the level of the social enterprise's overall scalability, but also influences the configuration of the subsequent components, causing a certain path dependency. In keeping with the relevant literature, we see the "ability to obtain the necessary resources", which contains the highest number of key drivers of any cluster, as particularly meaningful for any social enterprise that intends to scale social impact. Other key components seem to be highly relevant to some social enterprises in particular sectors only. Replicability of the operational model, for example, might be regarded as central to social enterprises in the technology sector, which has been noted for very high scalability of such organizations (see Fruchtermann, 2004). The key components not only interfere with each other; they share interfaces as well. These interfaces exist between similar key drivers belonging to different clusters or key components, as one can deduce from the different roles these key drivers play within the scaling process. An example of such a relationship might be alliance-building, a key driver suggested by Bloom and Smith (2010). Their empirical analysis reveals that "alliance-building and lobbying no longer remained significant when all SCALERS . . . were entered into the regression analysis" (p. 140). They surmise that the reason for their results might originate in the "character of the organizations in the sample" (p. 140). Applying our framework, we add another guess: Whereas Bloom and Smith included alliance-building as a single determinant in their model, we suggest that it has at least four specific roles in the process of scaling social impact. It figures in (a) the component we call the ability to obtain necessary resources, (b) the component referred to as the potential effectiveness of scaling social impact with others entails the involvement of other organizations, (c) the adaptability component, and (d) networking as a scaling strategy to diffuse knowledge.

*Linking Key Components with Four Types of Strategy:* As mentioned above, social enterprises vary greatly in size, industry, financial and social returns, as well as in their operational model and their capacities for scaling and developing social impact (Jenkins et al., 2010). Determined by these individual/particular characteristics, social enterprises follow different scaling paths that link a social enterprise's operational model to the identified key components and to one of the four types of strategy. We therefore suggest that the range or spectrum of strategies that social enterprises can pursue is restricted from the outset by the characteristics of those organizations. Our scalability framework therefore reduces the complexity of choosing promising strategies for a social enterprise that intends to scale social impact. It does not recommend one optimal strategy for the enterprise's operational model, though.

*Differences of Scaling in the Social Sector as Opposed to the Commercial Sector:* Referring to the replication of social programs, van Oudenhoven and Wazir (n.d.) propose to "look to the business sector for inspiration and the great impact of large scaled programs" (paragraph 20). We found that scaling in the social sector and scaling in the commercial sector were similar as far as the replicability of the operational model was concerned. For instance, both social and commercial literature recommends focusing on the core elements of the operational or business model and/or standardizing these elements in order to foster replicability. We have, however, also identified differences between social and commercial scaling. For instance, social enterprises searching for underserved target groups and intending to initiate systemic social change deliberately tap into contexts that are highly dissimilar to the context in which they are currently embedded. By contrast, commercial enterprises are advised to keep contextual dissimilarities to a minimum when trying to maximize economic value. Ghemawat (2001) asserts that purposefully scaling into highly dissimilar contexts tends to be costly and risky. Yet high costs seem at odds with social enterprises' characteristics, for such organizations tend to face even higher resource constraints than commercial enterprises do such as the limited ability of social enterprises to pay salaries at market level (Dees, 1998). However, social enterprises that may not have enough resources to scale their

operational model might still be able to overcome even high barriers to market entry and to scale social impact by solely diffusing their knowledge, that is employing strategies like advocacy (CASE, 2006b) or open-source change-making (Waitzer & Paul, 2011). Following such strategies, social enterprises provide necessary knowledge to others willing and able to adopt their approaches. They can pass risks and costs for scaling social impact to the adapting enterprise(s), organization(s), or institution(s). These strategies of scaling impact without scaling the operational model are usually not an option for commercial enterprises for they rather tend to safeguard their knowledge from competitors (Cohen & Meyer, 2011). Hence, whereas commercial enterprises tend to ensure their unique competitive position by keeping their capabilities a secret, social enterprises tend to disclose and share their knowledge with others willing and able to adopt and lever their approach in other settings (Cohen & Meyer, 2011). In this context, the openness of social enterprises to sharing knowledge originates in their strong commitment to their social mission, which has higher priority than the profit maximization does (Austin et al., 2006; Cohen & Meyer, 2011). However, this strong commitment to the social mission might also curb the scaling ambition of social enterprises if their scaling activities risk affecting the social mission.

### CONTRIBUTION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this paper we set out to take the partially unconnected, though valuable, discussions and findings presented in the scalability literature and integrate them into a more holistic approach to scaling social impact in order to provide important new insights into that process and the possibilities of social enterprises. Our resulting scalability framework is thus intended as a contribution to both theory and practice. More precisely, it advances the research on and the practice of social entrepreneurship in at least five ways. First, by defining a taxonomy of replicability, adaptability and transferability, we offer a common basis for understanding the central terminologies of scaling that have most often been used in overlapping, inconsistent, or synonymous fashion. Application of our taxonomy to further research might help clarify investigations into the scaling of social impact. Second, we distill 241 key drivers from 88 scientific articles and book chapters in the relevant scaling literature on social impact, then derive from that material one precondition for scaling and seven key components that directly determine the scale of the social impact by social enterprises. We provide a set of factors that covers all variables of scalability that have emerged from the literature so far. These key components might serve as a guiding structure and improve the understanding of what determines the scaling of social impact. Third, we relate the identified key components to each other by suggesting interdependencies. This advance expands the understanding of the complex causalities of the various factors involved in the scalability of social impact—including the trade-offs and interfaces between the key components. The framework we suggested thereby takes account of the interdependencies between each particular key component and scalability and between the key components themselves. Fourth, and most important, we interrelate these various elements and dimensions. As a result, our comprehensive framework connects the components to the four overriding types of scaling strategies and there with adds this important link to the continuing debate on the scaling of social impact. In keeping with the partnership–adaptability matrix that we developed, our scalability framework offers four different possible scaling paths along various decision trajectories arising from the key components and leading to the four types of scaling strategies. These paths may serve as guidelines for scaling scenarios, and in that capacity they could be a major stride forward in research on the scalability of social enterprises. Fifth, we identify clear differences between social and commercial scaling activities. Although they have much in common, they differ significantly in terms of the targeted context, resource constraints, the ability to scale without scaling the operational model, and the willingness to share strategically important knowledge. In this sense we add to research that has highlighted single differences between social and commercial scaling (e.g., Cohen & Meyer, 2011). Besides these diverse contributions to theory, our scalability framework is important to practitioners as well in that it breaks the complex construct of scalability down into variables that can be analyzed

step by step. Because each key component is critical for scaling social impact, practitioners can evaluate one component after another. By regarding the interdependencies, practitioners can then identify trade-offs and interfaces between the key components. The scalability framework may thus function as a compass guiding social entrepreneurs in their decision-making process. Social enterprises are not the only beneficiaries of our scalability framework. Other practitioners, too, such as social investors or governmental institutions, may use it to improve the process of evaluating both the social enterprise under investigation and its scaling potential and to compare it to other social enterprises or active institutions in this sector.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Certain limitations of our analysis could affect the generalization of the results. First, the 241 identified key drivers were condensed to key components through intercoder agreement. This limitation may be mitigated by future quantitative research, which could indicate which key drivers belong to the proposed clusters. Moreover, additional analysis could contribute to answering the question of which key drivers have uniform influences on scalability. In this context, factor analysis could provide valuable insights. Second, the suggested interdependencies have been conceptually developed and, hence, call for empirical elaboration. Quantitative research could address this limitation by verifying how the key components influence scalability as well as each other. Keeping in mind the well-known individualities of social enterprises, researchers carrying out this verification should control for sectorial and contextual specifics. Such in-depth analysis might help tailor scalability frameworks to particular sectors and contexts and could thereby bring purposeful complexity into the investigation of the scalability concept. Qualitative research could also explore the identified trade-offs and interfaces between the various components. Third, we have suggested that strategies be classified in terms of two dimensions: partnerships and adaptation. That typology expressed in the “partnership-adaptability” matrix is a first attempt to structure the wide range of strategies discussed in the relevant literature and calls for empirical validation. Moreover, this empirical research may also identify which decisions along the critical decision-making path lead to which type of strategy for the scaling of social impact. This research could identify preferences that social enterprises or types of social enterprises have for particular scaling paths. Fourth, although we illustrated several differences between social and commercial scaling processes, we assume that our list of differences is not exhaustive. However, we believe this to be a useful starting point for research designed to distinguish scaling activities of social enterprises from those of commercial enterprises.

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FIGURE 1

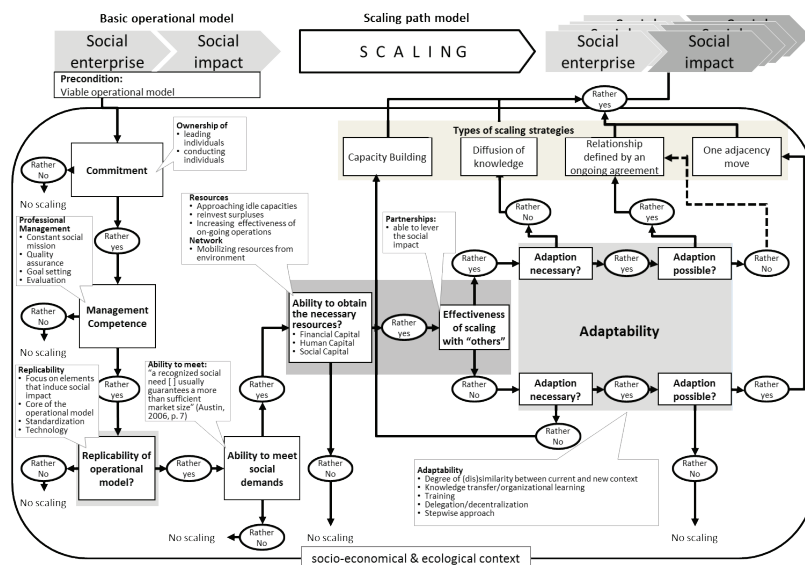


Figure 1: Scalability Framework