



Responsible Scaling Pathways for Mission-Driven Enterprises

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Abstract

Mission-driven enterprises face a distinctive scaling dilemma. Expanding organizational reach can increase the number of beneficiaries, customers, communities, or environmental outcomes served, yet rapid growth can simultaneously place pressure on mission integrity, organizational culture, service quality, stakeholder accountability, financial resilience, and the contextual knowledge that initially made the enterprise effective. This study develops responsible scaling as an organizational capability through which mission-driven enterprises expand impact while deliberately managing the risks generated by growth, replication, partnership dependence, commercialization, and institutional complexity. Scaling is treated as broader than organizational enlargement and may involve direct growth, replication, franchising or licensing, partnerships and networks, open diffusion, depth-oriented development, or influence on wider systems and institutions. The theoretical framework integrates social-impact scaling, hybrid organizing, mission-drift governance, organizational replication, accountability, and social-enterprise sustainability research. Because no primary enterprise dataset was supplied, a transparent simulation-based explanatory design was adopted.

A synthetic dataset containing 360 hypothetical mission-driven enterprise profiles was generated using responsible scaling capability, mission integrity, operational replicability, stakeholder accountability, financial resilience, and sustainable scale performance as seven-point constructs. Responsible scaling capability demonstrated a strong simulated association with sustainable scale performance ($r = 0.711$). Operational replicability ($r = 0.585$), stakeholder accountability ($r = 0.579$), financial resilience ($r = 0.562$), and mission integrity ($r = 0.539$) were also positively associated with sustainable scaling. The five constructs jointly explained approximately 66.1% of simulated variance in scale performance. Mean performance rose from 3.82 among very-low-maturity enterprises to 5.97 among very-high-maturity enterprises. These numerical outcomes are synthetic and are not presented as observations from actual enterprises. The study argues that responsible scaling requires enterprises to select pathways according to mission characteristics, transferability, stakeholder needs, resource conditions, and acceptable levels of control rather than assuming that direct organizational growth is always the superior route to greater impact.

Keywords: responsible scaling, mission-driven enterprise, social impact, mission integrity, social enterprise, mission drift, organizational replication, stakeholder accountability, sustainable growth



1. Introduction

Mission-driven enterprises combine organizational survival and economic discipline with an explicit intention to generate social, community, or environmental value. This dual orientation makes scale fundamentally different from conventional business growth. A commercial enterprise may reasonably evaluate expansion through sales, assets, geographic coverage, market share, or profitability, whereas a mission-driven enterprise must additionally determine whether greater organizational activity is producing greater mission-relevant change. Islam's integrative review of social-impact scaling emphasizes both quantitative and qualitative positive change and recognizes that scaling can occur at individual or systemic levels through multiple pathways rather than through organizational growth alone.

Earlier social-entrepreneurship research similarly challenged the assumption that scaling necessarily requires creating a larger organization. Bloom and Chatterji identified capabilities associated with scaling social entrepreneurial impact through their SCALERS framework, while Bloom and Smith subsequently developed and empirically explored that model. Lyon and Fernandez showed that social enterprises can expand impact internally through new activities and sites, but can also work beyond organizational boundaries through franchising, training, networks, relationships, and dissemination. Their research also identifies a central tradeoff: broader diffusion can increase potential impact while reducing the originating organization's control over implementation.

Scaling is therefore simultaneously an opportunity and a governance challenge. Mission-driven enterprises frequently combine social and commercial priorities that do not remain perfectly aligned as the organization grows. Smith, Gonin, and Besharov show that social enterprises experience persistent tensions between social missions and business requirements, while Battilana and Lee position social enterprises as important examples of hybrid organizations in which different organizational logics coexist. Ebrahim, Battilana, and Mair demonstrate that these hybrid characteristics create distinctive governance and accountability problems, including the risk of mission drift when market mechanisms alter priorities, incentives, beneficiary selection, or organizational attention.

The choice of scaling pathway can intensify or reduce these tensions. Lyon and Fernandez identify alternatives ranging from direct organizational expansion to approaches based on external relationships and replication. Bauwens, Huybrechts, and Dufays further demonstrate that mission orientation can be associated with different scaling strategies and distinguish growth-focused approaches from scale-out and scale-deep pathways. Their study of renewable-energy cooperatives shows that scaling strategies are not neutral technical choices; they are connected with the mission and interest orientation established within the organization.

This paper develops the concept of responsible scaling to integrate these concerns. Responsible scaling is defined as the deliberate expansion, replication, diffusion, or intensification of mission-relevant impact at a rate and through a pathway that preserves acceptable mission integrity, stakeholder accountability, operational quality, learning capacity, and financial resilience. Responsible scale is therefore distinguished from maximum scale. The objective is not to grow as rapidly as possible, but to expand impact without allowing organizational size, financial pressures, or replication mechanisms to systematically undermine the purpose that justified scaling in the first place.



2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 To Conceptualize Responsible Scaling Beyond Organizational Growth

The first objective is to conceptualize responsible scaling as a multidimensional strategic capability. Social-impact literature shows that greater impact can be achieved through different routes. Lyon and Fernandez identify strategies inside and outside organizational boundaries, while Bauwens, Huybrechts, and Dufays discuss scale-up, scale-out, and scale-deep approaches within hybrid organizations. Islam's 2020 conceptual synthesis similarly defines scaling through multiple paths rather than limiting it to one expansion model.

Responsible scaling therefore requires leaders to begin with the mission problem rather than with an organizational growth target. Direct growth may be appropriate when service quality depends on specialized capabilities that need close control. Replication or social franchising may be suitable when a proven model can be codified and transferred. Partnerships can extend reach where complementary organizations already possess local infrastructure. Open dissemination can be preferable when impact matters more than organizational ownership. Depth-oriented strategies can be appropriate when transforming outcomes for an existing community is more mission-relevant than reaching additional beneficiaries superficially.

A responsible pathway is consequently one that matches the causal structure of the intended impact. Organizational size becomes a means rather than an end. This distinction protects enterprises from equating visible expansion with mission success and provides a foundation for assessing whether scale should be achieved through organizational ownership, distributed implementation, knowledge transfer, ecosystem mobilization, or institutional influence.

2.2 To Examine Mission Integrity, Replicability, and Sustainable Scale Performance

The second objective is to examine the relationship between responsible scaling capability and sustainable scale performance. Mission integrity refers to the degree to which organizational decisions, target populations, service standards, resource allocation, and outcome measures remain consistent with the enterprise's stated purpose during expansion. This dimension is particularly important because hybrid organizations can face persistent social-commercial tensions rather than resolving them permanently.

Operational replicability represents the extent to which the mechanisms producing mission-relevant value can be specified, transferred, monitored, and adapted across locations or implementing organizations. Scaling a highly founder-dependent or tacitly operated model can produce rapid expansion without reliable reproduction of outcomes. Bloom and Chatterji's scaling framework explicitly identifies replication as one of the capabilities relevant to scaling impact, while Lyon and Fernandez show that scaling may involve transferring practice beyond the original organization's direct ownership.

The study therefore proposes that responsible scaling performs best when organizations can preserve the essential elements of their impact model while allowing contextually appropriate adaptation. Replicability should not be interpreted as mechanical standardization. The relevant question is which elements must remain consistent to protect mission outcomes and which elements can legitimately change according to local conditions.

2.3 To Assess Stakeholder Accountability and Financial Resilience During Scaling

The third objective is to assess stakeholder accountability and financial resilience as complementary scaling conditions. Ebrahim and Rangan argue that measurement systems should be aligned with the operational mission, scale, and scope of a mission-driven organization rather than automatically demanding the same long-term impact measures from every organization. Ebrahim, Battilana, and Mair similarly emphasize governance and accountability problems within hybrid social enterprises.

Stakeholder accountability becomes increasingly important during scale because organizational distance grows. Founders can become removed from frontline implementation, partnerships can diffuse responsibility, and financially powerful stakeholders may acquire greater influence over strategic priorities. Responsible scaling therefore requires mechanisms through which beneficiaries, communities, employees, customers, partners, funders, and governing bodies can evaluate whether expansion remains aligned with the mission.

Financial resilience is equally necessary because scale without durable funding can increase exposure rather than impact. Revenue growth accompanied by proportionally greater fixed costs, working-capital requirements, or dependence on unstable funding can create organizational fragility. Responsible scaling therefore treats financial sustainability as a mission-protection mechanism: an enterprise that cannot finance reliable delivery is unlikely to preserve either operational quality or long-term impact.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Social-Impact Scaling and Alternative Scaling Pathways

Bloom and Chatterji's SCALERS framework remains an influential contribution to social-impact scaling. It identifies staffing, communicating, alliance building, lobbying, earnings generation, replication, and stimulation of market forces as capabilities that can support greater impact. Bloom and Smith subsequently developed the theoretical foundation of this framework and subjected it to exploratory empirical testing, reinforcing the view that scaling depends on organizational capabilities rather than on ambition alone.

Lyon and Fernandez extend this perspective by demonstrating that scaling can move outside the boundaries of the originating organization. Their case research identifies approaches including new activities and sites, social franchises, training, networks, and other forms of knowledge transfer. Importantly, they observe that wider partnership and dissemination strategies can increase potential impact while reducing the originating organization's direct control.

Desa and Koch examine scaling social impact in base-of-the-pyramid contexts and connect scale with the process of building sustainable social ventures. Bauwens, Huybrechts, and Dufays later reinforce the diversity of scaling strategies by demonstrating that hybrid enterprises can pursue markedly different combinations of scale-up, scale-out, and depth-oriented expansion and that these choices are connected with organizational mission. Together, this literature indicates that scaling pathway selection should be treated as a strategic design problem rather than as a universal progression toward larger organizational size.



3.2 Hybrid Organizing, Mission Drift, and Ethical Scaling

Mission-driven enterprises frequently combine logics that create enduring rather than temporary tensions. Smith, Gonin, and Besharov identify several forms of social–business tension and argue that understanding social enterprise requires explicit attention to how these competing demands are managed. Battilana and Lee similarly conceptualize social enterprises as emblematic hybrid organizations that combine constitutive elements associated with different organizational forms.

Scaling intensifies these tensions because new capital, managerial systems, professionalization, external partnerships, performance targets, and customer segments can alter the relative influence of commercial and mission priorities. Ebrahim, Battilana, and Mair's governance analysis identifies mission drift and accountability as central challenges for organizations pursuing social missions through market mechanisms. André and Pache make the related ethical argument that social entrepreneurs must transform founder-level care into organization-level structures if ethical commitments are to survive expansion.

Mission preservation does not mean preventing all strategic evolution. A mission-driven enterprise may legitimately revise delivery methods, revenue models, technologies, partnerships, or target segments as evidence changes. The relevant distinction is between mission adaptation and mission drift. Adaptation alters means in order to preserve or strengthen the intended impact, whereas drift allows growth incentives or external pressures to redefine the purpose without adequate mission-based justification. Responsible scaling requires governance processes capable of distinguishing between these two trajectories.

3.3 Accountability, Organizational Capability, and Sustainable Scale

Responsible scale also depends on the capacity to demonstrate what is being scaled. Ebrahim and Rangan caution against undifferentiated impact-measurement expectations and propose evaluating social performance according to operational mission, scale, and scope. Their framework is important because enterprises can easily substitute indicators of organizational activity—such as sites opened, transactions completed, or participants enrolled—for evidence that intended outcomes are improving.

Bauwens, Huybrechts, and Dufays show that scaling approaches can be imprinted by organizational mission and can also operate through interorganizational collaboration rather than isolated firm growth. Their findings suggest that missions may sometimes be pursued collectively through networks of organizations with complementary roles. This creates a broader accountability challenge because no single enterprise necessarily controls the full impact pathway.

The literature therefore supports a conception of sustainable scale built around organizational capability, governance, and contextual fit. Responsible scaling requires sufficient human resources, financial resources, transferability of the operating model, monitoring systems, learning processes, and relationships with external actors. It also requires leaders to recognize circumstances in which refusing premature growth may protect future impact more effectively than accepting expansion opportunities for which the enterprise is not organizationally prepared.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Analytical Scope

The study employs a quantitative simulation-based explanatory design. No completed survey, financial database, beneficiary outcome dataset, social-impact audit, or longitudinal enterprise record was provided. Presenting numerical findings as observations from actual mission-driven enterprises would therefore be inappropriate. Synthetic data are used solely to demonstrate how the proposed responsible-scaling framework could be operationalized in future empirical research.

A total of 360 hypothetical mission-driven enterprise profiles was generated. Each observation represents a conceptual enterprise rather than an identifiable organization. The framework can conceptually apply to social enterprises, mission-oriented businesses, hybrid ventures, community enterprises, and other organizations that combine revenue or commercial activity with an explicit social or environmental mission.

Table 1: Operationalization of the Responsible Scaling Framework

Construct	Scale	Conceptual Operationalization	Analytical Role
Responsible Scaling Capability	1–7	Ability to select and sequence scaling pathways according to mission, evidence, capacity, risk, and contextual conditions	Primary explanatory construct
Mission Integrity	1–7	Degree to which beneficiaries, outcome priorities, ethical commitments, and decision criteria remain aligned with organizational purpose during scale	Explanatory mechanism
Operational Replicability	1–7	Capacity to codify, transfer, reproduce, monitor, and contextually adapt the enterprise's impact-producing model	Explanatory mechanism
Stakeholder Accountability	1–7	Quality of governance, stakeholder voice, transparency, impact monitoring, and responsibility across expanded operations	Explanatory mechanism
Financial Resilience	1–7	Ability to finance expansion without excessive instability, unsustainable subsidy dependence, or deterioration of mission-critical service quality	Explanatory mechanism
Sustainable Scale Performance	1–7	Ability to expand the magnitude of mission-relevant impact while sustaining organizational and financial viability	Dependent variable

Note: All observations and statistical results are synthetic and are generated exclusively for methodological demonstration.

4.2 Synthetic Data Generation and Scaling Logic

Responsible scaling capability was generated as the principal explanatory construct. Mission integrity was modeled as positively but imperfectly associated with scaling maturity. The imperfect relationship reflects the theoretical possibility that organizations can possess sophisticated scaling systems while still experiencing mission tension because of financing, governance, or stakeholder pressures.

Operational replicability was also modeled as related to responsible scaling capability because mature enterprises should possess clearer processes for identifying core versus adaptable components of their model. Stakeholder accountability was generated partly from scaling capability and mission integrity, while financial resilience was modeled from scaling maturity and replicability.

Sustainable scale performance was then generated from responsible scaling capability, mission integrity, operational replicability, stakeholder accountability, financial resilience, and stochastic variation. The random component represents additional influences such as sector, regulatory environment, leadership succession, organizational age, capital availability, competitive conditions, political risk, technology, and local institutional capacity.

4.3 Statistical Procedures and Ethical Boundaries

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated first. Ordinary least squares multiple regression was subsequently used to estimate sustainable scale performance from the five explanatory constructs.

The 360 profiles were divided into five equal responsible-scaling maturity categories: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high, with 72 synthetic enterprises in each category. Mean outcomes were calculated across these groups, and 95% confidence intervals from the simulated observations were included in the graph.

The methodology makes no claim that simulated statistical significance establishes real causal relationships. The synthetic model is intended to demonstrate construct relationships, guide questionnaire development, support future hypotheses, and prevent the presentation of fabricated field evidence.

5. Analysis

5.1 Relationships Among Responsible Scaling Capabilities

The synthetic dataset produced a mean responsible scaling capability score of 4.08, mission integrity of 3.69, operational replicability of 3.70, stakeholder accountability of 4.05, financial resilience of 3.71, and sustainable scale performance of 4.83.

Responsible scaling capability demonstrated the strongest association with sustainable scale performance, with a simulated Pearson correlation of $r = 0.711$. Operational replicability was positively related to sustainable scale at $r = 0.585$, stakeholder accountability at $r = 0.579$, financial resilience at $r = 0.562$, and mission integrity at $r = 0.539$.

The results illustrate the multidimensional character of responsible scale. High scaling capability alone cannot fully compensate for weak governance, inadequate replication processes, fragile finances, or deteriorating mission alignment. The model therefore conceptualizes scale performance as a system outcome rather than as a direct product of organizational growth.



5.2 Responsible Scaling Maturity and Sustainable Scale Performance

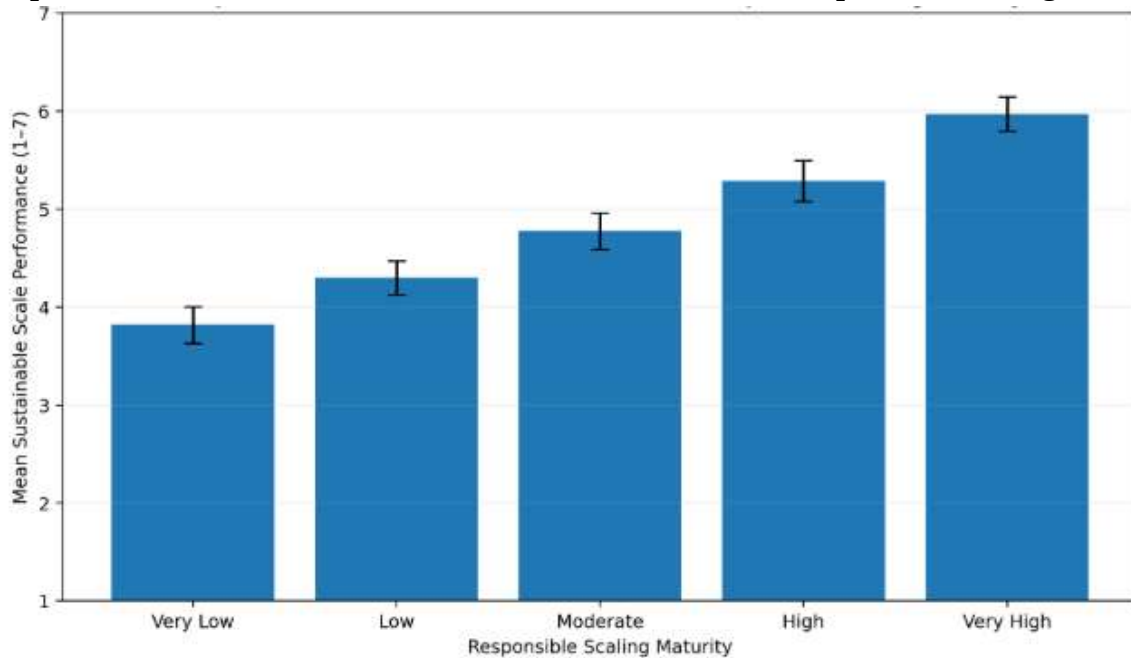
Table 2: Simulated Outcomes Across Responsible Scaling Maturity

Scaling Maturity	Synthetic Enterprises (n)	Mean Scaling Capability	Mean Mission Integrity	Mean Operational Replicability	Mean Stakeholder Accountability	Mean Financial Resilience	Mean Sustainable Scale Performance
Very Low	72	2.66	3.00	2.84	3.19	2.99	3.82
Low	72	3.54	3.31	3.34	3.65	3.37	4.30
Moderate	72	4.06	3.65	3.65	4.02	3.67	4.77
High	72	4.60	3.95	4.02	4.39	3.97	5.29
Very High	72	5.54	4.55	4.63	5.00	4.54	5.97

Mean sustainable scale performance increases from 3.82 in the very-low-maturity group to 4.30 in the low group, 4.77 at moderate maturity, 5.29 at high maturity, and 5.97 among very-high-maturity enterprises. The total illustrative difference between the lowest and highest categories is approximately 2.15 points on the seven-point scale.

Mission integrity increases more gradually than overall scale performance. This is theoretically meaningful because growth capability and mission preservation should not be assumed to develop automatically at identical rates. Enterprises may learn how to acquire resources and replicate operations faster than they develop governance systems capable of protecting mission commitments.

Graph 1: Simulated Sustainable Scale Performance Across Responsible Scaling Maturity



Interpretation: Sustainable scale performance rises consistently as responsible scaling maturity increases. The progressive pattern suggests that enterprises perform more strongly when scaling is accompanied by deliberate mission protection, replication capability, financial resilience, and stakeholder accountability rather than pursued as organizational expansion alone.

Key Finding: Within the simulation, very-high responsible-scaling maturity is associated with substantially stronger sustainable scale performance than low-maturity expansion.

5.3 Multivariate Assessment of Sustainable Scale Performance

The regression model showed an R^2 of 0.661 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.656, indicating that the five constructs jointly explained 66.1% of the simulated variation in sustainable scale performance. Responsible scaling capability had the strongest coefficient (0.258), followed by operational replicability (0.244), stakeholder accountability (0.214), financial resilience (0.212), and mission integrity (0.203), with all relationships remaining positive.

The balanced coefficients suggest that responsible scaling is multidimensional rather than dependent on one managerial practice. Sustainable expansion requires effective scaling decisions alongside mission preservation, operational replicability, stakeholder accountability, and financial resilience.

6. Discussion

6.1 Responsible Scaling Begins With Pathway Selection Rather Than Growth Targets

The first implication is that mission-driven leaders should distinguish scaling impact from scaling the organization. Lyon and Fernandez show that social enterprises can expand impact through organizational growth but also through social franchises, training, networks, and knowledge



dissemination. Their analysis explicitly identifies a tradeoff between wider potential impact and decreasing control by the original innovator.

This tradeoff makes pathway selection an ethical and strategic decision. Direct organizational growth provides relatively high control but can be capital intensive and managerial-resource intensive. Franchising or licensing can reproduce a model more rapidly but creates quality-control requirements. Partnership strategies can exploit local knowledge and infrastructure while creating shared-accountability problems. Open diffusion can maximize accessibility but sharply reduce control over how the model is implemented. Depth scaling may preserve relational quality and community embeddedness while producing limited geographic reach.

Bauwens, Huybrechts, and Dufays reinforce this position by showing that scaling strategy can be understood in relation to organizational mission and by documenting meaningful differences among scale-up, scale-out, and depth-oriented approaches. Responsible scaling therefore requires leadership to identify what type of growth the mission actually demands rather than treating increased organizational size as evidence of success.

6.2 Mission Integrity Must Be Institutionalized Before Rapid Expansion

The second implication concerns mission drift. Hybrid organizations contain multiple goals and institutional logics, and those tensions can intensify as enterprises professionalize and become more dependent on external capital, paying customers, or performance targets. Smith, Gonin, and Besharov characterize social–business tensions as persistent organizational challenges, while Ebrahim, Battilana, and Mair explicitly connect hybrid governance with mission-drift and accountability risks.

Responsible scaling therefore requires mission integrity to move from founder intention into organizational architecture. Mission-relevant criteria should be visible in board responsibilities, recruitment, incentive systems, customer or beneficiary selection, investment decisions, partnership agreements, performance dashboards, and expansion approval processes. If mission protection depends entirely on a founder's personal judgment, growth will eventually increase the number of decisions occurring beyond that founder's direct control.

André and Pache's argument concerning the transition from a caring entrepreneur to a caring enterprise is especially relevant. Ethical commitments that operate only at founder level can be challenged by the scaling process; preserving them requires organizational structures and processes capable of reproducing those commitments at enterprise level.

6.3 Accountability and Financial Resilience Define the Boundary of Responsible Speed

The third implication is that speed should be conditional on organizational evidence. Enterprises frequently encounter pressure to expand after a successful pilot or an influx of funding. Yet a locally effective intervention may rely on tacit founder knowledge, unusually committed early employees, specific community relationships, or subsidized resources that do not automatically transfer to other locations. Scaling before these dependencies are understood can increase reach while reducing outcome quality.

Impact measurement should therefore be linked directly to the mission and operating model. Ebrahim and Rangan's framework is useful because it distinguishes among outputs, outcomes, and wider



impact and argues that measurement should reflect the organization's operational mission, scale, and scope rather than follow a universal reporting template. Responsible enterprises should know which indicators must remain stable during expansion and which measures demonstrate that the intended impact mechanism is surviving replication.

Financial resilience sets another boundary. An enterprise that acquires new sites or participants faster than it develops working capital, competent staff, quality assurance, and revenue reliability may produce organizational fragility. Scaling should therefore proceed through decision gates: the next stage of expansion should depend on evidence that mission outcomes, operating quality, stakeholder trust, and financial capacity remain within acceptable ranges. Responsible scaling is consequently not necessarily slow scaling. It is evidence-paced scaling.

7. Conclusion

Responsible scaling requires mission-driven enterprises to redefine what organizational success means during expansion. Greater size, revenue, geographic reach, or beneficiary counts can be valuable, but these indicators become strategically meaningful only when they correspond with an increase in mission-relevant impact. Scaling therefore involves a continuing choice concerning what should grow, what must remain protected, what can be transferred, and which actors need to participate in expansion. The simulation-based analysis provides an internally coherent illustration of this framework. Responsible scaling capability was strongly and positively associated with sustainable scale performance, while operational replicability, stakeholder accountability, financial resilience, and mission integrity each contributed positively. Sustainable scale performance increased progressively across responsible-scaling maturity categories. These outcomes are generated from synthetic profiles and are not presented as empirical evidence from real enterprises.

The paper's principal theoretical contribution is to integrate scaling pathways with hybrid governance and mission preservation. Responsible scaling rejects two opposing assumptions: first, that rapid organizational growth is always desirable because more scale automatically means more impact; and second, that growth necessarily threatens mission and should therefore be avoided. Different pathways involve different combinations of reach, depth, control, resource requirements, and mission risk. The appropriate strategy depends on the nature of the problem, the transferability of the solution, the enterprise's capabilities, and the degree of local adaptation required.

Future empirical research should examine these relationships using longitudinal data from mission-driven enterprises before, during, and after major scaling transitions. Researchers should compare direct organizational expansion, social franchising, licensing, partnerships, network diffusion, open replication, depth scaling, and system-level influence. Particularly valuable studies would track not only revenue and beneficiary numbers but also mission consistency, outcome quality, employee capability, beneficiary voice, financial dependence, partner performance, and organizational learning. Responsible scaling should ultimately be judged by a demanding but practical criterion: whether the enterprise can increase the magnitude of its mission-relevant contribution without systematically weakening the organizational conditions that made that contribution credible in the first place.



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