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***Scaling for Impact : Applying Organizational Frameworks to a
Mission-Driven NGO's Growth***

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 - ☐ Purpose of AI use (e.g., brainstorming, drafting, summarizing, editing): GenAI was used to assist with brainstorming, drafting, and critically evaluating the essay's structure and coherence. The analysis, reflection, and organizational context were entirely provided by me, while AI helped refine ideas and enhance clarity in alignment with the essay's overall theme and purpose.
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- ☐ I take full responsibility for the content of this submission and confirm that AI was used only as a **support tool**, not as the primary creator of my work.
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- o I have ensured that no **confidential or private data** was shared with AI tools without proper permissions.
- o I have adhered to all legal requirements regarding **data protection** and **intellectual property**, and have appropriately cited any sources.

5. **Originality and Human Authorship**

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- o The assessment reflects my personal intellectual effort, and I confirm that it complies with Trinity Business School's guidelines on AI use and academic integrity.

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By signing this form, I affirm that this submission is a true reflection of my work and that I have adhered to the principles of responsible AI use.

Signature: Mitali Badkul

Date: 3 December 2024

Scaling for Impact - Applying Organizational Frameworks to a Mission-Driven NGO's Growth

Introduction

In the plural sector, where organizations strive to serve society's needs beyond the reach of governments or markets, growth is not just about expansion, it is about sustaining purpose and impact (Mintzberg, 2015). For mission-driven organizations, particularly NGOs operating in this sector, the challenge of scaling is both essential and complex. While corporations focus on economies of scale, NGOs must navigate the intricacies of societal gaps, balancing agility, collaboration, and purpose-driven work. *How can such organizations design structures that enable sustainable growth without losing sight of their mission?*

Globally, numerous NGOs serve as a bridge in addressing developmental gaps, often in resource-constrained settings. In contexts such as India where NGOs outnumber schools and hospitals combined, their role is undeniable but fraught with challenges (Indian Express, 2015). Having worked with NGOs across diverse structural and cultural contexts, I have witnessed firsthand how these limitations affect their growth and impact. This experience guided my approach to analyzing frameworks taught in this module, which highlighted key scaling strategies while also revealing their limitations in addressing the complexities of purpose-driven organizations.

This essay evaluates the evolution, current structure, and future potential of a for-impact EdTech NGO (referred to as "the NGO"). The NGO, rooted in the Creativity Phase of Greiner's Growth Model, has reached the Direction Phase, where it grapples with tensions between operational efficiency and scaling for impact. By analyzing its readiness to transition to the Collaboration Phase, this essay examines structural bottlenecks and opportunities for systemic change. Frameworks such as Mintzberg's Configurations, Dees' Scaling Principles, and the Helix Model provide the foundation for this critique, alongside insights from Humanocracy principles and Kotter's 8-Step Model for change management.

The NGO's AI-driven innovation is central to its potential, positioning it to address educational inequities at scale. However, without deliberate structural adaptations, this potential may remain unrealized. This essay provides tailored recommendations to foster collaborative, resilient structures while maintaining mission alignment. The analysis underscores a recurring theme: the interplay between structure, agility, and mission as critical to sustainable growth.



Figure : (The NGO) Organization Timeline

History & evaluation

The NGO began in 2015 as a grassroots initiative aimed at addressing educational inequities in underserved communities. It operated as a Simple Structure (Mintzberg, 1990), with decision-making centralized under the founder, who served as the Strategic Apex. Coordination mechanisms relied heavily on informal communication and the intrinsic motivation of volunteers who shared a strong commitment to the NGO's mission. This phase mirrored the Creativity Phase in Greiner's Growth Model (1998), marked by innovation, agility, and a reliance on passion rather than formal processes.

A key milestone in the NGO's early journey was winning the Harvard President's Innovation Challenge in 2018, which not only validated its mission but also attracted donor interest. However, as the organization's operations expanded, cracks began to appear in its informal structure. Volunteers and team members often faced unclear expectations, and the founder's centralized control became a bottleneck. This Leadership Crisis, as defined by Greiner, necessitated the formalization of processes to support growth and scalability.

By 2022, the NGO transitioned to a more formalized structure, adopting vertical silos - Product, Operations, Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E), and Partnerships, characteristic of a Machine Bureaucracy. While this transition brought much-needed clarity and efficiency, it also introduced new challenges, like limited collaboration, and constrained the autonomy of middle managers, stifling their ability to drive innovation. The organizational audit ([Figure 1](#)) underscores these dynamics, revealing high centralization and formalization scores indicative of Machine Bureaucracy, alongside low autonomy scores, which reflect underutilized Professional Organization traits. The NGO's evolution from a volunteer-driven grassroots initiative to a more formalized structure highlights the inherent trade-offs in scaling for impact. The early phase's innovation and flexibility enabled rapid growth, but as the organization entered the Direction Phase of Greiner's model ([Figure 2](#)), the need for structure and control introduced tensions between operational efficiency and inhibited cross-functional collaboration, aligning the NGO with the Direction Phase of Greiner's Growth Model.

Current structure

The NGO's current structure represents a hybrid of **Machine Bureaucracy** and **Divisional Organization** (Mintzberg, 1990), characterized by formalized processes designed to balance **operational efficiency with scalability**. At the **Strategic Apex**, the CEO retains centralized control, overseeing both strategic and operational decisions. The verticals—comprising Product, Operations, Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E), and Partnerships—function as semi-autonomous units with clearly defined objectives but minimal interdependence, reflecting **Divisional traits**.

Similarly, the **Operating Core**, consisting of teachers, content creators, and field implementers, operates efficiently but remains disconnected from strategic planning, limiting its contribution to **organizational innovation**. The **Technostructure**, led by the M&E team, generates valuable data-driven insights but functions in isolation, curtailing its ability to influence integrated programmatic decisions. While this structure ensures operational stability, it inherently restricts **agility and innovation**—both essential for scaling impact.

Key Observations

- Underutilized Advisory Board - The advisory board, despite offering valuable strategic expertise, remains consultative and peripheral to decision-making. This underutilization represents a missed opportunity to leverage diverse perspectives for long-term strategy development and accountability. Strategic integration of the advisory board could enhance governance and provide critical support for adaptive planning.
- Silos and Centralization - Middle managers operate with constrained autonomy, and cross-vertical collaboration is minimal. The introduction of a new **Middle Line** layer above vertical heads,

intended to streamline decision-making and strengthen oversight, has inadvertently deepened reliance on **Coordination by Standardization** and **Direct Supervision**. Rather than mitigating silos, this additional hierarchy reinforces them, further limiting lateral coordination and innovation.

1.

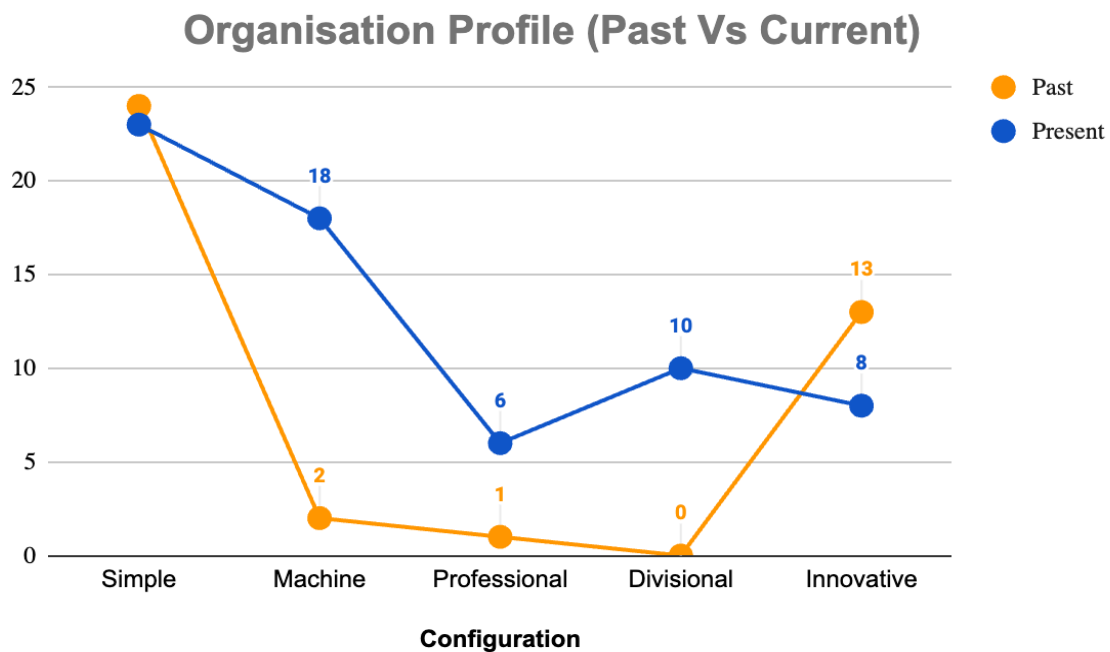


Figure 1 : Organization Audit (Mintzberg's Configuration – History Vs Current)¹

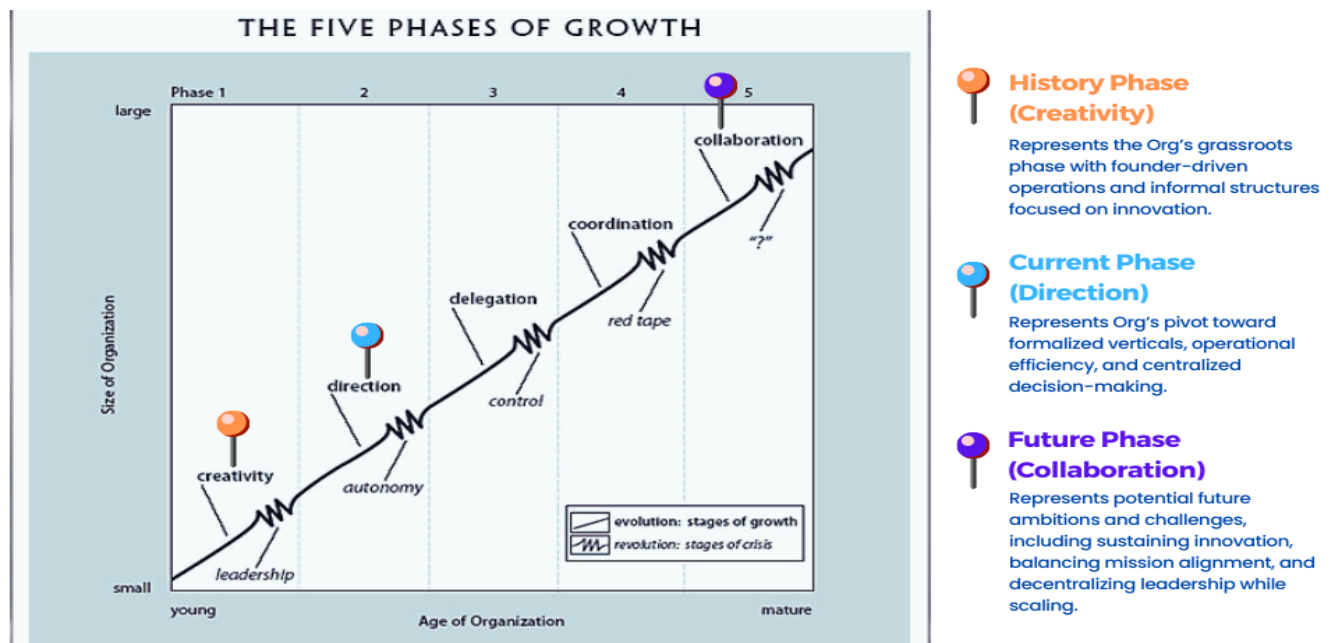
The organizational audit scores (refer [Figure 1](#)) offer quantitative insights into the NGO's current structural configuration:

- **High scores for Machine Bureaucracy (18)** reflect the dominance of formalized processes and a focus on operational consistency.
- **Moderate scores for Divisional traits (10)** highlight clear segmentation but limited integration across verticals.
- **Low scores for Professional traits (6)** emphasize restricted autonomy and collaboration, underscoring the lack of mutual adjustment mechanisms.

¹ Comparative Organizational Audit Table shared by Professor John Quilliam during the Management & Organisation module, Trinity Business School, FT MBA Class 2024/25. The audit scores spreadsheet, comparing the NGO's past and current structures, can be accessed : [here](#).

These dynamics align the NGO with the **Direction Phase** of Greiner's Growth Model (1998), where centralized leadership and formalized structures dominate. While this phase has delivered much-needed operational clarity, it also risks creating a **Crisis of Autonomy**. Rigid structures and top-down decision-making constrain the engagement and contributions of middle managers, volunteers, and advisory board members. Moving to the Collaboration Phase will require deliberate investments in Mutual Adjustment and lateral coordination mechanisms, enabling cross-functional teams and decentralizing authority.

GREINER'S EVOLUTION & REVOLUTION MODEL



Source : Greiner, L. E. (1998). "Evolution and Revolution as Organizations Grow." Harvard Business Review, May-June 1998

Figure 2 : Greiner's Evolution & Revolution

The Dichotomy of Economies of Scale and Mission-Driven Growth

The NGO's reliance on formalized processes and segmentation reflects an approach suited to achieving **economies of scale**, often seen in corporate settings. In corporate environments, structures like Mintzberg's Machine Bureaucracy excel due to their emphasis on standardization, functional specialization, and centralized decision-making, which drive consistency and efficiency. However, these same attributes create challenges for mission-driven NGOs operating in dynamic and

resource-constrained environments. For NGOs, scaling impact requires adaptability, stakeholder integration, and lateral coordination mechanisms that enable cross-functional collaboration and responsiveness to local contexts (Dees, 2004).

This misalignment between structure and purpose highlights the limitations of the NGO's current configuration. While its formalized processes provide operational stability, they constrain the flexibility needed to adapt programs to diverse contexts or effectively engage resources like the advisory board and volunteers. Similarly, while Greiner's Growth Model provides valuable insights into organizational scaling phases, its linear framework does not fully address the iterative, adaptive processes required in plural-sector organizations and VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) environments. For the NGO, transitioning from the Direction Phase to the Collaboration Phase demands more than resolving a Crisis of Autonomy—it requires embedding adaptive coordination mechanisms and fostering a culture of trust and innovation. These critiques extend beyond NGOs. Even corporations increasingly encounter challenges with traditional hierarchical structures in today's unpredictable environments. To make frameworks like Machine Bureaucracy and Greiner's Growth Model more relevant across sectors, particularly in VUCA contexts, several adaptations are necessary:

- Empowering Decentralization - Enabling middle managers and regional leaders to make decisions within defined boundaries, balancing agility with strategic alignment.
- Strengthening Lateral Coordination - Promoting cross-functional teams and shared objectives to break down silos and encourage innovation.
- Incorporating Feedback Loops - Establishing continuous learning processes to enable real-time adaptation to evolving circumstances.

For the NGO, embedding these adaptive mechanisms is essential to bridging the gap between scaling operations and scaling impact. Such adjustments are critical to ensuring its growth aligns with its mission while remaining responsive to stakeholder needs and environmental shifts. As explored in the recommendations, hybrid approaches like the Helix Model provide a way to reconcile efficiency and flexibility, enabling the organization to achieve sustainable, mission-driven growth.

The Future

Opportunities and Readiness

Scaling impact for the NGO involves more than operational growth, it requires a multidimensional approach addressing systemic, cultural, and contextual challenges. Dees' Scaling Framework provides a robust lens for analyzing and extending impact sustainably. Interestingly, the NGO is already leveraging several of these pathways—such as Scaling Up through partnerships with state governments and Scaling

Out via its AI-powered personalization tools. These efforts have created a solid foundation for broader impact and highlight the organization's readiness to scale further. However, opportunities remain to strengthen its approach to Scaling Deep and Scaling Through by building deeper community trust and enhancing collaborative partnerships, as detailed in the [Appendix](#). Together, these pathways reflect how the NGO's structure can enable effective, systemic scaling.

The NGO's AI-powered learning assistant uniquely positions it to address educational inequities at scale. Its ability to deliver personalized learning through WhatsApp demonstrates high potential for replication across diverse geographies and cultural contexts. Supported by data-driven insights from its Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) team, the NGO has built a strong foundation for assessing learner outcomes and refining program effectiveness.

At its core, the NGO's strength lies in its mission-driven workforce, comprising employees and volunteers intrinsically motivated by purpose over profit. This aligns with Theory Y (McGregor, 1960), which highlights the power of autonomy, trust, and purpose. Coupled with Humanocracy principles (Hamel & Zanini, 2020), this workforce can be a catalyst for innovation and systemic impact when empowered with collaborative frameworks.

The NGO's hybrid structure combining remote and on-ground operations offers a strong foundation for adopting the Helix Model, which balances operational efficiency with capability building (McKinsey & Company, 2021). However, underutilized resources like the advisory board and volunteers must be strategically integrated to enhance governance, adaptability, and cultural alignment.

Over-reliance on centralized decision-making and Machine Bureaucracy traits risks entrenching silos and limiting collaboration—critical for scaling impact. Remaining in the Direction Phase of Greiner's Growth Model without advancing to the Collaboration Phase could perpetuate disengagement and missed opportunities for systemic growth ([Figure 2](#)). By leveraging its existing strengths while embedding adaptive mechanisms, the NGO can overcome these challenges and scale impact sustainably. The following recommendations attempt to outline actionable steps toward achieving this transformation.

Recommendations and Predictions

The NGO's trajectory reflects both its potential and its challenges—a mission-driven organization that has achieved much yet risks being constrained by its own structure. To unlock its full potential and transition effectively to the Collaboration Phase, the NGO must rethink how it leverages its strengths, addresses its structural gaps, and builds for sustainable, mission-aligned growth. The following recommendations focus on decentralizing leadership, fostering adaptive structures, and embedding change management principles to enable scalable impact.

Decentralize Leadership and Foster Humanocracy

The NGO's people, its employees and volunteers, can be utilized by decentralizing leadership, guided by Humanocracy principles (Hamel & Zanini, 2020), the organization can empower middle managers and regional leaders to innovate while maintaining alignment with strategic goals. Key actions include:

- **Decision-Making Matrices** - Clearly defining accountabilities and decision-making boundaries to empower leaders at all levels without losing strategic coherence.
- **Distributed Leadership Models** - Allowing regional leaders and middle managers to take ownership of localized program design and delivery, ensuring responsiveness to contextual needs.

These changes would not only foster innovation and trust but also align with the NGO's mission of serving diverse, underserved communities.

Leverage the Helix Model

Reflecting on the NGO's structural evolution, it is evident that operational efficiency has often been prioritized at the expense of capability building. The **Helix Model** (McKinsey & Company, 2021) offers a dual-track approach to redress this balance:

- **Operational Track:** Leveraging AI dashboards and real-time analytics can improve decision-making autonomy at the regional level, reducing reliance on centralized oversight and enhancing process consistency.
- **Capability-Building Track:** Investing in leadership development and fostering lateral coordination. Cross-functional teams, integrating advisory board members, volunteers, and middle managers, can drive both innovation and cultural alignment while breaking down silos.

This dual-track approach would enable the NGO to simultaneously optimize its operations and build the internal capacity required for sustained impact.

Implement Kotter's 8-Step Model for Organizational Change

To effectively transition to the Collaboration Phase, the NGO must embed a structured approach to change management. Kotter's 8-Step Model (Kotter, 1996) offers a practical framework for managing this transformation:

1. **Create a Sense of Urgency:** Highlight the risks of remaining in the Direction Phase, such as disengagement and missed opportunities, to mobilize stakeholders.

2. **Build a Guiding Coalition:** Establish a cross-functional team that includes middle managers, advisory board members, and volunteers to champion the scaling vision.
3. **Develop a Vision and Strategy:** Craft a clear vision that links operational efficiency with mission alignment, supported by actionable strategies like decentralization and lateral coordination.
4. **Communicate the Vision:** Use tailored communication channels (e.g., town halls, workshops, newsletters) to ensure buy-in from employees, volunteers, and external stakeholders.
5. **Empower Broad-Based Action:** Remove structural barriers like excessive centralization by implementing decision-making matrices and encouraging mutual adjustment.
6. **Generate Short-Term Wins:** Pilot initiatives such as cross-functional task forces or regional program innovations, showcasing early successes to build momentum.
7. **Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change:** Scale successful pilots across the organization, refining processes and building on stakeholder feedback.
8. **Anchor New Approaches in Culture:** Embed collaboration, decentralization, and ethical practices into the NGO's culture through ongoing training, transparent evaluations, and stakeholder engagement.

By systematically applying this framework, the NGO can embed adaptive coordination mechanisms and foster a culture of collaboration and innovation.

Address Ethical and Transparent Practices

As a mission-driven organization, ethical transparency must be a cornerstone of the NGO's scaling efforts. To enhance trust and alignment with stakeholders:

- Establish an Ethics Committee - Ensure programmatic outcomes align with donor expectations and community needs, safeguarding mission integrity.
- Mission-Driven Evaluations - Link performance evaluations to mission-driven outcomes, motivating employees and volunteers to maintain their commitment to impact-focused goals.

These practices not only build trust among stakeholders but also reinforce the NGO's ethos, ensuring alignment with its purpose at every level.

Conclusion

Scaling for impact is a complex and evolving challenge, requiring mission-driven organizations to address structural realities while staying true to their purpose. This essay has critically examined the NGO's growth trajectory, demonstrating that its success hinges on the dynamic and tailored application of organizational frameworks. Positioned at a pivotal moment, the NGO's ability to integrate AI-driven

innovation, operational stability, and mission alignment will shape its structural future and capacity to achieve sustainable impact.

The frameworks explored—Mintzberg’s Configurations, Greiner’s Growth Model, Dees’ Scaling Principles, Kotter’s 8-Step Model, and the Helix Model—provided valuable insights into diagnosing structural gaps and identifying actionable pathways for improvement. They clarified the inherent tension between operational stability and adaptability, a dichotomy that reflects the contrasting demands of corporate scaling and mission-driven scaling. While corporates often prioritize economies of scale through standardization and efficiency, NGOs must navigate complex, resource-constrained environments where collaboration, flexibility, and contextual responsiveness are paramount.

Moving forward, the NGO must adopt structures that prioritize decentralized leadership, cross-functional collaboration, and cultural alignment to bridge this gap. This analysis highlights that scaling for impact is neither linear nor prescriptive, demanding a continuous reimagining of structures to balance internal aspirations with external complexities. For mission-driven organizations, this journey is about more than scaling operations, it is about ensuring that growth remains aligned with purpose and community impact. As Mintzberg aptly observes, “*An organization is not a machine; it is a living organism*” (Mintzberg, 1983). This insight underscores the importance of fostering adaptability and intentionality in every structural evolution. By embracing this mindset, the NGO can serve as a model for reconciling the demands of operational efficiency with the need for mission-driven innovation, offering a blueprint for sustainable, scalable growth.

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Additional references include course slides, reading material uploaded on Blackboard, classroom discussions, lectures, and publicly available sources such as LinkedIn and Glassdoor.

Appendix

Dees' Scaling Framework

The NGO's initiatives, such as integrating programs into public school systems through state government partnerships (**Scaling Up**) and leveraging AI to personalize learning for diverse learner contexts (**Scaling Wide**), reflect a deliberate effort to extend its impact sustainably. By focusing on **Scaling Deep**, the NGO ensures cultural relevance through community trust-building and volunteer involvement. Similarly, its collaboration with corporates and advisory boards (**Scaling Through**) enhances organizational capacity, while its AI-powered product enables it to directly scale outreach to broader demographics (**Scaling Out**).

Scaling Pathway	Definition	Relevance to the NGO
Scaling Deep	Focusing on cultural and behavioural change within a community or system.	Building trust with underserved communities, ensuring programs are culturally relevant, and using volunteers for localized program delivery.
Scaling Up	Influencing policy and institutional frameworks to enable systemic change.	Partnering with state governments to integrate programs into public school systems, expanding reach and sustainability.
Scaling Wide	Replicating programs in new geographic or demographic contexts.	Extending AI-enabled learning solutions to underserved regions and urban centers, ensuring contextual adaptability.
Scaling Through	Collaborating with partners to co-deliver programs or scale through collective efforts.	Leveraging corporate partnerships and advisory board expertise to scale delivery and expand organizational capacity.
Scaling Out	Expanding direct service delivery to reach more beneficiaries.	Using AI-driven personalization to scale outreach from 10,000 learners to broader target demographics.