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Scale Accelerator: Summary Learning Paper

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Participating organisations all describe significant benefits from taking part in Scale Accelerator; all would recommend the programme to others.

About Scale Accelerator

Scale Accelerator is an intensive programme of consultancy support delivered by Spring Impact to social purpose organisations. It aims to support these organisations to scale their programmes and to reach more service users more effectively.

Since 2019, 21 organisations[1] have taken part in Scale Accelerator and 19 in Leaders of Scale. Four cohorts were offered a mix of group workshops; bespoke consultancy; reports; and modelling. Support shifted online due to Covid-19, with some face-to-face meetings for the final cohort.

[1] One organisation (not included in this total) withdrew as a result of Covid pressures

Seven Steps to Scale

In an earlier learning paper, m2 suggested that three key organisational elements - **the '3Cs', culture, coherence, change** - increase the likelihood of Scale Accelerator being able to support effective organisational scaling plans:

- **Organisational culture:** an open, curious environment in which challenge is seen to be constructive and processes are in place to learn and reflect;

- **Organisational coherence:** strategic vision is aligned with the focus upon scaling, and there is a clear sense about what can be achieved through scale;

- **Social change:** there is existing and demonstrable social impact as a result of the intervention looking to be scaled, and internal mechanisms to capture data on this.

Participants on the Scale Accelerator programme demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of what is needed to scale up and identified seven key ways in which Scale Accelerator had enabled them to do this:

1 Increased strategic thinking

Participants describe moving from firefighting mode to strategic thinking. A particularly important aspect of this is a renewed focus upon vision and mission:

'It is that ability to think more strategically; how our programmes connect to our overall mission and vision.'

2 Developing effective tools

Participants gained tools that have improved the way they work. These include templates, reports and better financial modelling:

'I learnt to document everything when scaling. This means that now I have everything ready [and] the systemisation of everything was very helpful.'

3 Having space and time to reflect

Having the space and time to reflect is one of the most frequently cited benefits of any consultancy or leadership programme. Scale Accelerator is no exception: participants welcomed the opportunity to have strategic conversations with colleagues and felt this enabled them to prepare for scale:

'Doing Scale Accelerator gave us the opportunity to have the space for honest discussions about what we did on a daily basis, what we wanted to do, and what, moving forwards, would be the best thing to do.'

4 Increased internal alignment

Participating in Scale Accelerator enabled organisations to increase the degree to which there was internal coherence and agreement around vision and plans:

'Spring Impact insisted that we got the Board involved early and we have done so and kept them involved throughout. We have all come together in our ambition to scale up.'

5 Increased confidence

Participants describe a new sense of personal and organisational confidence. This manifested in feeling better able to develop ambitious goals - knowing that they are grounded in reality - and to reach out more effectively to senior stakeholders:

'Spring Impact have helped us have confidence in our credentials and our abilities.'

6 Communicating more effectively

Going through the Scale Accelerator process enabled participants to develop a shared internal language to describe their work and plans; this in turn helps with stronger external communications:

'It gave us a language to explore some of what we were doing already with a view of doing it on a much bigger scale in the future.'

7 Sustainability

Organisations were more resilient and sustainably run in three key areas:

1 Understanding financial sustainability:

'The work we are doing at the moment feels much more sustainable than the work we did before. What we are doing now makes a lot more financial sense.'

2 Developing stronger partnerships:

Partnerships were more important [than funding] as we wanted to make sure that the model for that was consistent and set in stone.'

3 Agility in the face of uncertainty:

'In terms of sustainability – our absolute strength is that we are flexible and adaptable and able to remain relevant.'

Scaling

Having support to get these steps in place meant that organisations developed scaling plans:

'It has made a difference as we have a model ready. So, when we are in a position to scale, we will be able to.'

Whilst some organisations had not yet implemented these scaling plans (largely as a result of the Covid pandemic as outlined below), others have made demonstrable progress against their plans particularly with regard to organisational structure, funding and project development.

1 Organisational structure

Some organisations made changes to the way they are structured and governed in order to put scaling plans in place:

'We ended up creating a membership association (this was an aspiration target for us) - the process of getting to that stage was great.'

'[The process] led me to recognise the need for a governing body, {and a} clear set of structures to help our plan longer-term.'

2 Funding

Several organisations have been able to use their scaling plans and models to gain funding: a critical step towards their scaling ambitions.

'We have used the model to pitch, and this helped us get funding; using the models from Scale Accelerator has equated to £96,000.'

'We did apply for funding to support the programme and we have been successful - that has been a huge achievement and we did use the things we had learnt with Scale Accelerator.'

'The strategy documents we developed with [Spring Impact] have been extremely helpful in both communicating the strategy to others but also to come back to when developing the [National Lottery] bid.'

3 Financial modelling

Some organisations have been able to implement plans and to scale:

'There is one project close to pilot stage in the next couple of months. It will be the first project to have gone through the entire new process/system.'

'We are [now] working at a national level as well as in local areas which is really important.

It is unsurprising that the organisations which have made most progress to date are those that were in the earlier cohorts; they have had more time to implement plans which are dependent on capacity building, buy-in from partners and funding. Scaling takes time and understanding the longer-term impacts of the programme needs to reflect this.

4 The difference for individuals

Alongside the organisational shifts described above, individual participants also gained significantly from the programme. Key areas they highlight are:

- Increased technical skills and knowledge in relation to finance and management;

- Stronger strategic thinking;

- Better understanding of project management and planning.

Participants also described developing skills as a result of working alongside the Scale Accelerator consultants:

'I learnt a lot through watching them, almost by osmosis.'

What worked

1 Expert staff

Scale Accelerator consultants were highly praised for the skill, care and approach which they brought to supporting organisations. Participants particularly valued consultants' ability to hold a balance between asking challenging questions and enabling a space to reflect.

| *'The two consultants that we worked with were brilliant.'*

2 Structured with flexibility

Participants valued the sense of structure and knowing what the programme would entail, whilst at the same time recognising the flexibility that enabled adaptation to changing circumstance and need: 'The way the sessions were structured was good in the way it focused upon the objectives to be met. It was also flexible enough so there was time to reflect.'

3 Financial modelling

The majority of participants highlighted the focus upon financial modelling - and the related report - as being the most significant element of the support provided. They felt that this substantially contributed to their ability to take the next steps in the scaling journey.

| *'The most transformational questions were the ones to do with the financial modelling.'*

4 Programme learning

The Scale Accelerator team engaged thoughtfully and responsively to emerging learning about the programme; this enabled them to address challenges and course correct in response. This meant that - as Spring Impact learnt more about which organisations were best equipped to scale - each cohort in turn ventured further down the scaling path so that by Cohort 4 most of the participant organisations were scaling.

5 Recruitment

Ensuring that the organisations applying to and participating in Scale Accelerator are likely to benefit from it has been a key area of learning and focus for the team.

Leaders of Scale

During the final year of Scale Accelerator, Spring Impact trialed a new approach to developing scaling capacity within organisations. Subsidised by the National Lottery Community Fund, Leaders of Scale is designed to be a lower cost, less intensive, version of Scale Accelerator, in which individuals are trained to carry out scaling support within their own organisations. Two cohorts went through the six-month training.

Though Leaders of Scale was not designed to offer the depth of the full Scale Accelerator programme, participants could point to specific ways in which they had developed their learning as a result of the programme. They reported increased skills a nd confidence, particularly in relation to their ability to run workshops and influence internally.

| *'It definitely met our expectations. The learning equipped us for our scaling path. We have a better and deeper understanding of scaling and replication and can apply this to the rest of our organisation.'*

| *'The content and knowledge were extraordinary!'*

On completion of the programme, participant organisations were understandably at different stages regarding their scaling models. A few participants had developed scaling models that were ready or would be ready for piloting soon - one organisation had a robust scaling model which is already being implemented.

Other participants were still developing a scaling model as they had to change their plans in the course of the programme due to unforeseen circumstances including Covid-19. Funding was still an issue though.

| *'[Our] scaling model is ready to pilot; we are talking to a strategic partner as we need funding in place.'*

Challenges

1 Covid-19

Scale Accelerator took place against the backdrop of the pandemic. By March 2020, Cohort 1 had completed their consultancy and were putting their implementation plans into action and Cohort 2 had just started. All consultancy immediately moved online, and Scale Accelerator staff were praised for the **'seamless'** way this was managed by participants.

Inevitably the pandemic meant that for these two cohorts plans had to alter or be significantly delayed. This was the case for all organisations, but particularly so for those working in schools and healthcare settings:

> *'We were in the process of piloting, but this got interrupted in March 2020. The pilot was not delivered so our scaling plans never materialised. If the pandemic hadn't happened, we would have completed the pilot and then decided on the scaling plans.'*

With plans being derailed in this way, Covid-19 makes understanding the contribution that Scale Accelerator has made towards scaling more challenging.

Few organisations have actually begun to scale in the way they intended; this makes mapping progress against the seven steps to scale critical in understanding the difference the programme makes. It is also important that Spring Impact further develops a collective understanding of what success in scaling looks like for the programme.

2 Cohort learning

Scale Accelerator's intention was to facilitate peer-learning amongst cohorts, and participants found this an attractive aspect of the programme at the recruitment stage. In reality, however, this was not an aspect of the programme that participants found particularly useful. To some extent, Covid and the lack of in-person interaction affected this - however most people felt that their organisations were too different in structure, size or sector to be able to offer one another much in the way of useful shared learning. Very few stayed in touch.

Social Bite

Social Bite is a social enterprise running an employment support programme for vulnerable and marginalised people experiencing homelessness across Scotland. It began life in a small café in Edinburgh, where a young homeless man asked about employment. This has led to Social Bite becoming a major employer of people experiencing homelessness and being the largest provider of free freshly made food to those in need in the UK.

Social Bite applied to Scale Accelerator for support in scaling its 'Jobs First' supported employment programme. This aims to provide more opportunities for sustainable employment to people with experience of homelessness. Social Bite was looking for support to engage more companies in this and to develop an accredited structure for companies to sign up to. Social Bite took part in Cohort 3, which finished in late 2021.

Following the support, 17 people have been employed through Jobs First, with nine in full time work. Six companies have signed up, and 57 charity partners have been involved. Social Bite are focusing upon expansion, offering training to employers and piloting the scheme in London.

Social Bite say the support from Scale Accelerator was particularly helpful in supporting them to test their thinking and pilot the work; this has helped them to scale up in a sustainable way. The support also helped them to gain funding and to develop strong working relationships with new partners:

> *'The way they challenge your thinking genuinely opens different perspectives.'*

Next steps

Spring Impact recently launched a new Scale Accelerator: providing fully funded consultancy and training to NGOs working on issues relating to women's empowerment within Southern Africa.

The organisation has engaged with a range of charities in the Southern African region in order to adapt the programme and ensure that the support offered is appropriate for this very different context.

It still, however, includes many of the core elements from the UK-based Scale Accelerator programme that m2's evaluation has shown to be important for previous participants.

Key changes include:

- Incorporating Lean innovation more consistently throughout the programme, to maximise the chance that the interventions being replicated, and the scaling models being designed, are impactful and valuable to a variety of stakeholders;

- Providing Leaders of Scale as a consistent and more affordable offer for charities that show high potential but are less likely to scale their solutions immediately after the support ends;

- Supporting charities for a longer time-frame, guiding them through delivering their scaling plans - as well as creating them;

- Building a network of charities across all of Spring Impact's programmes, projects, and alumni to ensure that there is a critical mass of NGOs taking part in cohort activities, and that organisations can opt in or out;

- Playing a more hands-on role in fundraising for the participating NGOs to scale (which has been the biggest blocker to scale in the UK Scale Accelerator.)

Methodology

m2 was appointed as learning partner to Scale Accelerator in 2017. This paper is a summary of the ongoing evaluation conducted by us. It brings together data from:

- Interviews with participants from all four cohorts;

- Baseline and final surveys completed by participants;

- Interviews with Scale Accelerator consultants;

- Ongoing meetings and discussions with the Scale Up team.[2]

[2] For a full methodology please contact admin@m2consultants.co.uk. All participants in Cohorts 1-3 were interviewed three times, at the outset and end of their consultancy support, with a follow up interview 6-12 months after the support finished. The final cohort was interviewed at the beginning and end of their consultancy; time frames did not allow for a longitudinal interview.

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For more information about Scale Accelerator, visit www.scaleaccelerator.org