Everyday Patterns for Shifting Systems
Right Scaling

This piece shares exploratory work we have been doing into everyday patterns, and the role and power of re-patterning in systems change. In our introduction we shared seven patterns we identified across our work and that of others that go some way to making visible active re-patterning for equity and powersharing. Here we examine the seventh one: **Right Scaling**.

To describe what is being re-orientated through this re-patterning we draw on eight different arenas of systems, and extend our visualisation of what is happening in systems as a living relationship between different interconnected parts.

This work was undertaken during a twelve month 'executive in residence' program at Griffith Centre for Systems Innovation (previously The Yunus Centre, Griffith University). We appointed the TSI / Auckland Co-Design Lab teams as our 'executive in residence', and set about jointly exploring the question, 'what can we learn from the work in South and West Auckland that could offer potential insights into growing the systemic foundations for civic innovation?'

A note on language
This piece uses Māori language and concepts including **_Whānau_** - often translated as 'extended family', but its meaning is more complex. It includes physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions.

7 Emerging Patterns
signalling potentials for transformative systems & enabling wellbeing

Beyond Services

Moving beyond services as the first response of addressing needs, to a much broader ecology of support for wellbeing. This involves recognition and activation of natural and cultural networks and resources; and an activation of expertise and capital in different ways.

Starting Differently

How we start matters. If we are trying to achieve different kinds of outcomes, or bolder still, create change in a system we need to start differently. If our starting point looks like same as always, it's not going to take us to a different place.

Diversifying Evidence & Value

Challenging evidence and indicators makes explicit the values and worldview underpinning them, and creates room for indicators and measures of success developed through different lenses, cultural perspectives and alongside whānau.

Collective action & ownership

Focusing on what it would take to initiate systemic and collective action and ownership for wellbeing outcomes - from people, families, communities, services, programs and policies. Wellbeing becomes the responsibility of the collective, rather than the individual.

Whānau & relationships as the unit of wellbeing

Working with, connecting to, recording, conceptualising people in relation to their wider context, relationships, whānau. This means seeing wellbeing from a family and intergenerational perspective not just an individual one.
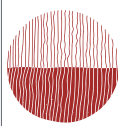
Connecting to place & being in place

Recognising and engaging the role of place and culture in creating and maintaining wellbeing, and potential of spaces in supporting the conditions for wellbeing, especially as places of healing and strengthening.

Right scale

Working within systems in ways that let us more fluidly move between big and wide and deep, understanding the connections between these and seeing them as equally important. This enables us to work across multiple levels at the same time
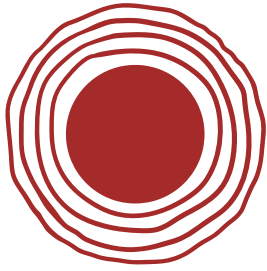
Right Scaling

Overview

This pattern is about scaling multi-dimensionally, scaling deeper, and connecting different scales to work together for wellbeing.

The idea of scale and scaling is an important aspect of how the public sector thinks about achieving impact across regions and at a national level.

Policy makers and funders are often focused on how activities or interventions can be brought to 'scale' which is assumed to be the best way to create impact. This usually refers to making something bigger, scaling it 'up' to impact policy, or replicating something across a number of places, scaling 'out'. Things that happen at population or national levels are thought of as representing what it means to work 'at scale'.

FROM

TO

Success is framed from a position of 'only scaled up initiatives are valid'. Large, population level scales are valued as being both effective & efficient, with scale being the ultimate goal of projects, programs & policies

What we measure & how we frame success

Scale needs to be seen relative to context. All levels of scale, from personal to family, community, place, & beyond are interconnected & effectiveness requires the ability to zoom in & out between macro & micro scales & see connections between them

Scaling up & scaling out dominates concepts of value, with replication seen as the most efficient way to achieve impact & therefore, value for money

How values are enacted, what is valued by & within the system

Value is focused on 'effectiveness of scale', with depth of scale considered equally valuable as 'scaling-up & out'. The 'right scale' for the right purpose & context is valued, as is shared learning across & between different scales

Preference for 'big' & aggregated data at scale, to track progress & inform population level decision making

What data is collected & how & who has access to that data

Focus on 'warm' and 'thick' data, as complementary to large, numerical data sets. Data needs to connect local, regional & national levels to create a richer picture of what is happening & what is possible. Some data may continue to be owned locally

Focus on 'economies of scale' where efficiency means that universal servicing is privileged over local & human scale, which is seen as too particular, nuanced, bespoke & therefore, costly

How goals & principles are produced & reproduced

Goals are redirected towards particular human & local contexts. Greater emphasis on effectiveness, & therefore on creating the conditions for scaling deep & connecting to place in order to generate outcomes
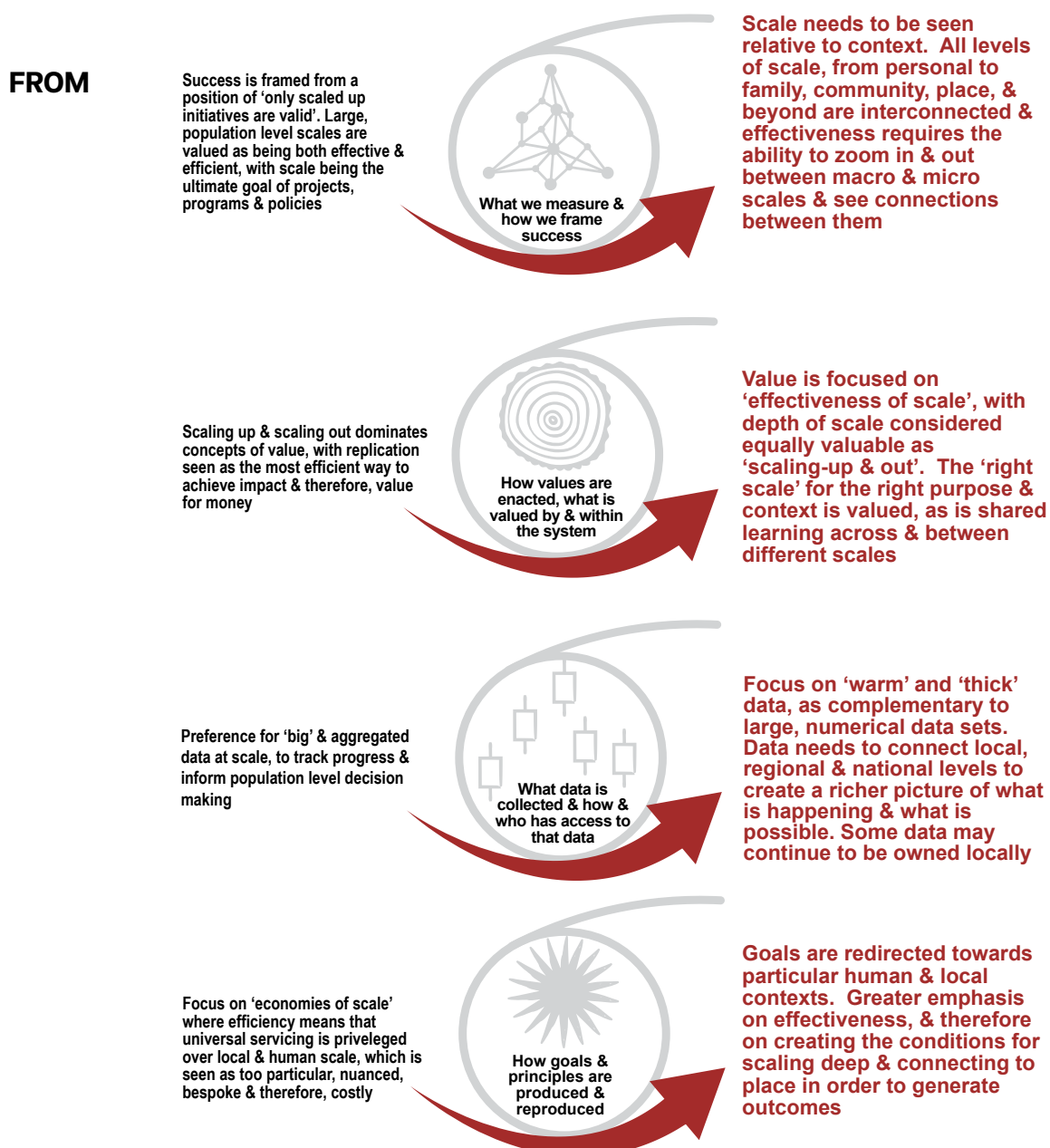
Fig 1. Four key shifts towards Right Scaling. GCSI (formerly The Yunus Centre Griffith) 2022.

Things that happen at the level of whānau, locality, or in particular places are generally thought of as discrete, bespoke, small or local in scale and are often considered as less efficient or effective as a result. There is an implicit hierarchy in this. Bigger scale policy and investment decisions are seen to be more important than smaller scale practice or operational decisions.

Similarly the overall general population impact seen through numbers or "at scale" often takes precedence over what those numbers represent in terms of the specific impact or experiences of particular people. This is played out in the hierarchy of quantitative over qualitative evidence and research. Yet they are both important but different lenses on impact - one goes wide, the other goes deep.

It is the norm at policy making level to work with abstractions, numbers and generalisations because this feels more workable than dealing with the particularities of different places and people. Thinking about scale in this way however results in decision-making that is dislocated from people, place and context.
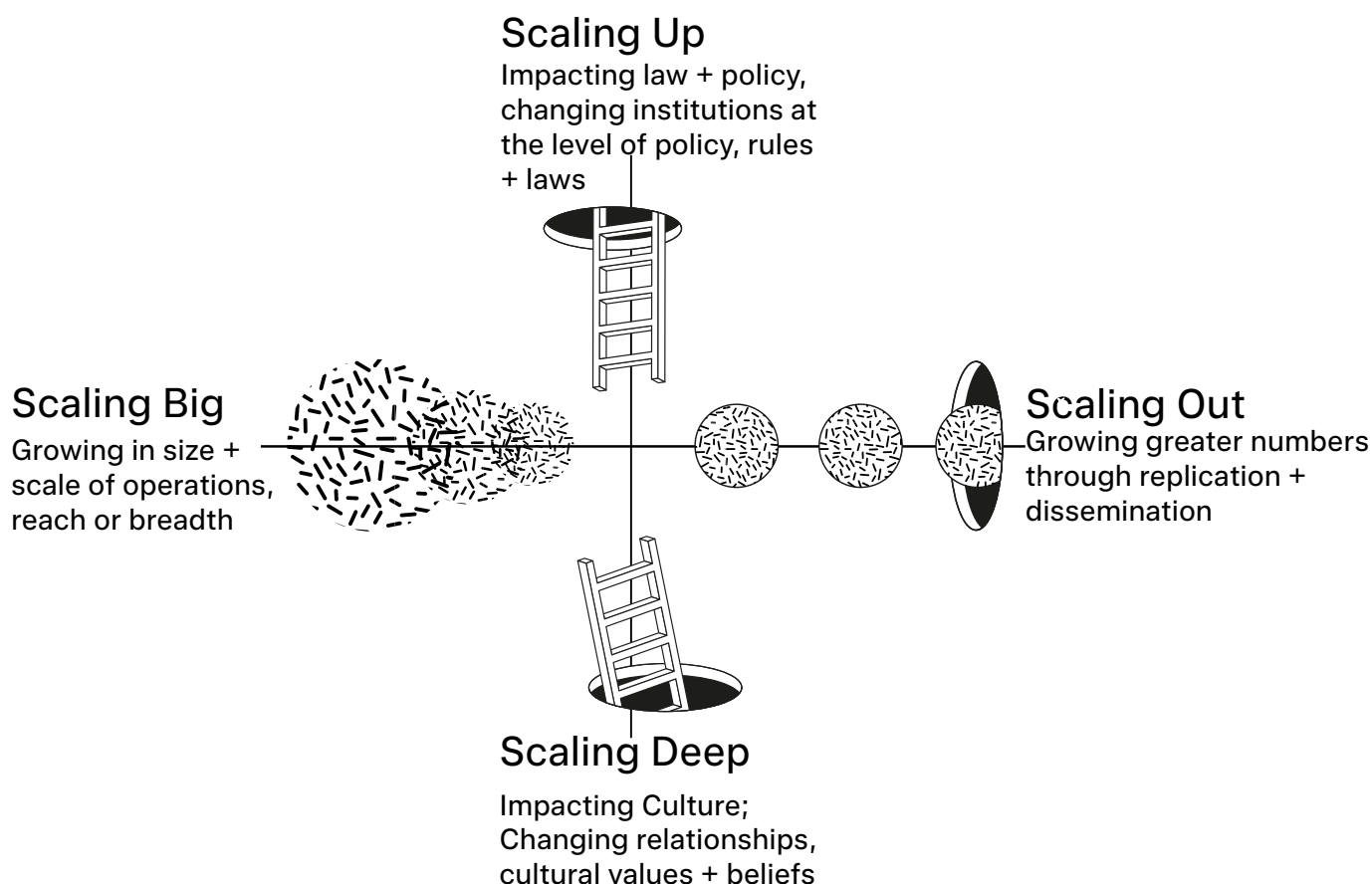
Right scaling is about disrupting our conventional ideas about scale and impact. It is about bringing together what is conventionally understood as big and little scale; it is about being able to work with the particular and the general at the same time.

Right scaling refers to ways of working that help us to connect lived realities with decision-making that occurs about, but often away from those realities. It is about understanding scale at human and systems infrastructure level as equally important AND different.

Right scaling means working within systems in ways that let us move more fluidly between big and small, wide and deep, recognise the connections between them and appreciate the different lenses they provide to our understanding of wellbeing.

It is also about reframing our understanding of the relationships between scale and impact. As noted, currently we assume scaling 'something' out is the most effective way to achieve impact. There is a fear that investing in going deep or taking the time to respond to the specificities of place is too costly.

Yet in reality, when we are working in spaces that are complex, or where inequity and trauma are

Scaling Up
Impacting law + policy, changing institutions at the level of policy, rules + laws

Scaling Big
Growing in size + scale of operations, reach or breadth

Scaling Out
Growing greater numbers through replication + dissemination

Scaling Deep
Impacting Culture; Changing relationships, cultural values + beliefs

embedded into structures, a universal focus on scaling out can hold us in shallow, generalised and surface ways of working that end up making little difference because they don't change anything in any fundamental ways, or worse they reinforce the inequity of the status quo.

Right scaling means privileging the need to scale deep in order for innovation and transformation to occur. To be able to sit long enough, go deep enough to recognise and accept what is sitting underneath and to collectively grapple with what we find.

As part of scaling we need to support going deep into culture, people, history, healing, mindsets, values, world views, and the particular stories, characteristics and strengths of people and place. This includes stories of trauma, loss and harm, as acknowledging these is the only way for new connections, directions and patterns to be possible.

Scaling deep is imperative for grappling with and shifting the mental models and assumptions that underpin current patterns in the system. This is possible and plausible if we understand that scaling out, can mean not just the scaling of interventions and programmes, but also the scaling of conditions, principles, values and ways of being and doing.

Right scaling then, lets us work with small, big, national, local scale as equally important and connected, and on conditions for scaling deep as part of scaling up and out.

Examples of 'Right Scaling' patterns in context

The Injury Prevention Team, ACC
In this example the Injury Prevention team at Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) operating at a national level worked with local providers in different communities, localities and settings, to identify how the cultural and natural networks and knowhow in those particular communities could be activated to support child wellbeing outcomes. The national team wanted to work alongside communities and community partners not to understand "what worked" in terms of interventions that could be scaled out, but rather what worked and could be scaled in terms of **conditions** that enable community partners and families to lead their own culturally grounded responses that are specific to, and built upon the strengths and knowledge of culture and place.

This re-orientation of investment and commissioning towards wellbeing conditions rather than programmes created the space to understand what was needed in place, and to support community partners to work responsively with communities to develop and grow those conditions in place. The conditions, which include principles, values and ways of working became the thing to be invested in and scaled out, rather than a programme. A focus on conditions allowed communities to work responsively and deeply with the issues that mattered and made the difference to them, starting not with a standardised intervention, but with where families and communities were at. Such an approach recognises that a one size fits all approach to investment or scaling out of specific programmes often doesn't work for communities who have experienced inequity, intergenerational trauma and marginalisation.

It puts the focus instead on the conditions that allow communities to scale deep in place, giving the space for healing and going deep into the issues, histories and stories particular to that community, and that will unlock the pathway for wellbeing in communities and families in that community. The role of national infrastructure and investment in this example becomes to support the conditions for those acting and living locally to go deep in place, which looks different in different settings.

This approach required a shift in thinking about scale, how you achieve it, and how we can honor and be accountable to both local scales (local knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, particular people in history and place, particular knowledge of place) and the scale of national and population level perspectives and obligations. It meant building the capability to work relationally and invest in learning with communities what works.

This approach also meant a shift in the kinds of data and measures that were used, as the focus became tracking conditions rather than only specific outputs. There was a willingness to share power and work in terms of principles, relationships and values, rather than prescribed outputs, allowing communities to define what was needed and how that would be achieved.

Working big and small, Auckland Council

Working big and small within Auckland Council was about building the capability to zoom in to the human scale to understand the implications of decisions.

In this example zooming in to the lived realities of communities and families interacting with council services, allowed those at management and decision-making level to understand the impact and connection of big and small levels of scale and better enabled equity-led decision-making and policy development.

The experiences of families and communities interacting with their local council services and spaces can seem small-scale in the broader context of region-wide infrastructure and decision-making. But working with families and having them share their experiences on the ground shows how small actions at local level are indicative of larger scale priorities and mindsets within the wider council system, and have large scale impacts on those families and communities.

For example parents experiencing the discomfort and practical challenges of having to ask for permission to use a locked toilet or access drinking water in a library when staff can easily access both, sent particular messages to community members about how they were perceived or valued by council.

Work with whānau also showed that access to a photocopier might be the difference between completing a job application or request for emergency support, whereas this aspect of a library's role for community was not often considered important or resourced from the council perspective.

The implications of not being able to access these things are significant for communities, but they appear 'small scale' in comparison to other kinds of decisions.

Often decision-making is based on abstracted data and numbers that removes the actual realities and impacts on people. When working *big and small* at the Council, the impacts of these local government policies and budget decisions on community members was brought to life and to the attention of leadership teams through stories and through sharing by whānau and staff themselves.

This enhanced view and connection to the granularity of how those decisions are experienced in the lived realities and human scale of community members and staff was important for retaining complexity integrity for good decision-making.

Working big and small means moving between the macro and abstract decision-making processes often based on numbers and aggregated data, and the micro detail of how these actually play out in reality. Too often teams only work within their own level or scale (for example policy making or operations) rather than having the means to zoom in and out, and connect between these, and things at 'smaller' scale perceived as less important.

It requires space and skill of decision-makers and policy development teams to create or welcome data and perspectives that sit close to communities' lived realities and make these part of decision-making. It requires acknowledging that abstracted data that is often the basis of decision-making masks the implications for people, and that a more holistic approach is needed. Building the skill to hold different levels of scale in mind, and to acknowledge that while some issues may seem small in comparison, the scale of their impact in people's lives can have equal value, especially from an equity perspective.
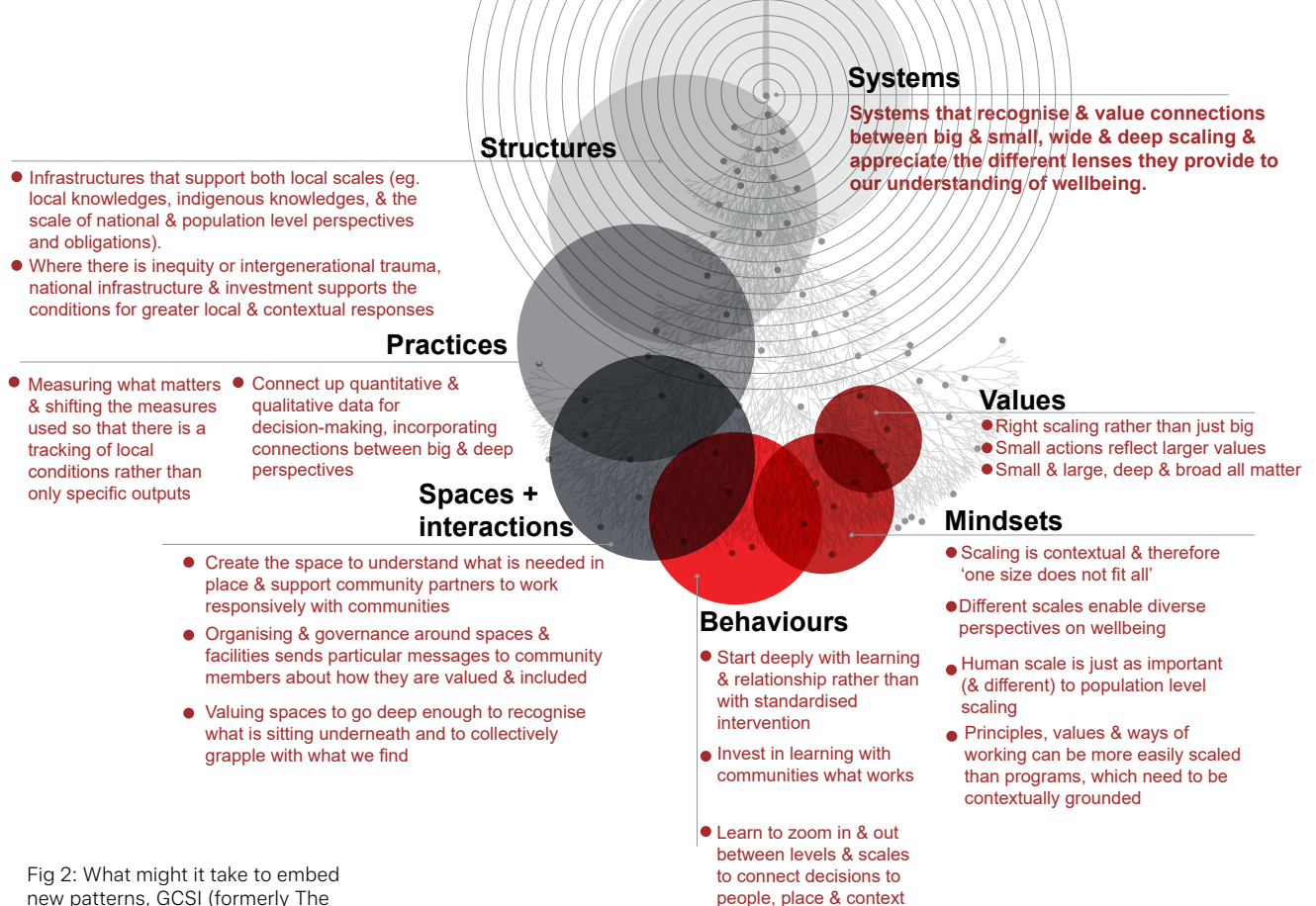
Embedding the Pattern: what might it take?

Systems
Systems that recognise & value connections between big & small, wide & deep scaling & appreciate the different lenses they provide to our understanding of wellbeing.

Structures
- Infrastructures that support both local scales (eg. local knowledges, indigenous knowledges, & the scale of national & population level perspectives and obligations).
- Where there is inequity or intergenerational trauma, national infrastructure & investment supports the conditions for greater local & contextual responses

Practices
- Measuring what matters & shifting the measures used so that there is a tracking of local conditions rather than only specific outputs
- Connect up quantitative & qualitative data for decision-making, incorporating connections between big & deep perspectives

Values
- Right scaling rather than just big
- Small actions reflect larger values
- Small & large, deep & broad all matter

Spaces + interactions
- Create the space to understand what is needed in place & support community partners to work responsively with communities
- Organising & governance around spaces & facilities sends particular messages to community members about how they are valued & included
- Valuing spaces to go deep enough to recognise what is sitting underneath and to collectively grapple with what we find

Behaviours
- Start deeply with learning & relationship rather than with standardised intervention
- Invest in learning with communities what works
- Learn to zoom in & out between levels & scales to connect decisions to people, place & context

Mindsets
- Scaling is contextual & therefore 'one size does not fit all'
- Different scales enable diverse perspectives on wellbeing
- Human scale is just as important (& different) to population level scaling
- Principles, values & ways of working can be more easily scaled than programs, which need to be contextually grounded

Fig 2: What might it take to embed new patterns, GCSI (formerly The Yunus Centre Griffith) 2022.

Conclusion and what's next

Patterns help to make visible or describe the different ways of working that are important to getting different outcomes. It's easy for us to talk about how we think things should work and be different (e.g community-led, partnerships, powersharing).

We are hopeful that by trying to go more deeply into the kinds of interconnected changes and patterns that these shifts represent we can make more visible some of the "how" of change.

The seven patterns we identify, including Right Scaling, are transitional patterns - starting points that reflect learning about ways of working that are more likely to create the possibility for different outcomes and greater equity.

You can find the other six patterns on our blog. We'd love to know if you recognise these patterns, can see examples of these patterns in your work, or can help us to extend our understanding of these patterns. Equally we would love to work with others to identify additional transitionary patterns that are helping to give further weak signals for systems change towards equity.You can reach out at gcsi@griffith.edu.au.