



Scaling Deep & Community/Economic Development

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I recently read Tatiana Fraser's 2025 report, *Scaling Deep: Shifting Power and Redefining Success*, after hearing about it through weekly conversations in the Strategic Doing Institute's Council of Elders, where I serve on the board. For years I have used Strategic

Doing as a practical discipline for guiding complex collaborations in communities, especially around what some call "wicked problems." Wicked problems are the kinds of issues that don't have clear boundaries or straightforward solutions, where every attempt to make progress reveals new layers of complexity and interconnected challenges. Reading Fraser's work allowed me to process what I already practice through a deeper and more value-based lens.

Strategic Doing provides a clear and agile framework for moving networks toward measurable

FROM THE EDITORS:

This article on Scaling Deep heavily uses Artificial Intelligence, so we asked the author: Does the use of AI impact your feelings about writing and about Scaling Deep itself?

Here's his answer:

The use of AI does not negatively impact my feelings about writing or Scaling Deep. I find AI very helpful. In much of my work, I am trying to deeply understand, disseminate, and use concepts like Scaling Deep. AI increases my ability to do all three. I do not use AI for my original writing.

I am aware, however, that AI presents challenges. As with many technological innovations, societal norms and ethics lag behind, which can lead to misuse.

outcomes through simple rules, thirty-day action cycles, and opportunity focused questions such as “What would it look like if...?” *Scaling Deep*, meanwhile, invites us to examine the cultural, relational, and personal shifts that make those actions durable. The more I read Fraser’s work, the more I could see how these two approaches fit together. Strategic Doing activates networks while Scaling Deep transforms the underlying norms and values that shape how those networks behave.

Tatiana Fraser is a long-time systems change leader and feminist practitioner, and the co-founder of The Systems Sanctuary, a place of support for people leading systemic change. Over her three decades of work, which include global speaking engagements, and leadership awards, she created her signature Scaling Deep framework that offers a pathway for lasting systemic change by focusing on cultural and personal transformation rather than growth for its own sake. The framework encourages people and organizations to strengthen relationships, shift beliefs and norms, and move at a pace that honors context and complexity.

Community and Economic Development through a Deep Scaling Lens

According to AI, community and economic development using Scaling Deep would look like a long term, place-based strategy that draws from local assets and strong partnerships. Instead of rapid expansion or growth driven by external investors, Scaling Deep emphasizes distinctive local enterprises, stronger community identity, and wealth that stays within the community. Key characteristics and outcomes of this approach include a strong emphasis on local resources, with development shaped by local talent, heritage, and the unique strengths of the community. It focuses on building local wealth so households can remain in place and benefit directly from revitalization efforts. Scaling Deep also strengthens local identity by supporting distinctive businesses and community gathering places that reflect the character of the area. Successful implementation requires trusting partnerships and collaboration across sectors, which help create sustainable, long-term impact as businesses and initiatives become deeply embedded in the community. This approach offers tailored support to small and community rooted entrepreneurs and pays close attention to underlying structures that shape values and behaviors, rather than simply creating new programs. Over time, it connects with broader strategies so communities can share practices and insights across regions in meaningful and mutually supportive ways.

A Deeper Dive

Scaling Deep is a long term, community driven approach that centers cultural, relational, and structural transformation. It emphasizes the cultivation of local assets and the strengthening of social fabric to create sustainable prosperity. In practice, success is defined by how deeply an initiative becomes embedded in local life, rather than how widely it spreads. This approach uplifts existing community strengths and treats relationship building as essential infrastructure. Decision-making remains community centered and includes diverse local voices, so solutions grow from the complexities of place. Scaling Deep also focuses on shifts in mindsets and values, which over time influence institutions and policy. It encourages the development of locally distinctive enterprises that reflect a community's heritage and identity. Above all, it requires a long-term commitment, growing slowly and steadily, with roots that deepen like an oak tree.

Why This Matters for Community and Economic Development

Current approaches in the field experience persistent problems such as unequal distribution of growth, limited local capacity, inadequate infrastructure, low community participation in decision-making, and heavy reliance on short-term, market driven strategies. Residents of under-resourced communities often do not benefit from overall growth, and many communities lack the staff, funding, and structural support needed to create lasting change. Scaling Deep challenges these norms. It encourages a shift from older models rooted in hierarchy and control to approaches grounded in relationship, collaboration, shared power, and innovation.
