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Replication-Based Growth: Toward a Theory of Entrepreneurial Scaling Through Organizational Templates

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial growth has traditionally been explained through innovation, opportunity recognition, dynamic capabilities, and strategic adaptation. While these perspectives have generated important insights, they provide only a partial explanation of how many organizations achieve sustained expansion in practice. Numerous firms, particularly those operating through multi-unit business formats, grow by systematically reproducing proven organizational systems rather than continuously generating novel products, services, or business models. Despite the prevalence of this phenomenon, existing research on replication, knowledge transfer, organizational routines, franchising, and entrepreneurial scaling remains fragmented and lacks an integrated theoretical explanation of replication as a distinct growth mechanism. This article addresses this gap by developing Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory, a conceptual framework that explains how organizations transform proven organizational systems into scalable engines of expansion. Drawing upon and integrating multiple theoretical streams, the framework identifies organizational templates, replication capability, scaling efficiency, and entrepreneurial scaling as the core mechanisms underlying replication-based growth. The study advances entrepreneurship and strategic management literature by conceptualizing reproducibility as a distinct logic of growth and by establishing replication as an independent pathway of entrepreneurial expansion. The proposed framework provides a foundation for future empirical research on organizational scaling, replication capability, and growth through organizational reproduction.

Keywords

structured entrepreneurship; entrepreneurial entry; ownership formation; capability transfer; entrepreneurial agency; franchising

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1. Introduction

Business growth remains one of the central concerns in entrepreneurship and strategic management research. The ability of firms to expand their operations, increase market presence, and sustain competitive advantages has long been viewed as a key indicator of entrepreneurial success. Consequently, scholars have devoted significant attention to understanding the mechanisms through which organizations achieve growth. Much of this literature has emphasized innovation, opportunity recognition, dynamic capabilities, and entrepreneurial experimentation as the primary drivers of organizational expansion (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; March, 1991; Teece *et al.*, 1997). Within this dominant perspective, growth is frequently portrayed as the outcome of creating novel products, developing new business models, or discovering previously untapped market opportunities.

The prominence of innovation-based explanations has substantially shaped contemporary entrepreneurship theory. Entrepreneurial success is often associated with exploration activities, where firms continuously search for new opportunities and develop innovative solutions to market problems (March, 1991). Dynamic capability theory further reinforces this perspective by arguing that organizations achieve superior performance through their ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external resources in response to changing environments (Teece *et al.*, 1997). Similarly, research on strategic management highlights adaptive learning and capability development as critical foundations of long-term organizational growth (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Zollo & Winter, 2002)

Although innovation undoubtedly plays an important role in entrepreneurial development, the dominant focus on innovation-based growth creates an incomplete understanding of how many organizations actually expand. In practice, numerous firms achieve substantial growth without relying primarily on continuous innovation. Instead, they grow by repeatedly reproducing proven organizational models across multiple locations, business units, or operational settings. This pattern is particularly evident in franchise systems, retail chains, restaurant networks, hospitality businesses, educational services, healthcare providers, and various service industries where organizational success depends on the consistent replication of established business formats rather than the continuous introduction of new products or technologies (Bradach, 1997; Combs *et al.*, 2004; Shane, 1998)

The growth of franchise systems provides a particularly illustrative example. Rather than pursuing expansion through constant innovation, many successful franchise organizations scale by reproducing standardized organizational templates across geographically dispersed units. Such templates typically include codified routines, operating procedures, managerial practices, brand standards, and knowledge systems that can be transferred and implemented repeatedly with relatively predictable outcomes (Jensen & Szulanski, 2007; Winter & Szulanski, 2001a). As a result, growth emerges not primarily from the creation of novelty but from the effective replication of organizational knowledge.

This phenomenon has attracted scholarly attention across several research streams. Studies of replication strategy suggest that organizational growth can be achieved through the systematic copying of successful business models and organizational routines (Winter & Szulanski, 2001a) Knowledge transfer research similarly demonstrates that the effective dissemination of organizational knowledge is critical for maintaining performance consistency across multiple units (Argote & Ingram, 2000a; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Szulanski, 1996) Organizational learning scholars have further emphasized the role of routines and codified practices in facilitating the reproduction of organizational capabilities across different contexts (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Nelson & Winter, 1982) More recently, research on entrepreneurial scaling has highlighted the importance of developing scalable organizational structures that allow firms to grow efficiently while maintaining operational coherence (Coviello *et al.*, 2024; Jansen *et al.*, 2023; Palmié *et al.*, 2023)

Despite these developments, existing research remains fragmented. Replication strategy scholars primarily focus on the mechanisms through which organizations copy successful templates (Mangematin & Baden-Fuller, 2008; Winter & Szulanski, 2001a) Knowledge transfer researchers examine the movement of information and capabilities across organizational units (Argote & Ingram, 2000a; Szulanski, 2000) Franchising studies frequently investigate governance structures, agency relationships, and ownership arrangements (Lafontaine, 1992; Windsperger & Dant, 2006) Meanwhile, entrepreneurial scaling research concentrates on organizational growth processes and scale-up dynamics (Coviello *et al.*, 2024; Jansen *et al.*, 2023). Although these streams address related phenomena, they rarely converge into a unified theoretical explanation of how replication functions as a distinct mechanism of entrepreneurial growth.

As a consequence, the literature lacks a comprehensive framework capable of explaining how organizations scale through the repeated deployment of proven organizational templates. Existing theories often treat replication as a component of knowledge transfer, organizational learning, or franchising rather than recognizing it as an independent growth logic. This limitation is particularly significant because many entrepreneurial ventures do not scale through continuous innovation but through the efficient reproduction of established organizational systems. The absence of an integrative theoretical perspective restricts our understanding of how replication contributes to entrepreneurial expansion and long-term organizational growth.

Addressing this gap is increasingly important given the growing prevalence of business models that depend on standardization, transferability, and scalability. Contemporary organizations operate in environments where growth frequently requires balancing adaptation with consistency. Under such conditions, organizational templates serve as mechanisms that enable firms to expand while preserving operational reliability. Understanding how such templates facilitate growth therefore represents a critical theoretical challenge for entrepreneurship and strategic management research.

Accordingly, this paper develops a conceptual framework termed Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory. The proposed theory argues that entrepreneurial growth can emerge from the systematic replication of organizational templates rather than solely from innovation-based activities. Drawing upon insights from replication strategy, knowledge transfer, organizational learning, dynamic capabilities, franchising, and entrepreneurial scaling literatures, the paper integrates previously disconnected perspectives into a coherent framework. Specifically, the study proposes that organizational templates, replication capability, scaling efficiency, and entrepreneurial scaling constitute the core mechanisms through which replication-based growth occurs. By advancing this framework, the paper contributes to entrepreneurship theory by introducing replication as a distinct and theoretically meaningful pathway of organizational growth.

2. Theoretical Foundations

Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory emerges from the convergence of several established yet largely disconnected streams of management and entrepreneurship research. While scholars have extensively examined replication, knowledge transfer, organizational routines, dynamic capabilities, and entrepreneurial scaling, these perspectives have generally evolved in parallel rather than as components of a unified explanation of organizational growth. Collectively, however, they provide important theoretical foundations for understanding how organizations expand through the repeated deployment of proven organizational systems.

This section synthesizes these foundational perspectives and demonstrates how each contributes to explaining a different dimension of replication-based growth. Specifically, replication strategy explains the logic of organizational reproduction, knowledge transfer explains the movement of organizational knowledge, organizational routines explain the persistence and reproducibility of organizational behavior, and dynamic capability and scaling research explain how organizations sustain expansion under conditions of growth. Together, these streams establish the intellectual foundations upon which RBG Theory is developed.

2.1 Replication Strategy: Growth Through Organizational Reproduction

The most direct foundation for replication-based growth originates from the replication strategy literature. Winter & Szulanski (2001a) introduced replication as a distinctive strategic logic through which organizations expand by reproducing successful business models across multiple locations. Rather than emphasizing continuous innovation, replication strategy focuses on identifying, codifying, and deploying proven organizational systems that can be repeatedly implemented with predictable outcomes.

From this perspective, organizational growth is achieved not primarily through the generation of new knowledge but through the systematic reuse of existing knowledge. Replication involves reproducing a complex configuration of routines, structures, practices, managerial processes, and operational arrangements that collectively constitute a successful business model (Winter & Szulanski, 2001). Consequently, organizational success depends on the ability to reproduce the underlying architecture responsible for superior performance rather than merely copying visible activities.

Subsequent research expanded this perspective by highlighting the importance of organizational templates as vehicles of replication. Jensen & Szulanski (2007) argue that templates provide standardized representations of successful organizational systems that guide implementation across dispersed units. Similarly, Baden-Fuller *et al.* (2008) distinguish between replication based on abstract principles and replication based on highly codified templates, suggesting that organizations differ in the degree to which growth relies on standardization.

Importantly, contemporary replication research increasingly recognizes that replication is not a simple act of copying. Organizations frequently confront challenges associated with contextual variation, local adaptation, implementation fidelity, and organizational learning (Szulanski & Jensen, 2006). As a result, successful replication requires the development of organizational mechanisms capable of balancing consistency with adaptability.

Recent research on organizational scaling reinforces this argument by suggesting that scalable organizations often depend on repeatable organizational architectures that can be deployed across heterogeneous environments while preserving core value-creation mechanisms (Chliova & Ringov, 2017). This perspective elevates replication from an operational process to a strategic growth logic and provides the first foundation for understanding how organizations expand through the repeated deployment of proven systems.

2.2 Knowledge Transfer and the Mobility of Organizational Knowledge

If replication represents the strategic logic of growth, knowledge transfer provides the mechanism through which replication becomes possible. The ability to reproduce organizational systems across multiple units depends fundamentally on the movement of knowledge throughout the organization.

Kogut & Zander (1992) argue that firms exist because they possess superior capabilities for creating, storing, and transferring knowledge. Organizations function as social communities that facilitate the communication and application of specialized knowledge more effectively than market-based mechanisms. From this perspective, organizational growth becomes possible because firms can repeatedly transfer knowledge embedded within routines, practices, and organizational systems.

Building upon this foundation, Szulanski (1996) introduced the concept of knowledge stickiness to explain why transferring best practices is frequently difficult. Knowledge transfer is often constrained by causal ambiguity, recipient capability limitations, communication barriers, and contextual differences. Consequently, successful replication requires more than simply making information available; it requires ensuring that transferred knowledge can be interpreted, absorbed, and implemented effectively.

Later research conceptualized knowledge transfer as a dynamic process involving initiation, implementation, adaptation, and integration (Szulanski, 2000) Similarly, (Argote & Ingram, 2000a) demonstrate that knowledge transfer represents a critical source of competitive advantage because organizations vary considerably in their ability to disseminate valuable practices across units.

More recent scholarship extends this perspective by emphasizing absorptive capacity and organizational learning mechanisms as important determinants of transfer effectiveness (Volberda *et al.*, 2010) The successful deployment of organizational templates depends not only on codification but also on the receiving unit's ability to recognize, assimilate, and apply transferred knowledge. Consequently, knowledge mobility becomes a central condition enabling replication-based growth.

Nevertheless, while knowledge transfer research explains how organizational knowledge moves, it provides only a partial explanation of growth. The literature primarily focuses on transfer effectiveness rather than on how repeated transfer contributes to scalable organizational expansion. This limitation suggests the need for a broader framework that connects knowledge transfer to entrepreneurial growth outcomes.

2.3 Organizational Routines and Templates as Reproducible Systems

A third theoretical foundation emerges from research on organizational routines and routine dynamics. This literature explains why organizational behavior can be reproduced consistently across time and space, thereby providing an essential basis for replication.

Nelson & Winter (1982) conceptualize routines as organizational analogues of individual skills. Just as individuals rely on learned habits to perform recurring activities, organizations depend on routines to coordinate actions, allocate resources, and generate predictable outcomes. Because routines embed accumulated organizational knowledge, they become important vehicles through which organizational capabilities are preserved and reproduced.

Traditional perspectives often portrayed routines as stable mechanisms that promote organizational consistency. However, subsequent research challenged this view by demonstrating that routines also possess adaptive and generative properties. Feldman & Pentland (2003) argue that routines simultaneously enable stability and change, allowing organizations to preserve coherence while adapting to environmental variation.

This insight has significant implications for replication-based growth. Organizations seeking expansion must maintain sufficient consistency to preserve performance while retaining enough flexibility to accommodate local conditions. Routine dynamics therefore provide an explanation for how replication can occur without producing excessive rigidity.

Further developments in routine theory suggest that routines should be viewed as dynamic systems capable of generating both continuity and adaptation (Parmigiani & Howard-Grenville, 2011). Through repeated enactment, routines become increasingly transferable while simultaneously evolving in response to contextual demands. This dual function makes routines particularly valuable for scalable organizational growth.

The concept of organizational templates extends this logic by integrating multiple routines into coherent systems that guide organizational action. Templates consist of interconnected routines, managerial practices, governance arrangements, performance standards, and operating procedures that collectively define how organizations create and deliver value (Jensen & Szulanski, 2007). Because templates encapsulate proven organizational architectures, they provide the structural foundation upon which replication-based growth can occur.

2.4 Dynamic Capabilities, Scalability, and Entrepreneurial Expansion

While replication depends on standardization, successful growth also requires adaptability. Dynamic capability theory provides important insights into how organizations maintain this balance while scaling.

Teece *et al.* (1997) define dynamic capabilities as the ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure organizational resources in response to changing environments. Although originally developed to explain sustained competitive advantage, the dynamic capability perspective also provides a useful lens for understanding scalable growth because expansion frequently requires organizations to deploy existing systems across new contexts while simultaneously adapting to emerging challenges.

Eisenhardt & Martin (2000) further argue that dynamic capabilities consist of identifiable and repeatable organizational processes. Rather than representing unique assets, dynamic capabilities function as learned organizational practices that facilitate adaptation and resource deployment. This interpretation aligns closely with replication because successful expansion depends on repeatedly applying proven organizational processes under varying conditions.

Zollo & Winter (2002) extend this perspective by demonstrating that dynamic capabilities emerge through deliberate learning processes involving experience accumulation, knowledge articulation, and knowledge codification. These mechanisms are particularly relevant to replication because organizational templates depend upon codified knowledge that can be transferred and reproduced across units.

Recent entrepreneurial scaling research provides an important extension of these ideas. Scholars increasingly argue that scaling should be distinguished from growth because scaling requires organizations to increase size, scope, or impact without proportional increases in complexity and resource commitments (Coviello *et al.*, 2024; Palmié *et al.*, 2023) From this perspective, scalability becomes an organizational capability rather than a simple outcome.

Similarly, Reuber *et al.* (2021) suggest that scaling depends on the development of repeatable organizational mechanisms that preserve value creation while supporting expansion across markets and operational contexts. Jansen *et al.* (2023) further argue that sustainable scaling requires organizations to balance growth ambitions with capability development, coordination, and organizational coherence.

Collectively, this literature highlights a central challenge of entrepreneurial growth: organizations must develop mechanisms that enable expansion without generating proportional increases in complexity. Organizational templates and replication capabilities provide such mechanisms because they reduce uncertainty, improve transferability, and enhance repeatability. Consequently, dynamic capability and scaling research provide the final theoretical foundation for understanding replication-based growth.

Taken together, the four theoretical streams reviewed above explain complementary aspects of organizational expansion. Replication strategy explains the logic of organizational reproduction, knowledge transfer explains the movement of organizational knowledge, organizational routines explain the persistence and reproducibility of organizational behavior, and dynamic capability and scaling research explain how organizations sustain growth under conditions of expansion. Despite their complementary insights, these perspectives remain fragmented and have not yet been integrated into a coherent explanation of how replication functions as a distinct mechanism of entrepreneurial growth. This fragmentation creates important conceptual gaps that justify the development of Replication-Based Growth Theory.

3. Conceptual Gap Analysis

Despite significant advances in research on replication, knowledge transfer, organizational routines, dynamic capabilities, franchising, and entrepreneurial scaling, a comprehensive explanation of how organizations grow through replication remains absent. Existing studies have generated valuable insights into specific aspects of organizational expansion, yet these insights remain fragmented across disciplinary boundaries. As a result, the literature provides only a partial understanding of replication as a mechanism of entrepreneurial growth.

This section identifies four interrelated conceptual gaps that collectively reveal the absence of a coherent theoretical explanation of replication-based growth. Rather than representing isolated deficiencies, these gaps reflect a broader fragmentation in the way organizational expansion has been conceptualized. Together, they justify the development of Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory.

3.1 The Reduction of Replication to a Knowledge Transfer Problem

The first conceptual gap concerns the dominant tendency to treat replication primarily as a knowledge transfer phenomenon. Existing research has extensively examined how organizations transfer knowledge across units, emphasizing issues such as causal ambiguity, absorptive capacity, transfer effectiveness, and knowledge stickiness (Argote & Ingram, 2000b; Szulanski, 1996, 2000; Volberda *et al.*, 2010). These contributions have substantially advanced understanding of how organizational knowledge moves within and across organizations.

However, replication involves considerably more than the transfer of knowledge. Knowledge transfer focuses on moving information, expertise, or practices between actors or organizational units. Replication, by contrast, requires the reproduction of an entire organizational system capable of generating consistent performance outcomes (Winter & Szulanski, 2001a). Successful replication depends not only on transferring knowledge but also on reproducing routines, governance structures, managerial practices, operational processes, performance standards, and value-creation mechanisms.

Consequently, knowledge transfer should be viewed as a necessary but insufficient condition for replication. Organizations may successfully transfer knowledge without reproducing the broader organizational architecture that enables consistent performance. In such cases, knowledge mobility occurs without organizational replication.

This distinction becomes increasingly important as organizations pursue growth through expansion. The challenge is rarely limited to communicating knowledge; rather, it involves creating new operational units capable of reproducing the performance characteristics of the original model. Existing knowledge transfer theory therefore explains an important component of replication but does not fully explain how replication generates organizational growth.

More importantly, the literature provides limited explanation of how repeated knowledge transfer evolves into a scalable growth mechanism. While transfer effectiveness has been studied extensively, the relationship between transferability and organizational expansion remains underdeveloped. As a result, replication continues to be conceptualized primarily as a learning process rather than as a distinct growth logic.

3.2 The Contextual Confinement of Replication Research

A second conceptual gap concerns the contextual confinement of replication research. Much of the existing literature examines replication within franchising settings, where standardized expansion represents a defining organizational characteristic (Bradach, 1997; Combs *et al.*, 2004; Shane, 1998)

Franchising has undoubtedly provided an important empirical context for studying replication because franchise systems rely heavily on organizational standardization, codified routines, and template deployment. However, the dominance of franchising as an empirical setting has inadvertently constrained broader theoretical development.

Most franchising research focuses on governance structures, agency relationships, ownership arrangements, contractual design, and incentive alignment (Castrogiovanni *et al.*, 2006; Lafontaine, 1992; Windsperger & Dant, 2006). Although these issues are important, they often shift attention away from replication itself as a mechanism of growth.

More fundamentally, replication extends far beyond franchising. Similar replication processes can be observed in retail chains, hospitality groups, healthcare systems, educational institutions, consulting organizations, and platform-enabled service networks. In each case, growth depends on the organization's ability to reproduce a proven operating model across multiple units while maintaining consistency and performance.

By treating replication primarily as a franchising phenomenon, existing research underestimates its broader significance for entrepreneurship and strategic management. Replication should instead be conceptualized as a general organizational growth logic that transcends specific governance structures or ownership arrangements. Without such reconceptualization, theoretical understanding remains fragmented and context-dependent.

3.3 The Persistence of Innovation-Centric Growth Assumptions

The third conceptual gap concerns the continued dominance of innovation-centered assumptions within entrepreneurship and strategic management research. For decades, organizational growth has been explained primarily through innovation, opportunity recognition, opportunity creation, exploration, and strategic adaptation (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; March, 1991; Teece *et al.*, 1997)

This perspective has generated substantial theoretical advances and remains highly influential. However, it has also produced an implicit assumption that growth is fundamentally driven by increasing novelty. Entrepreneurial success is frequently associated with creating new products, discovering new opportunities, or developing new business models.

Such assumptions overlook an important reality of organizational expansion. Many successful organizations grow not by continuously creating something new but by systematically reproducing what already works. Franchise systems, restaurant chains, hospitality organizations, educational institutions, and numerous service-based businesses often achieve expansion through the repeated deployment of proven organizational templates rather than through ongoing innovation (Jensen & Szulanski, 2007; Winter & Szulanski, 2001a)

Recent scaling research has begun to recognize that organizational growth depends heavily on repeatability, transferability, and scalability (Coviello *et al.*, 2024; Palmié *et al.*, 2023; Reuber *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless, innovation remains the dominant explanatory mechanism in most growth theories. Consequently, organizational replication continues to occupy a peripheral position despite its widespread practical relevance.

This imbalance creates a significant theoretical blind spot. While scholars understand how organizations create novelty, considerably less attention has been devoted to understanding how organizations scale existing value-creation systems. Replication therefore remains theoretically underdeveloped as an independent pathway to entrepreneurial growth.

3.4 The Missing Link Between Replication and Entrepreneurial Scaling

The most significant conceptual gap concerns the absence of a coherent explanation linking replication processes to entrepreneurial scaling outcomes.

Theoretical insights relevant to replication are currently dispersed across multiple research traditions. Replication strategy explains how organizational templates are reproduced (Jensen & Szulanski, 2007; Winter & Szulanski, 2001). Knowledge transfer theory explains how organizational knowledge moves across units (Argote & Ingram, 2000a; Kogut & Zander, 1992). Organizational routine theory explains how recurring patterns of action generate stability and reproducibility (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Nelson & Winter, 1982). Dynamic capability research explains how organizations adapt and sustain performance under changing conditions (Teece *et al.*, 1997; Zollo & Winter, 2002). Scaling research explains how organizations expand while maintaining coherence and effectiveness (Coviello *et al.*, 2024; Jansen *et al.*, 2023)

Although these perspectives provide valuable insights, they rarely converge within a common explanatory framework. Existing studies tend to focus on isolated mechanisms rather than examining how templates, routines, capabilities, transfer processes, and scaling outcomes interact to produce sustained organizational growth.

As a consequence, scholars lack a unified conceptual language for explaining why some organizations successfully scale through replication while others struggle to expand beyond their initial operations. Existing theories explain how organizations learn, transfer knowledge, adapt, and grow, but they do not adequately explain how proven organizational systems become engines of scalable expansion.

This omission is particularly important because scalability increasingly represents a central concern in entrepreneurship research. Contemporary organizations must often expand across multiple markets, locations, and operational contexts while preserving performance consistency. Understanding how organizational systems become scalable therefore represents a critical theoretical challenge.

3.5 Toward a Replication-Based Theory of Entrepreneurial Growth

Taken together, the preceding gaps reveal a common limitation across existing literature streams. Replication has been studied as a process of knowledge transfer, as an operational feature of franchising, as an outcome of organizational routines, or as a component of scaling. Yet it has rarely been conceptualized as a distinct growth logic capable of explaining how organizations systematically transform proven organizational systems into scalable mechanisms of expansion.

The central theoretical problem is therefore not the absence of research on replication itself. Rather, it is the absence of an integrative explanation of how replication generates entrepreneurial growth.

Addressing this limitation requires a framework capable of connecting organizational templates, replication capability, scaling efficiency, and entrepreneurial scaling within a single theoretical system. Such a framework must move beyond isolated explanations of transfer, routines, governance, or adaptation and instead explain how these mechanisms collectively enable organizations to grow through organizational reproduction.

The preceding review reveals that explanations of organizational expansion remain theoretically fragmented. Existing studies have generated important insights into replication, knowledge transfer, organizational routines, and entrepreneurial scaling, yet these perspectives have largely evolved as separate streams of inquiry. Consequently, the literature lacks an integrated explanation of how proven organizational systems are transformed into scalable mechanisms of entrepreneurial growth. Figure 1 summarizes this fragmentation, identifies the key conceptual gaps, and illustrates the theoretical rationale underlying the development of Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory.

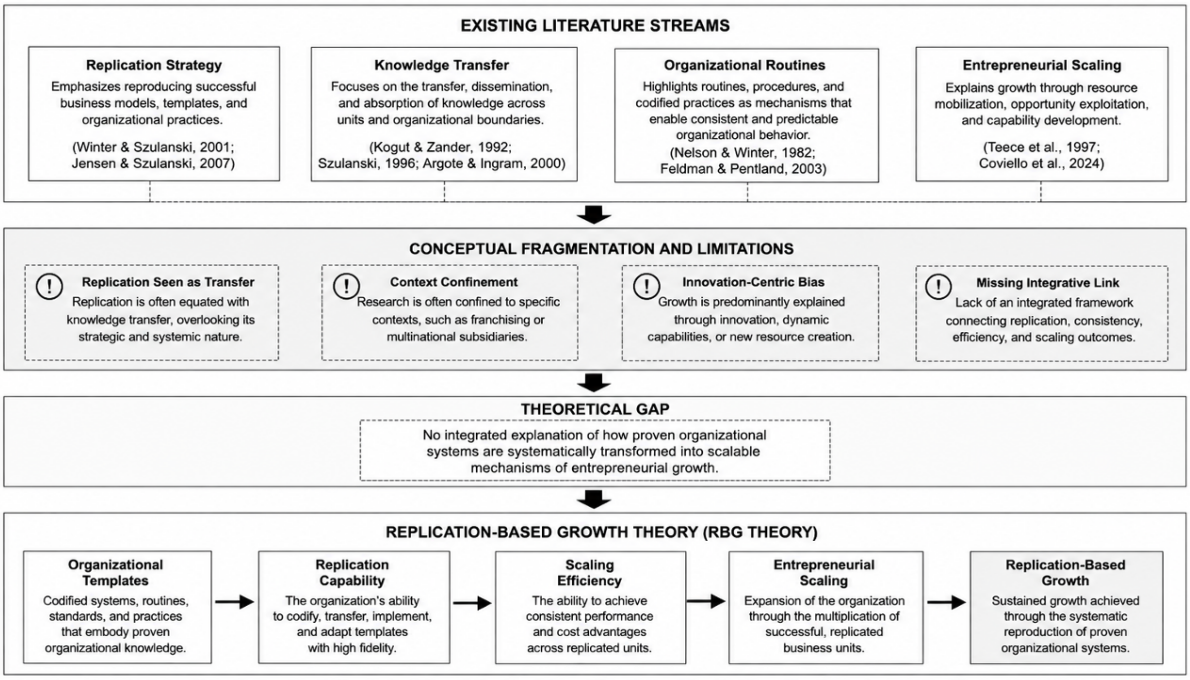

Figure 1. From Fragmented Explanations of Organizational Expansion to Replication-Based Growth Theory

Source: Developed by the authors based on Winter and Szulanski (2001), Kogut and Zander (1992), Nelson and Winter (1982), Feldman and Pentland (2003), Teece et al. (1997), and Coviello et al. (2024).

Figure 1 demonstrates that current explanations of organizational growth remain dispersed across multiple theoretical traditions. While each stream contributes valuable insights, none independently explains how organizations systematically convert proven organizational systems into scalable engines of expansion. The figure therefore highlights the central theoretical gap addressed in this article and positions Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory as an integrative framework that connects organizational reproduction, knowledge mobility, routine-based consistency, and entrepreneurial scaling within a unified explanation of growth.

Accordingly, the next section develops Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory. By integrating previously disconnected research streams, the proposed framework conceptualizes replication as a distinct pathway of entrepreneurial growth and provides a unified explanation of how organizations scale through the systematic deployment of proven organizational templates.

To further clarify the theoretical contribution of this study, Table 1 compares dominant explanations of organizational growth with the proposed Replication-Based Growth perspective and highlights the distinct assumptions underlying each approach.

Table 1. Comparing Dominant Growth Perspectives and Replication-Based Growth Theory

Dimension	Innovation-Based Growth	Dynamic Capability Perspective	Entrepreneurial Scaling Perspective	Replication-Based Growth Theory
Primary Growth Logic	Novelty creation	Resource reconfiguration	Organizational expansion	Organizational reproduction
Central Mechanism	Innovation	Capability development	Scaling processes	Replication capability

Dimension	Innovation-Based Growth	Dynamic Capability Perspective	Entrepreneurial Scaling Perspective	Replication-Based Growth Theory
Key Resource	New ideas	Strategic resources	Scalable structures	Organizational templates
Growth Driver	Exploration	Adaptation	Expansion readiness	Repeatability
Main Challenge	Opportunity discovery	Environmental change	Growth coordination	Replication fidelity
Unit of Analysis	Innovation activities	Organizational capabilities	Scaling organizations	Replicable organizational systems
Outcome	New value creation	Sustained advantage	Scalable growth	Replication-based growth

Source: Developed by the authors based on March (1991), Teece et al. (1997), Eisenhardt and Martin (2000), Winter and Szulanski (2001), Reuber et al. (2021), Jansen et al. (2023), and Coviello et al. (2024).

Table 1 highlights the distinctive contribution of RBG Theory. Unlike dominant growth perspectives that emphasize innovation, adaptation, or scaling processes, the proposed framework explains growth through the systematic reproduction of proven organizational systems and the development of replication capability.

4. Development of Replication-Based Growth Theory

The preceding sections demonstrated that existing research provides important insights into replication, knowledge transfer, organizational routines, dynamic capabilities, and entrepreneurial scaling, yet no integrated explanation currently exists for how organizations achieve growth through the systematic reproduction of proven organizational systems. The conceptual gaps identified in the previous section suggest that replication has frequently been treated as a supporting process within broader theories of learning, franchising, or organizational expansion rather than as an independent growth mechanism.

To address this limitation, this study proposes Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory. The central premise of the theory is that entrepreneurial growth can emerge through the systematic reproduction of proven organizational systems rather than relying exclusively on innovation, opportunity creation, or strategic diversification. While innovation-centered theories emphasize the creation of new value propositions, RBG Theory emphasizes the scalable reproduction of existing value-creation architectures.

The theory argues that growth occurs through the interaction of four interconnected constructs: organizational templates, replication capability, scaling efficiency, and entrepreneurial scaling. Together, these constructs explain how organizations transform proven operating systems into repeatable and scalable growth mechanisms.

Importantly, the proposed framework does not position replication as a substitute for innovation. Rather, it conceptualizes replication as a complementary growth logic that becomes particularly important when organizations seek to expand proven business models across multiple units, locations, or operational contexts. In such situations, organizational success depends less on generating novelty and more on reproducing value-creating systems consistently and efficiently.

4.1 Organizational Templates: The Foundational Resource of Replication-Based Growth

The first foundational construct of RBG Theory is organizational templates.

Organizational templates refer to codified and transferable configurations of routines, managerial practices, governance structures, operational procedures, performance standards, and value-creation mechanisms that collectively define how an organization operates and delivers value. Unlike isolated routines or discrete organizational practices, templates represent integrated organizational systems that can be reproduced across multiple operational units while preserving essential performance characteristics (Jensen & Szulanski, 2007; Winter & Szulanski, 2001)

The concept builds upon evolutionary perspectives of the firm, which view routines as repositories of accumulated organizational knowledge and experience (Nelson & Winter, 1982). Over time, organizations develop recurring patterns of action that become embedded within their operating systems. Through learning, codification, and refinement, these recurring patterns evolve into organizational templates capable of guiding behavior across multiple organizational settings.

Organizational templates are particularly important because they reduce uncertainty associated with growth. Expansion typically requires organizations to make numerous decisions regarding resource allocation, operational processes, quality control, customer interactions, and managerial coordination. Without standardized templates, each new unit would require substantial experimentation and local problem-solving. Templates reduce these requirements by providing proven solutions that can be repeatedly deployed across organizational contexts.

Recent scholarship on organizational scaling similarly emphasizes the importance of repeatable organizational architectures. Reuber *et al.* (2021) argue that scalable organizations depend upon mechanisms capable of preserving value creation across expanding organizational boundaries. Likewise, Coviello *et al.* (2024) suggest that scalability emerges when organizations develop systems that allow growth without proportional increases in complexity and resource commitments. Organizational templates serve precisely this function because they transform organizational knowledge into reusable growth assets.

Importantly, organizational templates should not be interpreted as rigid blueprints. Research on routine dynamics demonstrates that organizational systems simultaneously exhibit stability and adaptability (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Parmigiani & Howard-Grenville, 2011). Consequently, effective templates contain both fixed and flexible elements. Core value-creation mechanisms remain standardized, while peripheral practices may be adapted to local conditions. This balance enables organizations to maintain consistency without sacrificing responsiveness.

Within RBG Theory, organizational templates constitute the foundational resource of growth. They represent the organizational infrastructure that makes replication possible and provide the starting point from which scalable expansion emerges.

4.2 Replication Capability: The Central Mechanism of Organizational Reproduction

Possessing a successful organizational template does not automatically generate growth. Organizations must also develop the capability to reproduce that template effectively across multiple operational contexts. This capability is conceptualized as replication capability.

Replication capability refers to an organization's ability to transfer, implement, preserve, monitor, and continuously reproduce organizational templates while maintaining their value-generating properties. The construct extends insights from knowledge transfer theory, dynamic capability theory, and scaling research by emphasizing the competencies required to reproduce complex organizational systems consistently across multiple units (Kogut & Zander, 1992; Teece *et al.*, 1997; Zollo & Winter, 2002).

Replication capability represents the central mechanism of RBG Theory because it transforms organizational templates from static repositories of knowledge into dynamic instruments of growth. Without replication capability, organizational templates remain localized assets whose value cannot be leveraged beyond their original context.

Existing research suggests that replication is frequently more difficult than anticipated. Knowledge transfer is often hindered by causal ambiguity, communication barriers, contextual variation, and recipient limitations (Szulanski, 1996, 2000) Consequently, organizations differ substantially in their ability to reproduce proven systems across operational settings.

RBG Theory conceptualizes replication capability as consisting of four interrelated dimensions.

First, organizations must possess codification capability. Critical organizational knowledge must be translated into transferable formats that reduce ambiguity and facilitate implementation. Codification transforms tacit organizational experience into explicit organizational assets (Zollo & Winter, 2002)

Second, organizations require deployment capability. Templates must be introduced, interpreted, and implemented effectively by new organizational units. This process involves training, socialization, capability development, and operational support.

Third, organizations require fidelity capability. Replication generates value only when essential organizational characteristics are preserved during implementation. Monitoring systems, performance controls, and governance mechanisms therefore become important tools for maintaining consistency across units.

Fourth, organizations require adaptive capability. Excessive standardization may reduce responsiveness to local conditions, whereas excessive adaptation may undermine replication effectiveness. Successful organizations therefore develop the capacity to distinguish between core elements that must remain standardized and peripheral elements that can be modified.

Taken together, these dimensions suggest that replication capability represents a specialized higher-order organizational capability. Unlike conventional dynamic capabilities that emphasize resource reconfiguration, replication capability emphasizes organizational reproduction. Its primary function is not to create new organizational systems but to reproduce proven systems across multiple contexts while preserving their value-generating logic.

Accordingly, replication capability constitutes the primary enabling mechanism through which organizations convert organizational templates into scalable growth opportunities.

4.3 Scaling Efficiency: Transforming Replication into Scalable Expansion

The third construct of RBG Theory is scaling efficiency.

Scaling efficiency refers to an organization's ability to increase operational scope through replication while minimizing growth-related increases in coordination costs, managerial complexity, implementation costs, and resource requirements. Whereas replication capability concerns the successful reproduction of organizational systems, scaling efficiency concerns the economic and organizational consequences of that reproduction.

Contemporary scaling research increasingly recognizes that growth and scaling are not synonymous (Coviello *et al.*, 2024; Palmié *et al.*, 2023). Organizations may grow by adding resources, employees, or operational units, yet such growth often produces increasing complexity and diminishing returns. Scaling, by contrast, occurs when organizations expand while preserving efficiency, coherence, and value creation.

RBG Theory proposes that scaling efficiency emerges from the interaction between organizational templates and replication capability. Templates reduce uncertainty by providing proven operating systems, while replication capability ensures that these systems can be deployed consistently across new units. Together, these mechanisms reduce many of the frictions typically associated with organizational growth.

As organizations repeatedly engage in replication, they accumulate experience regarding implementation processes, transfer challenges, training mechanisms, and operational coordination. This accumulated experience generates learning effects that improve expansion efficiency over time. Consequently, subsequent replication efforts become progressively faster, less costly, and more predictable.

The logic underlying scaling efficiency resembles learning-curve effects observed in production systems. However, whereas traditional learning curves focus on operational productivity, scaling efficiency concerns the organization's ability to reproduce organizational systems. Growth becomes increasingly efficient because organizations learn how to replicate effectively.

This construct represents an important contribution of RBG Theory because it provides the missing link between replication processes and growth outcomes. Replication alone does not necessarily generate expansion. Growth occurs when replication becomes sufficiently efficient to support repeated deployment across multiple organizational contexts.

4.4 Entrepreneurial Scaling: The Observable Outcome of Replication

The fourth construct is entrepreneurial scaling.

Entrepreneurial scaling refers to the systematic expansion of business operations through the multiplication of organizational units that reproduce a proven organizational template. It represents the observable growth outcome generated by the interaction of templates, replication capability, and scaling efficiency.

Traditional entrepreneurship research frequently associates growth with innovation, opportunity exploitation, and strategic diversification (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; March, 1991). While these mechanisms remain important, entrepreneurial scaling highlights a complementary pathway through which growth can occur.

In replication-based systems, expansion does not necessarily require the continual creation of new products, technologies, or business models. Instead, growth emerges through the repeated deployment of existing value-creation systems across multiple operational settings. Examples include franchise systems, retail chains, hospitality organizations, educational institutions, healthcare providers, and various service-based enterprises.

Entrepreneurial scaling therefore shifts attention from entrepreneurial discovery toward entrepreneurial reproduction. The entrepreneur's primary challenge is no longer limited to identifying opportunities but extends to ensuring that successful organizational systems can be reproduced repeatedly and reliably across expanding organizational networks.

This perspective aligns closely with recent scaling literature, which emphasizes repeatability as a fundamental condition for sustainable expansion (Jansen *et al.*, 2023; Reuber *et al.*, 2021) Organizations scale successfully when they develop mechanisms capable of reproducing value creation without proportional increases in complexity.

Accordingly, entrepreneurial scaling represents the direct manifestation of replication-based growth. It transforms organizational templates from localized organizational assets into engines of sustained expansion.

4.5 Integrating the Constructs: The Logic of Replication-Based Growth

The four constructs together form the foundation of Replication-Based Growth Theory.

The theory proposes that organizational templates constitute the primary growth resource because they encapsulate proven organizational knowledge within transferable systems. However, templates alone cannot generate expansion. Organizations must also possess replication capability, which enables templates to be transferred, implemented, monitored, and reproduced across operational settings.

As replication capability develops, organizations achieve higher levels of scaling efficiency because expansion becomes increasingly standardized, predictable, and cost-effective. Improved scaling efficiency subsequently facilitates entrepreneurial scaling by enabling organizations to add new units without proportional increases in complexity and resource commitments.

The preceding discussion introduced the four core constructs of Replication-Based Growth Theory. Figure 2 integrates these constructs into a unified framework explaining how organizational reproduction generates scalable entrepreneurial expansion.

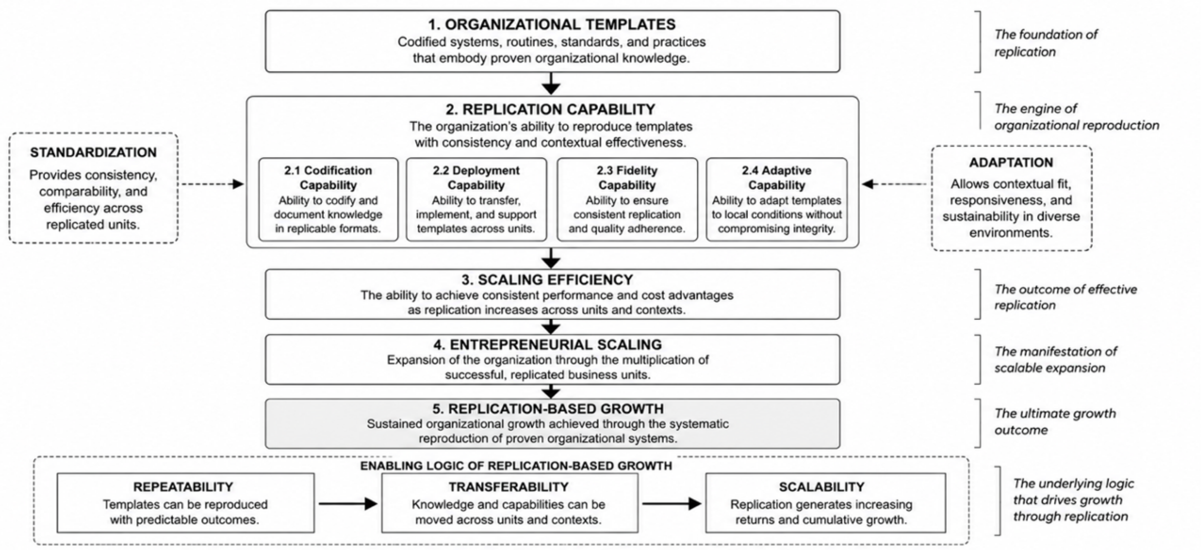

Figure 2. The Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Framework

Source: Developed by the authors based on Winter and Szulanski (2001), Jensen and Szulanski (2007), Kogut and Zander (1992), Teece et al. (1997), Zollo and Winter (2002), Reuber et al. (2021), Jansen et al. (2023), and Coviello et al. (2024).

Figure 2 illustrates the central logic of Replication-Based Growth Theory. Organizational templates provide the foundational architecture for expansion, while replication capability enables their consistent reproduction across operational contexts. Through repeated deployment, organizations achieve scaling efficiency, which facilitates entrepreneurial scaling and ultimately generates replication-based growth as a distinct pathway of organizational expansion.

This sequence reflects a distinct organizational growth logic. Whereas innovation-centered theories explain growth through the creation of novelty, RBG Theory explains growth through the reproduction of proven organizational systems. Innovation-based growth expands through exploration. Replication-based growth expands through repeatability. Innovation emphasizes discovery; replication emphasizes reproducibility.

The central contribution of RBG Theory is therefore the recognition that organizational growth can emerge not only from creating new value but also from scaling existing value-creation architectures. By integrating insights from replication strategy, knowledge transfer, organizational routines, dynamic capabilities, and entrepreneurial scaling research, the theory provides a coherent explanation of how organizations transform proven organizational systems into engines of sustained entrepreneurial expansion.

5. Proposition Development

The Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory developed in the previous section proposes that entrepreneurial growth emerges through the systematic reproduction of proven organizational systems. Specifically, the framework identifies organizational templates, replication capability, scaling efficiency, and entrepreneurial scaling as the core mechanisms through which organizations transform existing value-creation architectures into scalable growth systems.

The relationships among these constructs are grounded in replication strategy, knowledge transfer, organizational routines, dynamic capabilities, and entrepreneurial scaling research. Together, these perspectives suggest that organizational growth can emerge not only from innovation and opportunity creation but also from the repeated deployment of organizational systems that have already demonstrated effectiveness.

To facilitate future empirical examination, this section develops six propositions derived from the theoretical framework.

While Figure 2 presents the structural architecture of Replication-Based Growth Theory, the growth process itself unfolds through a sequence of organizational mechanisms. Figure 3 illustrates the causal pathway through which replication generates entrepreneurial scaling.

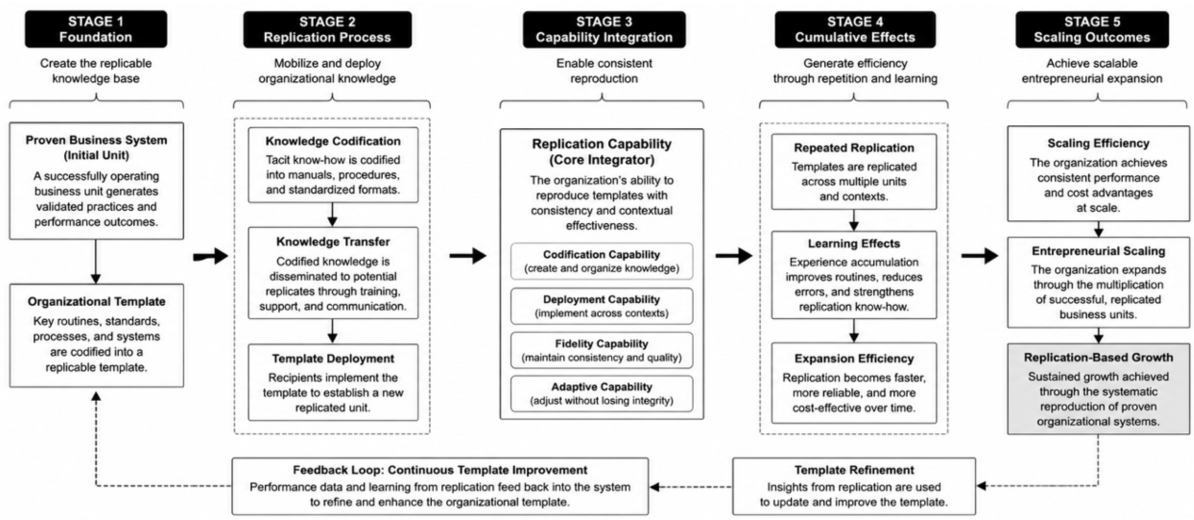

Figure 3. Mechanism of Entrepreneurial Scaling Through Organizational Replication
Source: Developed by the authors based on Winter and Szulanski (2001), Szulanski (2000), Argote and Ingram (2000), Zollo and Winter (2002), Feldman and Pentland (2003), Reuber et al. (2021), Jansen et al. (2023), and Coviello et al. (2024).

Figure 3 illustrates the dynamic mechanism underlying replication-based growth. Through repeated cycles of codification, transfer, deployment, and organizational learning, firms progressively improve replication capability and expansion efficiency. This cumulative process transforms proven organizational templates into scalable growth engines that support sustained entrepreneurial scaling over time.

5.1 Proposition 1: Organizational Templates and Replication Capability

Organizational templates constitute the foundational resource of replication-based growth because they encapsulate the routines, practices, governance structures, operational procedures, and value-creation mechanisms that define how an organization functions (Jensen & Szulanski, 2007; Winter & Szulanski, 2001) As repositories of organizational knowledge, templates reduce ambiguity and provide standardized guidance that facilitates implementation across multiple operational contexts.

The knowledge transfer literature suggests that the successful movement of organizational knowledge depends heavily on the degree to which knowledge can be articulated, codified, and communicated (Kogut & Zander, 1992; Szulanski, 1996). Similarly, research on organizational learning emphasizes that codified organizational systems improve transferability because they reduce reliance on tacit knowledge and individual expertise (Zollo & Winter, 2002)

From a replication perspective, well-developed templates serve as organizational blueprints that make value-generating systems visible, understandable, and reproducible. Organizations possessing highly codified templates should therefore experience fewer difficulties when attempting to transfer and reproduce organizational practices across units. In contrast, organizations relying primarily on tacit knowledge may struggle to scale because critical operating knowledge remains difficult to communicate and implement consistently.

Recent scaling research reinforces this argument by emphasizing the importance of repeatability as a prerequisite for organizational expansion (Coviello *et al.*, 2024; Reuber *et al.*, 2021). Repeatability becomes possible only when organizational systems can be sufficiently codified to support reproduction across multiple settings.

Accordingly, organizational templates provide the structural foundation upon which replication capability develops.

Proposition 1 (P1): *Organizational templates positively influence replication capability.*

5.2 Proposition 2: Replication Capability and Scaling Efficiency

Replication capability reflects an organization's ability to transfer, implement, preserve, monitor, and adapt organizational templates across multiple operational units. While organizational templates provide the underlying architecture for growth, replication capability determines whether that architecture can be deployed effectively at scale.

Knowledge transfer research demonstrates that organizations differ significantly in their ability to reproduce organizational knowledge across units (Argote & Ingram, 2000a). Similarly, dynamic capability theory suggests that organizations develop specialized competencies that facilitate resource deployment, organizational coordination, and strategic execution (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece *et al.*, 1997).

Replication capability extends these ideas by focusing specifically on organizational reproduction. Organizations possessing strong replication capability are better able to reduce implementation errors, maintain operational consistency, preserve performance standards, and accelerate learning across newly established units. As replication becomes increasingly standardized, the costs associated with training, monitoring, coordination, and implementation decline.

This process generates what RBG Theory conceptualizes as scaling efficiency. Through repeated replication, organizations accumulate knowledge regarding expansion processes and become progressively more effective at reproducing organizational systems. Consequently, expansion becomes faster, more predictable, and less resource-intensive.

Recent entrepreneurial scaling research similarly suggests that scalability depends on the development of organizational mechanisms that enable growth without proportional increases in complexity (Coviello *et al.*, 2024; Jansen *et al.*, 2023; Palmié *et al.*, 2023) Replication capability represents one such mechanism because it allows organizations to deploy proven systems repeatedly while minimizing growth-related frictions.

Therefore, stronger replication capability should improve scaling efficiency.

Proposition 2 (P2): *Replication capability positively influences scaling efficiency.*

5.3 Proposition 3: Scaling Efficiency and Entrepreneurial Scaling

Scaling efficiency represents an organization's ability to expand through replication while minimizing increases in coordination costs, managerial complexity, and resource requirements. This construct occupies a central position within RBG Theory because it connects organizational capabilities to observable growth outcomes.

Growth often creates organizational challenges associated with communication, control, coordination, and resource allocation. Organizations that fail to manage these challenges frequently experience diminishing returns as they expand. Consequently, growth alone does not necessarily lead to scalability.

The scaling literature increasingly distinguishes between growth and scaling, arguing that sustainable expansion requires organizational systems capable of preserving effectiveness while increasing organizational scope (Palmié *et al.*, 2023; Reuber *et al.*, 2021). Scaling efficiency provides precisely such a mechanism.

When organizations achieve high levels of scaling efficiency, expansion becomes more predictable and less costly. New operational units can be established without requiring extensive experimentation, excessive managerial intervention, or substantial redesign of organizational processes. As a result, organizations become capable of increasing their operational footprint more rapidly and consistently.

In replication-based systems, scaling efficiency therefore functions as a direct enabler of entrepreneurial scaling because it transforms replication from a localized capability into a repeatable expansion process.

Proposition 3 (P3): *Scaling efficiency positively influences entrepreneurial scaling.*

5.4 Proposition 4: Entrepreneurial Scaling and Replication-Based Growth

Entrepreneurial scaling refers to the systematic expansion of organizational operations through the multiplication of units that reproduce a proven organizational template. It represents the observable manifestation of replication-based growth.

Traditional growth theories often emphasize innovation, opportunity exploitation, and strategic diversification as primary drivers of organizational expansion (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; March, 1991). While these mechanisms remain important, entrepreneurial scaling highlights an alternative pathway through which organizations grow.

Replication-based systems generate expansion by reproducing established value-creation architectures rather than continuously generating new ones. Franchise networks, retail chains, hospitality organizations, healthcare providers, and educational institutions frequently achieve growth through this mechanism. In such contexts, organizational success depends less on discovering new opportunities and more on replicating proven operating systems across multiple locations.

As entrepreneurial scaling increases, organizations expand their market presence, revenue-generating capacity, organizational reach, and strategic influence. Growth therefore emerges through the multiplication of organizational units that reproduce an existing value-creation model.

This argument is consistent with replication strategy research, which demonstrates that organizational reproduction can serve as an independent mechanism of expansion (Mangematin & Baden-Fuller, 2008; Winter & Szulanski, 2001)

Accordingly, entrepreneurial scaling represents the immediate pathway through which replication-based growth materializes.

Proposition 4 (P4): *Entrepreneurial scaling positively influences replication-based growth.*

5.5 Proposition 5: The Mediating Role of Replication Capability

Although organizational templates provide the foundational resource for replication-based growth, templates alone are insufficient to generate scalable outcomes. Possessing a proven organizational system does not automatically ensure that the system can be reproduced effectively across multiple contexts.

The relationship between templates and growth therefore depends on the organization's ability to operationalize those templates through replication capability. This argument is consistent with dynamic capability theory, which suggests that organizational resources create value only when organizations possess the capabilities necessary to deploy them effectively (Teece *et al.*, 1997; Zollo & Winter, 2002).

Organizational templates define what should be replicated, whereas replication capability determines whether replication can actually occur. Templates that remain difficult to transfer, implement, or monitor are unlikely to generate substantial growth regardless of their inherent quality.

Consequently, replication capability functions as the primary mechanism through which organizational templates influence entrepreneurial scaling. Organizations possessing highly developed templates should achieve superior growth outcomes only when they also possess the capability required to reproduce those templates consistently across operational settings.

From this perspective, replication capability transforms organizational templates from static organizational assets into dynamic growth resources.

Proposition 5 (P5): *Replication capability mediates the relationship between organizational templates and entrepreneurial scaling.*

5.6 Proposition 6: The Mediating Role of Scaling Efficiency

While replication capability enables organizations to reproduce organizational templates, sustainable growth ultimately depends on the efficiency with which replication occurs. Organizations may successfully replicate organizational systems yet still struggle to scale if expansion generates excessive complexity, coordination costs, or resource requirements.

Scaling efficiency therefore represents a second critical mechanism within the RBG framework. Replication capability facilitates the reproduction of organizational systems, but scaling efficiency determines whether that reproduction can support sustained organizational expansion.

As organizations accumulate replication experience, they develop increasingly efficient processes for training personnel, transferring knowledge, implementing templates, coordinating activities, and monitoring performance. These efficiencies reduce growth-related frictions and enable organizations to expand more effectively across multiple operational contexts.

Recent scaling research similarly emphasizes that organizational growth becomes sustainable only when organizations develop mechanisms that decouple expansion from proportional increases in resource commitments (Coviello *et al.*, 2024; Palmié *et al.*, 2023). Scaling efficiency represents precisely such a mechanism.

Accordingly, the growth effects of replication capability are expected to operate largely through scaling efficiency. Replication capability enables organizational reproduction, while scaling efficiency transforms reproduction into scalable expansion.

Proposition 6 (P6): *Scaling efficiency mediates the relationship between replication capability and replication-based growth.*

5.7 Summary of the Propositional Framework

Taken together, the six propositions establish the causal architecture of Replication-Based Growth Theory. The framework suggests that organizational templates constitute the foundational growth resource, replication capability serves as the primary enabling mechanism, scaling efficiency functions as the operational accelerator, and entrepreneurial scaling represents the immediate pathway through which growth occurs.

The resulting theoretical model provides an integrated explanation of how organizations transform proven organizational systems into scalable growth mechanisms. More importantly, it advances a distinct growth logic in which organizational expansion emerges through reproducibility rather than novelty. By identifying the mechanisms linking templates, replication, efficiency, and scaling, the framework offers a foundation for future empirical studies examining replication-driven growth across franchise systems, retail chains, hospitality organizations, healthcare providers, educational institutions, and other template-based organizational forms.

To facilitate future empirical research, Table 2 summarizes the key constructs of Replication-Based Growth Theory and identifies their conceptual definitions and observable organizational manifestations.

Table 2. Theoretical Constructs Underpinning Replication-Based Growth Theory

Construct	Conceptual Definition	Organizational Manifestation
Organizational Templates	Codified and transferable organizational systems	Standard operating procedures, routines, manuals, business formats
Replication Capability	Ability to reproduce templates across contexts	Training systems, deployment mechanisms, monitoring systems
Scaling Efficiency	Ability to expand with limited increases in complexity	Faster implementation, lower coordination costs, predictable expansion
Entrepreneurial Scaling	Expansion through multiplication of replicated units	Franchise growth, chain expansion, multi-unit development
Replication-Based Growth	Sustained growth through organizational reproduction	Scalable business networks and repeated organizational deployment

Source: Developed by the authors based on Winter and Szulanski (2001), Jensen and Szulanski (2007), Zollo and Winter (2002), Reuber et al. (2021), Jansen et al. (2023), and Coviello et al. (2024).

Table 2 translates the theoretical framework into a set of analytically distinguishable constructs. The table provides a foundation for future operationalization and empirical testing by linking abstract concepts to observable organizational practices and growth outcomes.

6. Discussion and Implications

This paper set out to address a persistent limitation in entrepreneurship and strategic management research concerning how organizations achieve growth through replication. While existing studies have generated valuable insights regarding replication strategy, knowledge transfer, organizational routines, dynamic capabilities, franchising, and entrepreneurial scaling, these perspectives have largely developed in parallel rather than as components of a unified explanation of organizational expansion.

To address this fragmentation, this study developed Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory. The proposed framework conceptualizes organizational growth as a process that emerges through the systematic reproduction of proven organizational systems. Specifically, the theory identifies organizational templates, replication capability, scaling efficiency, and entrepreneurial scaling as the core mechanisms through which organizations transform existing value-creation architectures into scalable growth systems.

By integrating previously disconnected theoretical traditions, RBG Theory advances a distinct explanation of entrepreneurial growth that complements prevailing innovation-centered perspectives. The following discussion outlines the primary theoretical, conceptual, and managerial implications of the framework.

6.1 Theoretical Contributions of Replication-Based Growth Theory

The first contribution of this study is the introduction of replication-based growth as a distinct theoretical logic within entrepreneurship and strategic management research.

Existing theories frequently explain organizational growth through innovation, opportunity recognition, exploration, business model innovation, strategic adaptation, and resource reconfiguration (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; March, 1991; Teece *et al.*, 1997). While these explanations have generated substantial theoretical advances, they implicitly assume that growth primarily emerges from increasing novelty.

RBG Theory challenges this assumption by demonstrating that organizational growth may also emerge from increasing reproducibility. Rather than focusing exclusively on the creation of new value propositions, organizations may expand by systematically reproducing proven value-creation architectures across multiple operational settings.

This perspective broadens existing conceptualizations of entrepreneurial growth by recognizing replication as an independent growth mechanism rather than merely an operational consequence of innovation. As a result, the theory contributes to entrepreneurship research by extending understanding of how organizations scale beyond traditional innovation-centered explanations.

A second theoretical contribution concerns the integration of previously fragmented research streams. Existing literature has generated substantial knowledge regarding replication (Winter & Szulanski, 2001), knowledge transfer (Argote & Ingram, 2000a), organizational routines (Feldman & Pentland, 2003), dynamic capabilities (Zollo & Winter, 2002), and entrepreneurial scaling (Coviello *et al.*, 2024). However, these streams rarely converge within a common explanatory framework.

RBG Theory contributes by establishing conceptual connections among these perspectives. Specifically, the framework explains how organizational templates function as repositories of transferable knowledge, how replication capability enables organizational reproduction, how scaling efficiency transforms replication into scalable expansion, and how entrepreneurial scaling ultimately generates growth outcomes. This integration provides a more comprehensive explanation of organizational expansion than any individual theoretical perspective alone.

A third contribution involves the introduction of replication capability as a distinct organizational construct. Existing research has examined transfer capability, learning capability, and dynamic capability, yet relatively limited attention has been devoted to the organizational competencies required to reproduce complex organizational systems consistently across multiple contexts.

Replication capability extends existing capability-based perspectives by emphasizing organizational reproduction rather than organizational adaptation. Whereas dynamic capabilities primarily focus on reconfiguring resources under changing conditions, replication capability focuses on preserving, transferring, and redeploying proven organizational architectures. This distinction contributes to ongoing discussions regarding the variety of organizational capabilities that support growth and competitive advantage.

Finally, RBG Theory contributes to the emerging literature on entrepreneurial scaling. Recent scholarship increasingly recognizes scalability as a distinct organizational phenomenon requiring repeatability, transferability, and operational coherence (Coviello *et al.*, 2024;

Palmié *et al.*, 2023; Reuber *et al.*, 2021). However, existing studies often identify the importance of scaling without fully specifying the organizational mechanisms through which scaling occurs.

The present framework addresses this limitation by identifying organizational templates, replication capability, and scaling efficiency as the mechanisms linking organizational resources to scaling outcomes. Consequently, the theory provides a more detailed explanation of how organizations convert proven operating systems into scalable growth mechanisms.

6.2 Reframing Entrepreneurial Growth: From Novelty to Reproducibility

Beyond its specific theoretical contributions, RBG Theory proposes a broader reconceptualization of entrepreneurial growth.

For decades, entrepreneurship research has been strongly influenced by assumptions that associate growth with innovation, opportunity discovery, and entrepreneurial creativity. Within this tradition, organizational success is frequently interpreted as the result of generating novel products, services, technologies, or business models.

The present framework suggests that this perspective captures only one dimension of organizational growth. While innovation remains an important mechanism of expansion, many organizations achieve growth through the systematic reproduction of proven organizational systems rather than through continuous novelty creation.

This distinction introduces an alternative growth logic based on reproducibility. Innovation-centered growth relies on exploration and discovery. Replication-based growth relies on repeatability and deployment. Innovation creates new value architectures, whereas replication scales existing value architectures.

The distinction is theoretically important because it shifts attention from entrepreneurial discovery toward entrepreneurial reproduction. Under this perspective, growth depends not only on identifying opportunities but also on developing organizational systems capable of preserving and reproducing value creation across multiple operational contexts.

This reconceptualization also contributes to ongoing debates regarding exploration and exploitation (March, 1991). Existing discussions often treat exploitation as a relatively passive process compared with exploration. RBG Theory suggests that organizational reproduction can itself constitute a sophisticated strategic activity requiring codification, transfer, coordination, monitoring, adaptation, and capability development.

Consequently, replication should not be viewed as a secondary consequence of innovation but as a distinct organizational logic that enables sustainable entrepreneurial expansion.

6.3 Managerial and Strategic Implications

The proposed framework also offers several implications for managers, entrepreneurs, franchise operators, and organizational leaders responsible for growth.

First, the theory suggests that organizational growth should not be viewed exclusively as an innovation challenge. While innovation remains important, organizations may achieve substantial expansion by identifying, refining, and replicating proven organizational systems. Managers should therefore devote attention not only to creating new business models but also to developing systems capable of supporting repeatable execution.

Second, organizational templates should be treated as strategic assets. Many firms possess valuable knowledge embedded within routines, managerial practices, operational procedures, and governance mechanisms. However, such knowledge often remains tacit and difficult to transfer. Organizations seeking growth should invest in codifying critical knowledge and transforming operational experience into transferable organizational templates.

Third, managers should recognize replication capability as a strategic competence. Successful expansion depends not only on possessing effective business models but also on possessing the organizational capabilities necessary to reproduce those models consistently. Training systems, knowledge management infrastructures, operational manuals, monitoring mechanisms, and implementation support processes therefore become critical investments for scalable growth.

Fourth, organizations pursuing aggressive expansion should focus on improving scaling efficiency. Growth frequently generates coordination challenges, communication problems, quality inconsistencies, and managerial overload. Developing efficient replication processes can reduce these growth-related frictions and increase the sustainability of expansion efforts.

Finally, the framework highlights the strategic importance of balancing standardization and adaptation. Excessive standardization may reduce responsiveness to local conditions, whereas excessive adaptation may undermine consistency and diminish the advantages of replication. Managers must therefore determine which elements of organizational templates should remain standardized and which elements can be adapted without compromising the integrity of the underlying value-creation system.

6.4 Boundary Conditions and Scope of RBG Theory

Despite its contributions, RBG Theory should be interpreted within clearly defined boundaries.

The theory is most applicable in contexts where organizational activities can be codified, standardized, and transferred across operational units. Industries characterized by repeatable service delivery, standardized operating procedures, and transferable organizational routines are therefore particularly suitable environments for replication-based growth.

Examples include franchise systems, retail chains, hospitality organizations, healthcare providers, educational institutions, professional service networks, and platform-enabled business systems. In such settings, organizational templates can be reproduced with relatively high levels of consistency.

By contrast, the explanatory power of RBG Theory may be more limited in contexts characterized by extreme customization, highly project-based work, artistic production, or environments requiring continuous innovation and experimentation. In such settings, organizational success may depend more heavily on adaptation and novelty creation than on organizational replication.

A second boundary condition concerns environmental volatility. Although replication-based growth incorporates adaptive mechanisms, environments characterized by rapid technological disruption or highly unpredictable market shifts may reduce the effectiveness of standardized organizational templates. Under such conditions, innovation-oriented growth logics may become relatively more important.

Finally, the present study is conceptual in nature. The proposed constructs and relationships have not yet been empirically validated. The framework should therefore be viewed as a theoretical foundation rather than a definitive explanation of organizational growth. Future empirical research is needed to examine the validity, generalizability, and boundary conditions of the proposed model across diverse organizational settings.

Recognizing these limitations does not diminish the value of the framework. Rather, it clarifies the contexts in which replication-based growth is most likely to operate and provides a foundation for future theoretical refinement and empirical investigation.

7. Future Research Agenda

The development of Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory creates numerous opportunities for future theoretical refinement and empirical investigation. Although the framework provides an integrated explanation of how organizations achieve growth through the systematic reproduction of proven organizational systems, many aspects of the theory remain open to further development. Future research can contribute by validating the proposed constructs, extending the framework into new organizational contexts, and identifying additional mechanisms that influence replication-based growth.

Rather than representing the conclusion of a theoretical discussion, RBG Theory should be viewed as the starting point of a broader research agenda focused on understanding organizational growth through reproducibility, transferability, and scalability.

7.1 Measurement Development and Construct Validation

A first priority for future research involves the development of reliable measures for the core constructs proposed in RBG Theory.

Although related concepts such as knowledge transfer, dynamic capabilities, organizational learning, and scaling have received substantial empirical attention, validated instruments specifically designed to capture organizational templates, replication capability, and scaling efficiency remain limited. Consequently, future studies should focus on conceptual clarification and scale development.

Particular attention should be devoted to replication capability because the construct represents the central mechanism of the proposed framework. Future researchers may seek to operationalize its dimensions, including codification capability, deployment capability, fidelity capability, and adaptive capability. Empirical validation of these dimensions would help establish whether replication capability constitutes a distinct organizational capability separate from related concepts such as absorptive capacity, dynamic capabilities, and knowledge transfer effectiveness.

The development of valid measurement instruments would provide a foundation for quantitative testing and comparative analyses across organizational settings.

7.2 Empirical Examination Across Organizational Contexts

A second research priority involves examining the applicability of RBG Theory across diverse organizational environments.

The framework was developed from insights originating in replication strategy, franchising, organizational routines, and scaling research. However, replication-based growth is not confined to franchise systems. Similar processes can be observed in retail chains, hospitality organizations, healthcare systems, educational institutions, consulting firms, logistics networks, and professional service organizations.

Future empirical studies should therefore investigate whether the relationships proposed in the framework remain consistent across different industries and organizational forms. Comparative research may reveal important contextual variations regarding the effectiveness of organizational templates, the development of replication capability, and the efficiency of scaling processes.

Such studies would help determine the generalizability of RBG Theory and identify industry-specific contingencies influencing replication-based growth.

7.3 Digitalization and Replication-Based Growth

An especially promising avenue for future research concerns the relationship between digitalization and replication-based growth.

Contemporary organizations increasingly rely on digital platforms, cloud-based infrastructures, algorithmic processes, and technology-enabled operating systems that facilitate the rapid deployment of organizational practices across markets. These developments may fundamentally alter the mechanisms through which organizational templates are created, transferred, and replicated.

Future research should investigate whether digital technologies strengthen replication capability by reducing communication barriers, enhancing knowledge codification, and improving implementation fidelity. Similarly, scholars may explore whether platform-based organizations represent a new form of replication-based growth in which organizational templates are embedded within technological architectures rather than traditional operating procedures.

Such research would extend RBG Theory beyond conventional franchise and multi-unit business settings and connect the framework with emerging discussions concerning digital scalability and platform growth.

7.4 Replication and Innovation as Complementary Growth Logics

A fourth research direction concerns the relationship between replication and innovation.

The present framework conceptualizes replication-based growth as a complementary rather than competing growth logic. Nevertheless, the interaction between replication and innovation remains poorly understood.

Future studies should examine how organizations balance the creation of new organizational systems with the reproduction of existing ones. Some organizations may alternate between periods of innovation and periods of replication, while others may pursue both activities simultaneously.

Longitudinal research could provide valuable insights into how firms transition from innovation-oriented growth to replication-oriented growth as they mature. Similarly, scholars may investigate whether innovation primarily occurs at the template level while replication occurs at the implementation level.

Such research would contribute not only to RBG Theory but also to broader debates concerning exploration and exploitation, organizational ambidexterity, and sustainable growth.

7.5 The Microfoundations of Replication Capability

Another important research opportunity involves examining the microfoundations underlying replication capability.

Although the present framework conceptualizes replication capability as an organizational-level construct, its development ultimately depends on managerial actions, employee behaviors, leadership processes, and organizational culture. Future studies should therefore investigate the individual and group-level mechanisms that support successful organizational replication.

Potential areas of inquiry include managerial cognition, leadership styles, training systems, knowledge-sharing behaviors, organizational identity, and cultural alignment. Researchers may also examine how decision makers determine which elements of organizational templates should remain standardized and which should be adapted to local conditions.

Understanding these microfoundations would provide deeper insight into the behavioral mechanisms through which replication capability emerges and evolves over time.

7.6 Multi-Unit Ownership and Entrepreneurial Scaling

Future research should also explore the relationship between replication-based growth and multi-unit ownership.

Entrepreneurial scaling frequently occurs through the expansion of ownership across multiple business units rather than through the growth of a single organizational entity. Franchisees, regional operators, chain owners, and portfolio entrepreneurs often expand by repeatedly deploying proven organizational templates across multiple locations.

Examining replication capability within multi-unit ownership systems may provide important insights into how entrepreneurs achieve growth through organizational reproduction. Such research would help bridge entrepreneurship literature with franchising, ownership, and scaling research while extending the practical relevance of RBG Theory.

Moreover, multi-unit ownership contexts provide particularly suitable settings for testing the mediating mechanisms proposed within the framework because they offer observable examples of organizational replication occurring at scale.

7.7 Cross-National and Institutional Perspectives

Finally, future research should investigate how institutional environments influence replication-based growth.

The transferability of organizational templates may vary across countries due to differences in cultural norms, regulatory systems, labor markets, and institutional structures. Organizational systems that replicate successfully in one context may encounter implementation challenges in another.

Cross-national comparative studies would therefore provide valuable insights regarding the boundary conditions of RBG Theory. Researchers could examine how institutional distance influences template transferability, replication capability, scaling efficiency, and entrepreneurial scaling outcomes.

Such studies would strengthen the external validity of the framework while contributing to broader discussions regarding international entrepreneurship, organizational adaptation, and global scaling.

7.8 Toward a Research Program on Replication-Based Growth

Collectively, these research directions suggest that RBG Theory has implications extending far beyond the initial framework proposed in this paper. The theory creates opportunities for research on organizational capabilities, entrepreneurial scaling, digital business models, multi-unit ownership, organizational routines, knowledge transfer, and institutional adaptation.

More broadly, the framework encourages scholars to reconsider a fundamental assumption underlying much of entrepreneurship research: that growth is primarily a function of novelty creation. RBG Theory suggests that growth may also emerge from reproducibility, transferability, and scalability. Understanding how organizations transform proven organizational systems into engines of expansion therefore represents a promising and potentially enduring research domain within entrepreneurship and strategic management.

Accordingly, future research should continue refining, extending, and empirically testing the mechanisms proposed in this study. Doing so will not only strengthen the validity of RBG

Theory but also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of organizational growth in contemporary business environments.

8. Conclusion

This study was motivated by a persistent theoretical limitation in entrepreneurship and strategic management research concerning how organizations achieve sustained growth through the systematic reproduction of proven organizational systems. Although extensive scholarship has examined innovation, opportunity recognition, dynamic capabilities, organizational learning, knowledge transfer, franchising, and entrepreneurial scaling, existing explanations remain fragmented and largely centered on the assumption that growth is primarily driven by novelty creation. As a consequence, the literature has provided only a partial understanding of how organizations expand by repeatedly deploying successful organizational architectures across multiple units, locations, and operational contexts. Addressing this limitation, the present study sought to develop a comprehensive theoretical explanation of replication as a distinct mechanism of entrepreneurial growth.

The primary contribution of this study is the development of Replication-Based Growth (RBG) Theory, a conceptual framework that explains how organizations transform proven organizational systems into scalable engines of expansion. By integrating insights from replication strategy, knowledge transfer, organizational routines, dynamic capabilities, franchising, and entrepreneurial scaling research, the study advances a coherent theoretical perspective that has previously been absent from the literature. Rather than treating replication as a subsidiary process embedded within learning, governance, or operational standardization, the proposed theory positions replication as an independent growth logic capable of generating entrepreneurial expansion. In doing so, the framework addresses an important conceptual gap and extends current understanding of how organizations scale beyond innovation-centered explanations.

More specifically, the study introduces and integrates four core constructs—organizational templates, replication capability, scaling efficiency, and entrepreneurial scaling—into a unified explanatory system. The framework proposes that organizational templates serve as repositories of proven value-creation architectures, replication capability enables their effective transfer and reproduction, scaling efficiency transforms replication into an economically viable expansion mechanism, and entrepreneurial scaling represents the observable manifestation of growth through organizational reproduction. Collectively, these constructs provide a process-based explanation of how firms achieve growth through repeatability, transferability, and scalability. The proposed propositions further establish the causal architecture linking these constructs and provide a foundation for future empirical examination. In this regard, the study not only synthesizes fragmented research streams but also advances new conceptual language and mechanisms for understanding growth through reproducibility.

Beyond introducing a new framework, the study contributes to a broader reconceptualization of entrepreneurial growth. Existing theories have predominantly emphasized exploration, innovation, and opportunity creation as the principal drivers of expansion. While these mechanisms remain critically important, the present study argues that growth may also emerge through the systematic scaling of existing value-creation architectures. This shift from novelty toward reproducibility represents a meaningful theoretical advancement because it recognizes that many organizations expand not by continuously creating something new, but by repeatedly deploying what has already proven successful. Accordingly, RBG Theory broadens the theoretical boundaries of entrepreneurship and strategic management research by demonstrating that organizational reproduction constitutes a legitimate and strategically significant pathway of growth.

The study also offers important implications for practice. For entrepreneurs, franchise operators, organizational leaders, and growth-oriented firms, the framework highlights the strategic importance of codifying organizational knowledge, developing transferable operating systems, and investing in capabilities that support replication. The theory suggests that scalable growth depends not only on identifying opportunities or generating innovation but also on building organizational architectures that can be reproduced consistently across multiple contexts. Consequently, managers should view organizational templates and replication capability as strategic assets that facilitate sustainable expansion while minimizing growth-related complexity and inefficiency.

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study is conceptual and therefore does not provide empirical evidence supporting the proposed relationships. While the framework is grounded in established theoretical traditions, empirical validation remains necessary to assess the robustness and generalizability of the model. Second, the theory is likely to be most applicable in organizational settings characterized by standardization, transferability, and repeatable value-creation processes. Its explanatory power may be more limited in contexts that depend heavily on continuous innovation, extreme customization, or highly project-based forms of work. Third, the framework necessarily simplifies the complexity of organizational growth by focusing on replication as a primary mechanism, whereas actual growth trajectories may involve dynamic interactions among innovation, adaptation, and reproduction.

These limitations provide several opportunities for future research. Subsequent studies should empirically test the proposed propositions across diverse industries and organizational forms, develop reliable measures for the key constructs introduced in the framework, and investigate the microfoundations underlying replication capability. Future research may also examine how digital technologies, platform-based business models, and artificial intelligence influence the codification, transfer, and reproduction of organizational templates. Equally important is the need to explore the interaction between innovation-based and replication-based growth logics, particularly in organizations that simultaneously pursue exploration and scalability. Cross-national and institutional research would further enhance understanding of the contextual conditions under which replication-based growth is most effective.

In conclusion, this study argues that organizational growth cannot be fully understood through innovation-centered explanations alone. By introducing Replication-Based Growth Theory, the paper demonstrates that entrepreneurial expansion may emerge not only from the creation of new value but also from the systematic reproduction of proven value-creation systems. In an era in which scalability, transferability, and organizational coherence increasingly determine competitive success, understanding how firms transform organizational templates into engines of expansion becomes both theoretically and practically essential. By establishing reproducibility as a fundamental logic of entrepreneurial growth, this study opens a new avenue for research and provides a foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of how organizations achieve sustainable expansion in contemporary business environments.

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