

Advancing Foundation Ownership

Researching how foundation-ownership creates value for business and society

Why foundation ownership matters

Enterprise foundations are foundations that own companies. This model plays a special role in Denmark, where many successful companies, including COWI, are owned by foundations. Similar examples can be found around the world, such as Robert Bosch, Inter IKEA, Rolex, Patagonia and Tata Industries.

Foundation ownership combines a long-term perspective with a commitment to purpose and social responsibility. At the same time, it raises important questions about how foundation-owned companies are governed, managed and regulated. Understanding these issues is increasingly important as interest in foundation ownership grows internationally.

The research project

The five-year research project **Advancing Foundation Ownership** examines how foundation ownership can be governed to create greater value for both business and society. In general foundation-owned companies do well in terms of financial and social performance, but some do better than others, and the project examines why.

The project is coordinated by the Center for Enterprise Foundations at Copenhagen Business School and led by **Professor Steen Thomsen**, a pioneer in research on foundation ownership. It brings together leading Danish and international scholars.

The project explores eight interconnected themes: (1) understanding the drivers of business performance in foundation-owned firms; (2) enterprise foundations and innovation; (3) the diversity of foundation ownership and governance models; (4) efficient regulation of enterprise foundations; (5) the alignment between foundation ownership and corporate purpose; (6) active ownership practices; (7) measuring the social impact of philanthropic and business activities; and (8) integration of these insights into the evolving discourse on sustainable corporate governance.

A key hypothesis is that foundation ownership is particularly well suited to companies that depend on innovation and knowledge building. Because foundation-owned companies are not under pressure to deliver short-term results, they may be better able to build lasting competitive advantages.

Expected outcomes and impact

The project aims to generate new knowledge about foundation ownership is best governed and to translate this knowledge into practical guidance for foundations, companies and policymakers. Expected outcomes include academic publications, business recommendations, policy insights and increased public understanding of foundation ownership.

The project builds on two previous research initiatives at Copenhagen Business School: *The Danish Industrial Foundations and Long-Term Ownership and Value Creation by Enterprise Foundations*. Together, these projects contribute to a deeper understanding of how foundation-owned companies create value for business and society.