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Nurturing tomorrow's champions

Unlocking the growth potential of Denmark's emerging scalers

We surveyed **207** companies across Denmark, interviewed **15** mid-market scalers, prepared **3** case studies and interviewed **24** professionals and academic experts.

1. Executive summary: Catalysing growth through established scalers

Denmark has long benefitted from the presence of global champions such as Novo Nordisk, Maersk and Carlsberg. Yet few Danish companies manage to reach a similar level of maturity, as many either relocate or fail to scale sufficiently. Despite having produced twelve unicorns[1] since the turn of the millennium, Denmark struggles to retain and grow these companies domestically[2]. This may help explain why only two Danish companies are currently listed on the FT1000, which ranks Europe's fastest-growing businesses. By comparison, Sweden has 23, Norway 7, and Finland 9[3]. Denmark also lags behind in the broader EU context when it comes to the prevalence of high-growth companies. In 2020, these companies accounted for 8.4% of all businesses in Denmark, versus an EU average of 9.4%. In a Nordic perspective, Sweden and Finland have high-growth companies representing 15.7% and 12.5% of their national business populations, respectively[4].

While the academic literature has largely focused on "growth companies" or "scalers", typically small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), this report shifts the lens to a distinct group; mid-market and larger companies that exhibit strong growth ambitions and are already on a steep upward trajectory. We name them the "established scalers", defined as companies with 100 or more employees growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of at least 10% over five years. "Established non-scalers" share the same characteristics but have an employee CAGR below 10% over five years[5]. Jointly, we name them "established companies".

Understanding the characteristics that allow established companies to grow, as well as the barriers facing them, is essential to craft the strategies that can enable more of these scalers to develop into large companies – and perhaps new global champions.

The segment of established companies has received limited attention in existing research leading to a knowledge gap on how best to support their growth ambitions in ways that also benefit Danish society. This knowledge gap underscores the importance of targeted research to understand and support their continued growth.

This lack of academic attention persists even though the number of established scalers has nearly doubled over the past decade, growing 4.6 times faster than the broader enterprise population and reaching a total of 331 companies in 2022[6]. They also exert a significant influence on Danish society. Although companies with 50 or more employees account for just 1.5% of all companies, they are responsible for 44% of total employment and 45% of overall revenue[4]. This underscores their outsized contribution to the Danish economy and amplifies the importance of understanding and supporting those companies with strong growth trajectories.

Consequently, this report aims to explore how Denmark can better support the growth journey of established scalers – companies with the potential to become new global champions. The insights gathered can also offer meaningful guidance to non-scalers, helping them overcome barriers and realise their growth potential. By unlocking the ability of established companies to scale further, they can drive innovation, job creation and long-term prosperity across Danish society.

To uncover what drives and hinders their growth, the report delves into the key factors shaping the development of Denmark's established scalers. Our insights are based on a comprehensive research approach; a survey of 207 established companies (both scalers and non-scalers), analyses of microdata[7], and 24 in-depth interviews with senior executives from established companies, industry experts, and academics. From this, we have identified four critical growth factors that play a decisive role in enabling these companies to scale successfully:

1. Regulation
2. Access to talent
3. Access to capital
4. Leadership and operational capacity

[1] A privately held company valued at over USD 1 billion.
[2] Dansk Erhverv, 2024
[3] Financial times, 2025
[4] Eurostat, 2025
[5] In the following, they will also be referred to simply as "scalers" and "non-scalers".
[6] Statistics Denmark, data for firms of 100 employees and above not available at aggregate level
[7] Microdata are company-level data accessible through specialised registers and allowing for the most granular level of analysis.

These growth factors may act as both barriers and enablers. In this report, we highlight how successful, established scalers have navigated these challenges throughout their scaling journey to demonstrate actionable paths for supporting more companies with similar potential in Denmark.

Below is a summary of our key findings across each growth factor:

Management of regulation: Embrace what you cannot change

Regulation is a major perceived barrier, especially for international expansion	Compliance capabilities determine resilience	Proactive firms can turn regulation into strategic value
Established companies see regulation as a major barrier, with inconsistencies across EU markets and high complexity and volume of regulatory requirements, e.g. related to sustainability. 1	Companies with limited in-house legal and compliance resources are more vulnerable. Scalers that invest in governance systems, risk management, and early regulatory adaptation are better positioned for growth. 2	By embracing ESG, data protection, and sustainability requirements early, successful scalers can strengthen stakeholder trust and differentiate themselves in regulated markets. 3

Regulation stands out as a key growth challenge – especially for non-scalers who are twice as likely as scalers to cite regulation as a barrier. This indicates that regulation disproportionately hinders the growth journey for non-scalers. Yet, regulation remains a significant concern for scalers as well. In fact, among the established scalers interviewed for this report, regulation was the most frequently mentioned challenge – highlighting its broad impact across companies striving for growth. While these companies acknowledge the necessity of regulation for safeguarding fair competition and driving sustainable societal transition, they express concern over the complexity and volume of regulatory requirements. Many state that fragmented or misaligned regulations, especially at EU level, hinder cross-border operations and undermine global competitiveness. Among the population of established companies (scalers and non-scalers), 18% identify regulation as a growth constraint. In interviews, 12 out of 15 companies mentioned it.

Regulation may also become a catalyst for growth. An example is European Energy, which has actively harnessed regulation to accelerate its growth trajectory (see case study in the appendix). Such companies demonstrate how regulatory pressures can become opportunities – for example, by strengthening governance, investing in technology for operational agility and embedding sustainability principles to foster innovation and market credibility. By proactively adapting to regulatory shifts and developing resilient, future-fit practices, established companies can position themselves for future growth.

Access to talent: Reinvent your recruitment strategies

Talent constraints are a disproportionate challenge for scalers	Early and strategic talent planning drives scalability	Remote work and alternative talent pools expand access
Scalers are 2.6x more likely than non-scalers to cite talent as a growth barrier, especially in ICT and advanced manufacturing sectors. 1	Scalers often forecast talent needs, hire ahead of demand, and invest in employer branding. 2	Scalers leverage remote setups, tap into non-traditional talent groups, and pursue foreign hires despite Denmark's administrative barriers and high cost of living. 3

Scalers are 2.6 times as likely as non-scalers to cite access to talents as a growth barrier. Still, it remains a major challenge for non-scalers as well, with 22% of all established companies considering access to talent a barrier to growth. Despite Denmark's generally favourable business environment, many scalers encounter difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled talent, which are challenges often linked to high taxation or restrictive immigration frameworks[8]. However, securing the needed talent was only identified as a challenge by about half of the interviewed scalers. Instead, several explained how they had developed effective strategies to address workforce constraints: sourcing talent internationally (including via remote work), integrating newly graduated professionals or people on the edge of the labour market, offering company shares and cultivating strong employer brands to enhance their attractiveness in a competitive labour market.

[8] Forbes, 2025

These practical approaches offer valuable insights for established non-scalers and other Danish companies seeking to grow. By learning from the successful tactics employed by scalers, these companies may develop more resilient workforce strategies to strengthen their ability to scale sustainably.

Access to capital: No best practice – be open to alternative funding

Capital access is unevenly experienced	Proactive capital strategies enable scaling	External investors can accelerate professionalisation
25% of established companies cite capital as a barrier, but scalers are less affected, often due to stronger financial competencies or more attractive business models. (1)	Scalers diversify funding sources, build financial maturity (e.g., working capital management and valuation readiness), and prepare for capital needs well ahead of growth inflection points. (2)	PE and VC involvement not only provides funding, but also supports operational and governance improvements, and clearer growth trajectories for the successful scalers. (3)

A quarter of established companies view access to capital as a barrier to growth, with non-scalers twice as affected as scalers. The exception is among large scalers, where securing big-ticket investments becomes a significant challenge, reflecting structural constraints in Denmark's financing environment. Stringent banking regulations, conservative lending practices, and the limited appeal of local stock-market listings make it harder to raise substantial funding rounds. Additionally, some view existing support mechanisms, such as EIFO, as insufficiently adapted to high-growth needs.

Despite such challenges, most established scalers have managed to secure funding by developing organisational maturity and a strategic approach to capital planning. Companies with strong governance, disciplined financial management and a clear growth narrative are better able to attract investors, often through venture capital (VC) or private equity (PE) funds that also help professionalise operations. Successful scalers further stand out by leveraging distinctive value propositions and by positioning themselves in high-growth sectors such as ICT, clean energy and biotechnology, where investor appetite and supportive policies help to lower financing barriers.

Leadership and operational capacity: Professionalism at the core

Leadership transition and professionalisation is a must	Investing early in organisational capabilities pays off	Sustainable scaling requires both a strong culture and a strong structure
Successful scalers have shifted from founder-led to professionally managed organisations, allowing for better handling of complexity, structured decision-making, and more effective growth execution. (1)	Scalers proactively strengthen their internal infrastructure, such as finance and HR before it becomes a bottleneck, allowing them to grow faster and more sustainably. (2)	Scalers combine entrepreneurial drive and innovation with formalised processes and scalable systems, creating a robust foundation for long-term growth. (3)

Based on the survey and interviews with scalers and experts, one of the most critical enablers of sustained growth among Denmark's established scalers that stands out is the professionalisation of leadership and operations. The transition from founder-led management to a professional leadership structure is essential for companies to cope with increasing complexity and to unlock their full growth potential. Successful scalers tend to invest early in strengthening core functions such as finance, HR, risk management and IT – often ahead of immediate needs. They also implement governance frameworks that ensure transparency, accountability and strategic agility.

A recurring theme among scalers is their ability to balance entrepreneurial culture with operational structure: combining speed and innovation with standardised processes and clear decision-making pathways. In many cases, changes in ownership – for example through VC or PE fund involvement – have served as a catalyst for operational maturity and performance improvements. Furthermore, successful scalers actively nurture a growth-oriented culture grounded in continuous learning, accountability and alignment across leadership teams. These companies understand that scaling is not just about market opportunity, but also about internal readiness and organisational adaptability.

Finally, an overarching takeaway is the value of pursuing a niche strategy; daring to focus and become the best within a specific area. This is also one of the main takeaways from the Deloitte Best Managed Companies programme, and it is furthermore evident among the companies explored by Deloitte in other publications such as the podcast *Fremtidens Fyrtårne*.

Contents

2. Identifying an untapped potential

Denmark is home to long-established global leaders in industries such as shipping, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing, and the country has profited immensely from the positioning of these champion companies through their profound economic and social impact on the Danish economy. The success of large companies is critical to the continued development of Danish society, in particular at a time when Denmark faces unprecedented investments in defence and climate.

2.1. The business landscape in Denmark

Danish business life is composed of relatively few large companies, and a considerable pool of mid-market companies. Furthermore, many of the large valuable companies are relatively old, which is evidenced in the composition of the OMXC25 where the average age of top ten companies is 98 years. This is a sharp contrast to the S&P 500 in the US, which is dominated by younger companies (average age of top ten is 63 years), especially in rapidly evolving sectors like technology (cf. Figure 1).

Notably, these companies tend to be significantly older than comparable companies in other countries – especially those outside of Europe – suggesting that the Danish business success tend to stem from long-established companies rather than newer ones (Figure 2). In Denmark, only a few of the new mid-market companies grow to become large champions.

A possible explanation for the high number of relatively old companies in Denmark may be the distinct composition of the foundation ownership model in the Danish business sector. Industrial foundations play a more significant role in the business sector than in any other country, collectively representing around 50% of the C20 index[9]. Many Danish industrial foundations include statutes that require the company's headquarters to remain in Denmark. This is often done to ensure long-term national anchoring and to preserve the foundation's original purpose and societal contribution[10].

Among the OMX25 top 10 companies, the average age is 98 years, and the majority of companies are more than century old – in the US companies are generally far younger.

OMX25 top 10 companies					**S&P500 top 10 companies**				
No.	Company	Market cap, USD bn	Year founded	Age	No.	Company	Market cap, USD bn	Year founded	Age
1	Novo Nordisk A/S	252.4	1923	102	1	NVIDIA Corp	4,326	1993	32
2	Nordea Bank Abp*	48.6	1848	177	2	Microsoft Corp	3,768	1975	50
3	DSV A/S	40.5	1976	49	3	Apple Inc	3,812	1976	49
4	Novonesis	27.8	1925	100	4	Alphabet Inc	2,976	1998	27
5	Coloplast A/S	19.5	1954	71	5	Amazon.com Inc	2,326	1994	31
6	Danske Bank A/S	34.8	1871	154	6	Meta Platforms Inc	1,881	2004	21
7	Ørsted A/S	14.1	1973	52	7	Broadcom Inc	1,587	1961	64
8	Vestas Wind Systems A/S **	18.6	1898	127	8	Tesla Inc	1,407	2003	22
9	AP Moeller - Maersk A/S	29.8	1904	121	9	Berkshire Hathaway Inc ***	1,069	1839	186
10	Genmab A/S	17.9	1999	26	10	Eli Lilly and Co	640.6	1876	149

Figure 1: Composition of top 10 OMX25 and S&P 500 by company age and industry

Note* Nordea in its current form emerged in 2001 after a history of mergers and acquisitions, the year above reflects its earliest historical origin

Note** Vestas Wind Systems in its current form was founded in 1945, the year above reflects its earliest historical origin

Note*** Berkshire Hathaway Inc in its current form was founded in 1965, the year above reflects its earliest historical origin

Source: Yahoo Finance, S&P 500, OMX25, Company Websites

[9] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2025

[10] Fondenes Videncenter, 2023

The average age of the top 8 most valuable companies in Denmark is 104 years, compared to 37 years in the US.

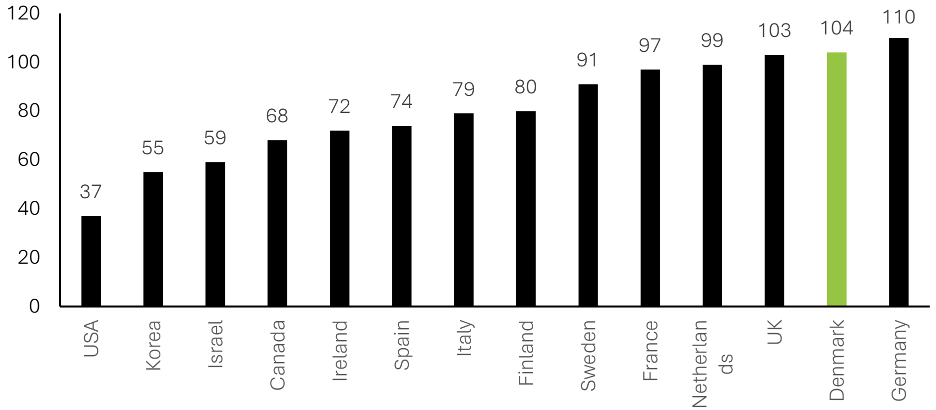


Figure 2: Average age of top 8 most valuable companies

Source: Dansk Erhverv, 2022

2.2. The established scalers

Given these observations, the question naturally emerges: How can Denmark renew and diversify its pool of top-performing companies over time?

One common approach is to study "growth companies" [11] which encompass a broad range of high-growth companies at various development stages from start-ups to large companies. The OECD defines growth companies as those with at least a three-year 10% annualised growth in either employment or turnover, with ten employees or more (cf. appendix, section 10.3).

While this definition effectively excludes microenterprises [12] – which make up 92% of all Danish companies, but only 20% of total employment and 16% of turnover – it still includes many companies that may experience high growth without reaching the critical size necessary to be considered a medium or large company. Such established companies form the bulk of the Danish employment (57%) and business turnover (62%) despite representing 1.5% of the company population. Consequently, this report will focus on a specific subset of companies:

We call them the established scalers**.**

These companies have not only achieved significant growth but have also reached a level of operational maturity that makes them a critical segment of the Danish economy, balancing the agility of high-growth companies with the scale of larger companies. This suggests that they are poised for further growth and could be new candidates to rejuvenate the OMX25 index in the coming decade. But how?

The report sets out to answer three key questions:

1. What does the Danish pool of mid-market and larger companies look like and what characterise them?
2. What are their main growth challenges?
3. What measures can be taken to ensure that these companies reach their full potential?

This will be addressed by first defining and profiling the established companies – and within them, the scalers (compared to non-scalers) – in this and the following two chapters. Chapter 4 answers the second research question by identifying four key growth factors. Chapters 5 to 8 examine each of these factors in detail and provide insights to address the third research question, offering a set of recommendations on how scalers – and non-scalers – can better secure sustained growth and evolve into new champion companies.

2.3. Defining established scalers

2.3.1. Size threshold

Figure 3 shows the thresholds used to define company sizes in Denmark and the EU. While employees, balance sheet and revenue are commonly admitted thresholds, it is generally considered that the number of employees (FTEs) is the most robust indicator to define company size (it is also the most widespread) [13].

Established companies are medium and large enterprises

Enterprise type	Staff threshold	Turnover threshold	Balance sheet threshold
Sole proprietorship	≤1	n/a	n/a
Microenterprise	<10	≤ DKK 15m	≤ DKK 15m
Small enterprise	<50	≤ DKK 75m	≤ DKK 75m
Medium enterprise	<250	≤ DKK 350m	≤ DKK 320m
Large enterprise	≥250	> DKK 350m	> DKK 320m

Table 1: Statistical definition of enterprise size in Denmark.

Source: Statistics Denmark

[11] See e.g., OECD 2022a; OECD 2023

[12] Enterprises with less than 10 employees.

[13] Cf. e.g., the Eurostat – OECD Manual on Business Demography Statistics

In this report, the number of employees is used as the main proxy for defining the size above which a company can be considered to have reached the maturity expected to be considered "established"[14]. We set a threshold at 100 employees and above to identify our population of established companies for the following reasons:

1. We naturally exclude microenterprises from our focus since they are already excluded from most growth company definitions (cf. appendix, section 10.3).
2. Among the wide-ranging SME bucket, "small companies" are excluded because we focus on organisations having reached a level of maturity allowing them to potentially bloom into large organisations (cf. work from, for example, Garcia-Martinez et al., 2023, or Berisha and Shiroka Pula, 2015).
3. Among medium-sized enterprises, the 100+ employee threshold appears relevant in terms of:
    a. Growth potential[15]: Firms with 100+ employees tend to be less likely to scale than smaller ones, but their scaling has a much larger impact.
    b. Converging perceptions of barriers to growth[16]: Firms with 100+ employees tend to have barriers to growth that differ from smaller scalers, where, for example, access to talents and organisational design and capacity becomes more critical.

2.3.2. Growth threshold

Established companies are defined as scalers based on a compound annual growth rate in the number of employees of 10% over a 5-year period, rather than the more typical 3-year time horizon, for the following reasons:

1. A 5-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR) provides a more reliable measure of sustained growth, as it reduces the impact of economic cycle variations and smooths out short-term fluctuations that might distort a company's true growth trajectory.
2. A longer timeframe than the conventional 3–year CAGR can also help identifying the companies most likely to experience sustained growth (as opposed to episodic spikes). Findings from the literature suggest that extending the timeframe beyond the conventional 3-year CAGR can help filtering out "one hit wonders" and suppress distortions introduced by short-term surges[17].

2.3.3. The definition of established scalers in this report

Based on this scoping, we use the following definition of established scalers:

Established scalers are companies of 100 employees or more in the base year, expanding their employee base by a minimum annual average of 10% for five years.

Established scalers have a 10%+ CAGR over 5 years and 100 employees or more.

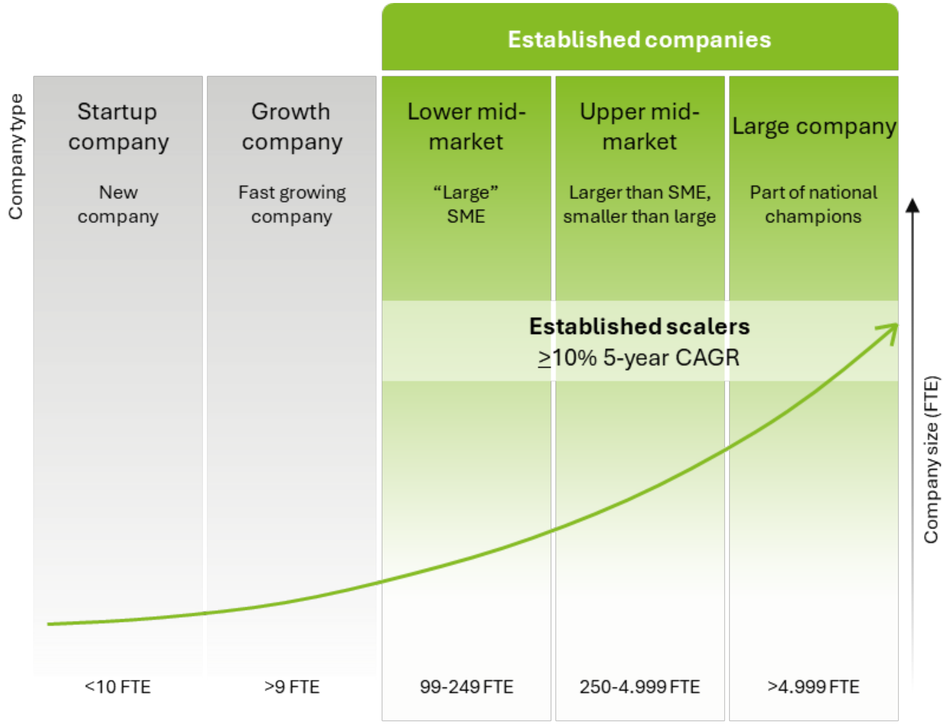


Figure 3: Categorising companies across sizes and growth rates

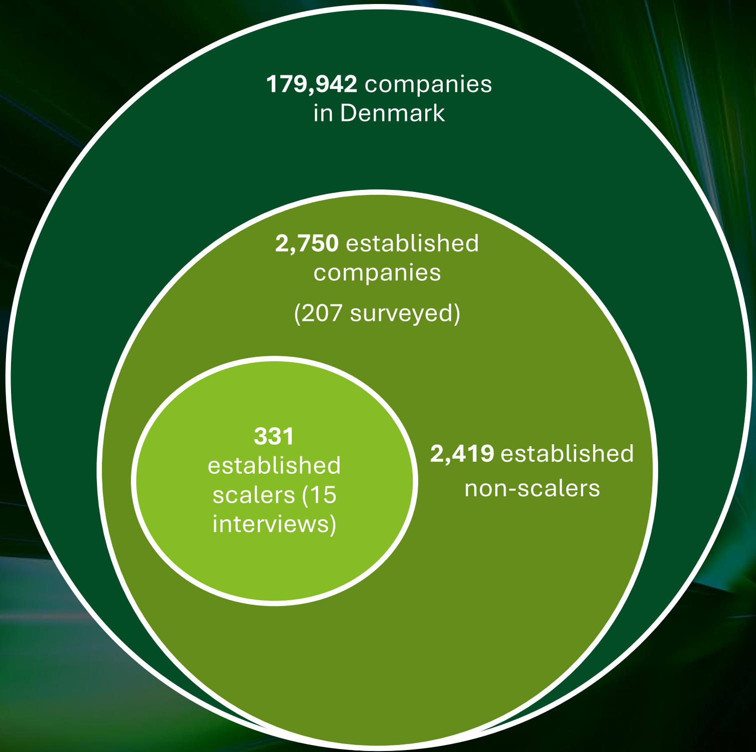
Note: May include start-ups (less than 9 employees), cf. Table 2: Selection of key growth factors for detailed considerations on definition.

Source: Deloitte, 2025

[14] Despite the availability of revenue data, access is restricted by Statistics Denmark even for anonymised data and for those authorised under the "Forskerordning".
[15] Anyadike-Danes et al., 2015; OECD, 2021
[16] Karlsson, 2021
[17] Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2013; Coad et al., 2018

Who are the established scalers?

2022



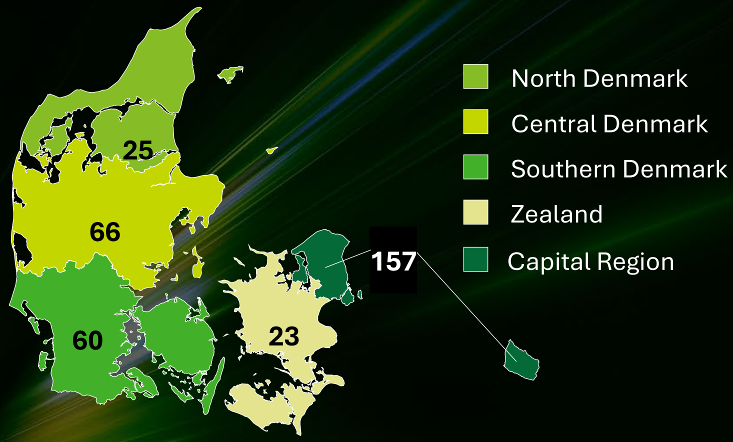
The population of established scalers has almost **doubled in size** since 2013.

72% of established scalers can be categorised as **lower mid-market companies** (more than 99 but less than 250 employees).

Source: Denmark's Statistics microdata

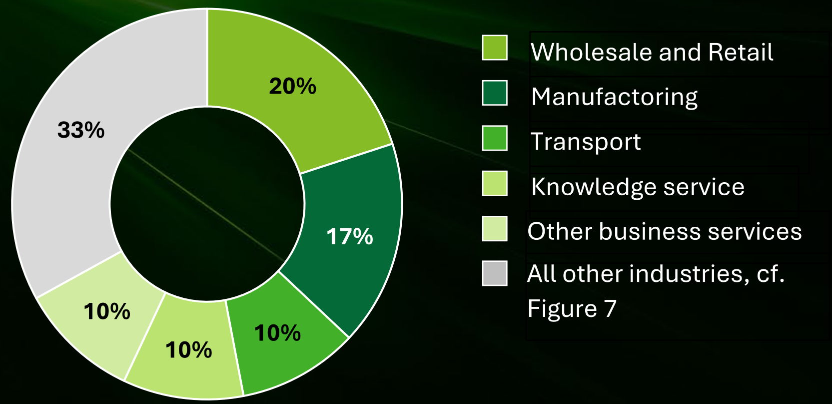
Geographic distribution

Nearly half of Denmark's established scalers are located in the Capital Region.



Industry distribution

In 2022, the top five industries in which established scalers operated were:



3. Profiling the Danish established scalers

Within a population of 180,000 Danish companies (excluding public entities and sole proprietorships), 2,750 companies qualify as established companies in 2022. Among these, 331 were established scalers[18]. This chapter sheds light on this overlooked pool of growth companies by examining their size, sectoral and regional distribution, and distinct scaling paths based on microdata from Statistics Denmark[19].

3.1. The pool of established companies and established scalers is expanding

Denmark had 157,000 companies (excluding public entities and sole proprietorships) in 2013, which in 2022 had increased to around 180,000 companies. Established companies accounted for 1.5% of that population in 2022 (cf. Figure 4). The population of established companies has expanded faster than that of the general enterprise population during this period – suggesting a gradual shift in the Danish business landscape towards larger entities – aligning with trends seen in other developed economies.

There were 331 established scalers in 2022. The group has almost doubled in size in a decade (from 175 in 2013). While broader business cycles play a part in this evolution, there have never been as many established scalers in Denmark as there were in 2022. This is despite being significantly impacted by the COVID period: the population of established scalers shrank by 20% in 2020 but was fully recovered and back on an expansive trajectory in 2022 (cf. Figure 5).

Established companies constitute 1.53% of the Danish enterprise population in 2022.

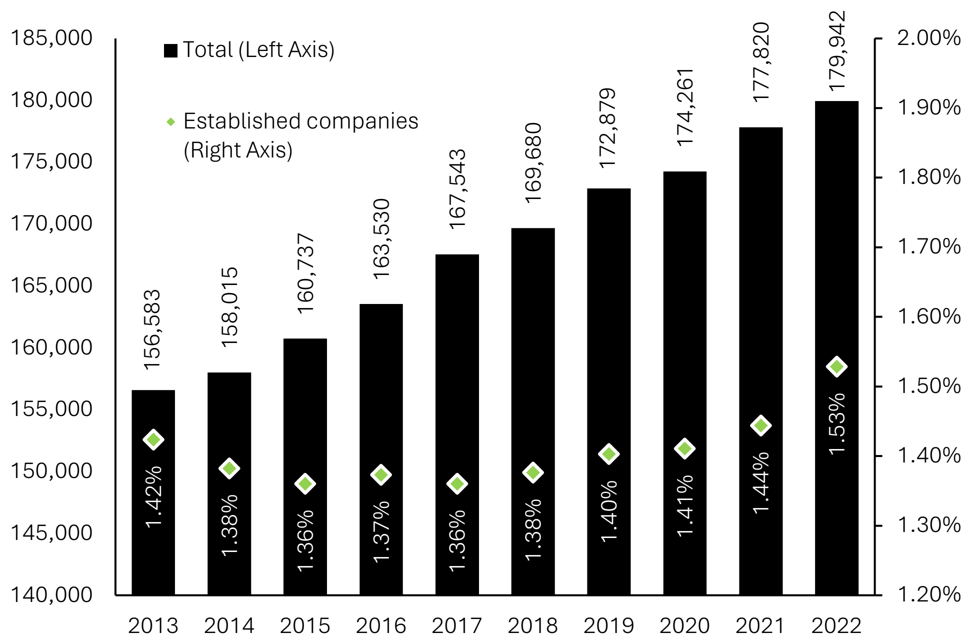


Figure 4: Overview of the Danish enterprise population 2013-2022
Source: Statistics Denmark, microdata

[18] Established companies: 100+ employees; established scalers: 100+ employees and ≥ 10% 5-year CAGR. 2022 scalers have their baseline growth in 2017.

[19] Microdata is company-level accessible through specialised registers and allowing for the most granular level of analysis. However, due to Statistics Denmark's policies, Deloitte, as a private research entity, has not been granted access to financial data. For certain registers, including data about financial performance, only public research entities are allowed access.

The share of established scalers among the established company population hovers between 10% and 15%.

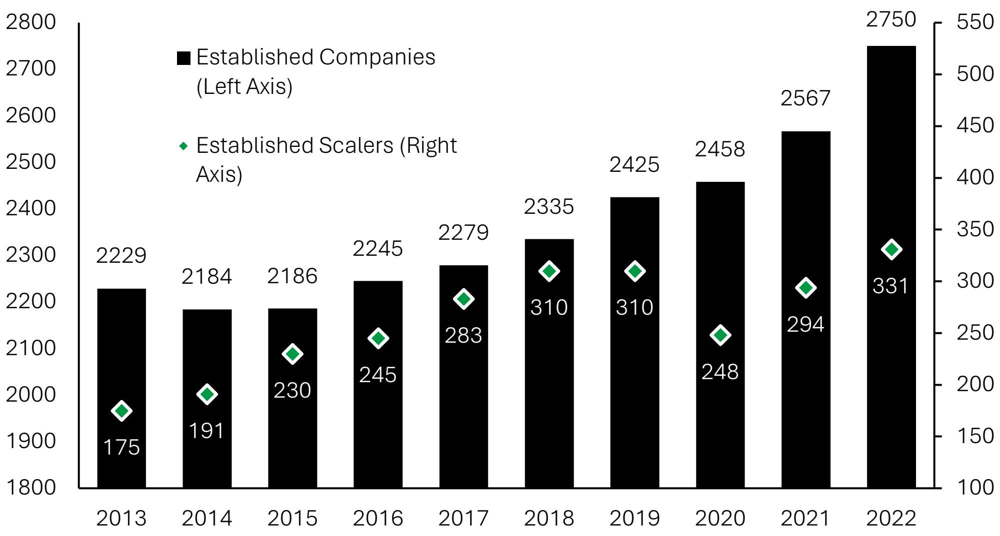


Figure 5: Share of established scalers in the total population of established companies, 2013-2022

Source: Statistics Denmark, microdata

Unsurprisingly, given their smaller size, lower mid-market companies are markedly overrepresented in the group of established scalers (cf. Figure 6): They formed 72% of the group in 2022 compared to 59% of the reference population of established companies. This makes lower mid-market companies 1.8 times more likely to be scalers than their upper mid-market counterparts.

Lower mid-market companies are consistently representing around 70% of established scalers.

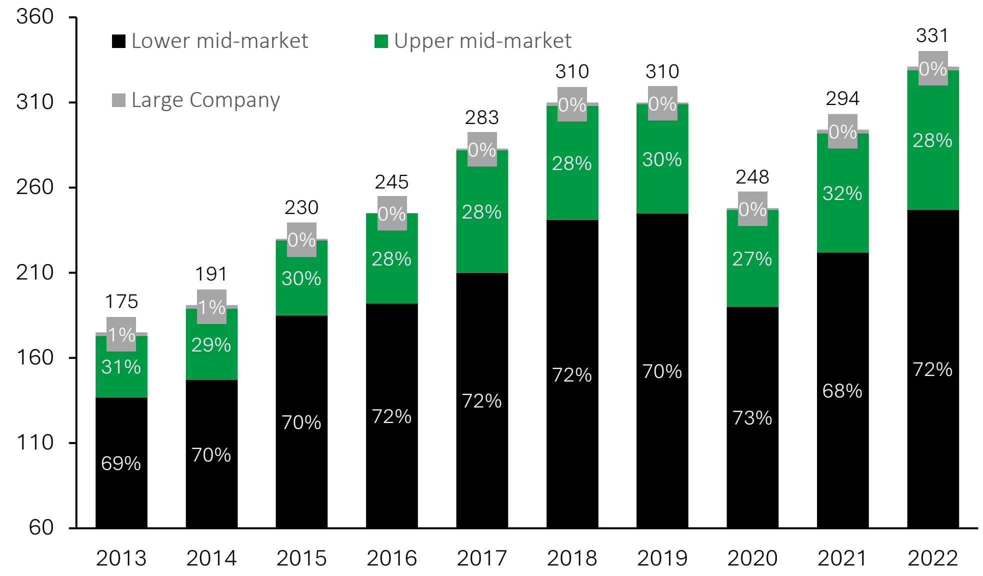


Figure 6: Size distribution of established scalers based on their size at the base year (5 years back), 2013-2022

Source: Statistics Denmark, microdata

3.2. Industries

Established companies are particularly prevalent in the manufacturing sector with 20% operating in this sector compared to 6% for the general enterprise population. The same share, 20%, are in the wholesale and retail sector, which reflects patterns from the general population (21%). The remaining 60% of the established companies operate in other industries in proportions close to those observed in the general population, except for the construction and agricultural sectors.

Distribution of established scalers, established firms, and general enterprise population into industries.

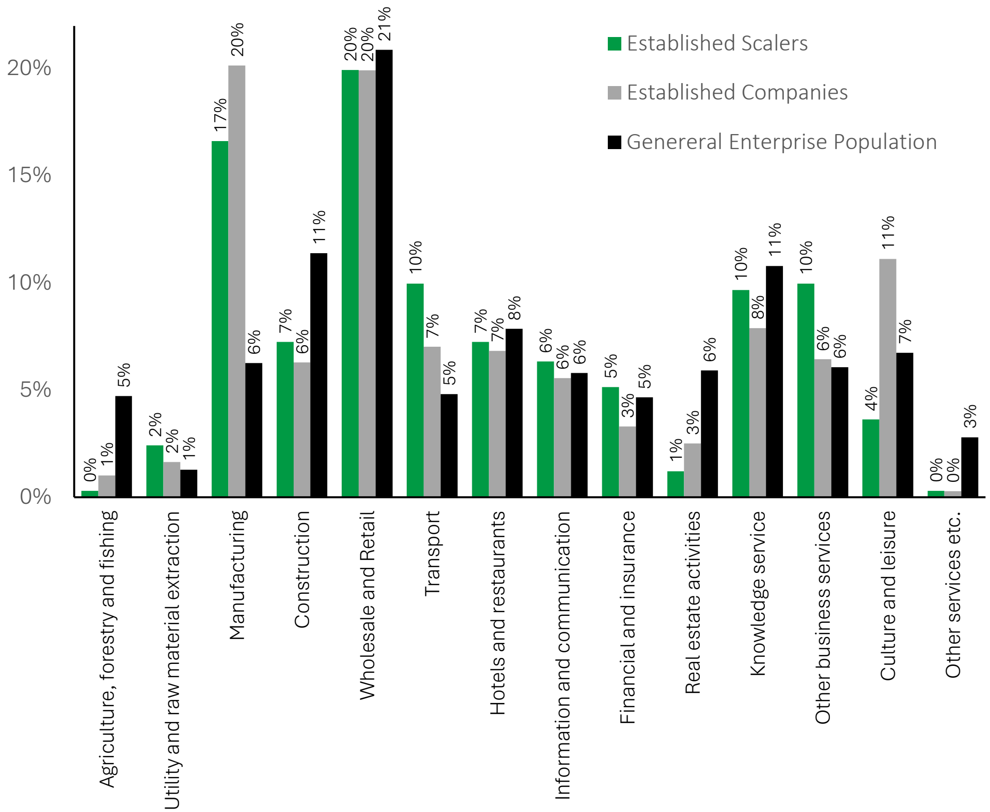


Figure 7: Overview of Danish industry distribution of established scalers
Source: Statistics Denmark, microdata

Established scalers are most likely to be found in wholesale and retail, manufacturing, transport, knowledge services or 'other business services' (e.g., leasing companies, travel agencies). These sectors represent areas where scaling benefits from both market size and efficiency gains – wholesale and retail provide volume opportunities, manufacturing thrives on process optimisation, and transport leverages network effects. Knowledge and business services, on the other hand, illustrate how intangible assets and specialised expertise can also support strong scaling trajectories. By contrast, scalers are less present in sectors like real estate, culture, and leisure, where growth is often constrained by local market conditions or asset intensity.

3.3. Established companies and scalers are overrepresented in the Capital Region

Geographically, Figure 8 shows a high concentration of established companies and scalers in the Capital Region. This aligns with international patterns of concentration of economic activity near a country's capital, which serves as a powerful hub to access resources and networks. The Region of Southern Denmark and the Central Denmark Region appear to be two other hubs for established companies, while Region Zealand and the North Denmark Region have the smallest pools of established companies.

There is a concentration of established companies and scalers in the Capital Region.

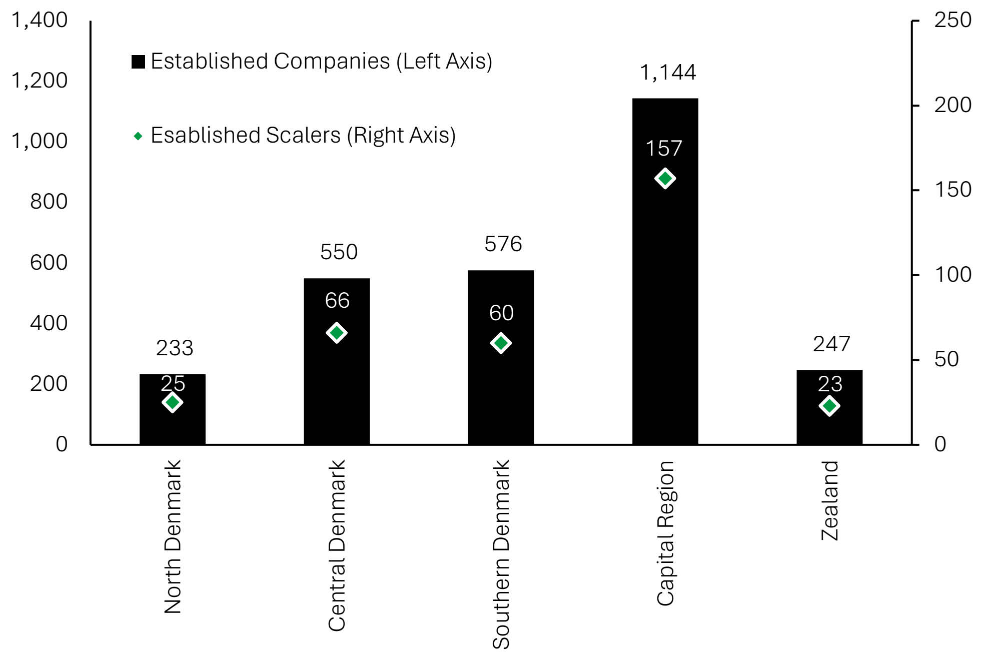


Figure 8: Geographical distribution of established scalers compared to the total population of established companies, 2022
Source: Statistics Denmark, microdata

3.4. Organic growth is the main driver of established scalers' development

The literature presents diverse approaches to growth strategies, encompassing both organic and inorganic methods. Inorganic growth is typically considered a key instrument to achieve fast-paced development through the use of mergers and acquisitions (M&A).

Our survey of 207 established companies shows that 68% primarily pursue organic growth, i.e. expansion through internal efforts and resources. This typically involves expanding operations, acquiring new customers, and enhancing portfolios of products and services.

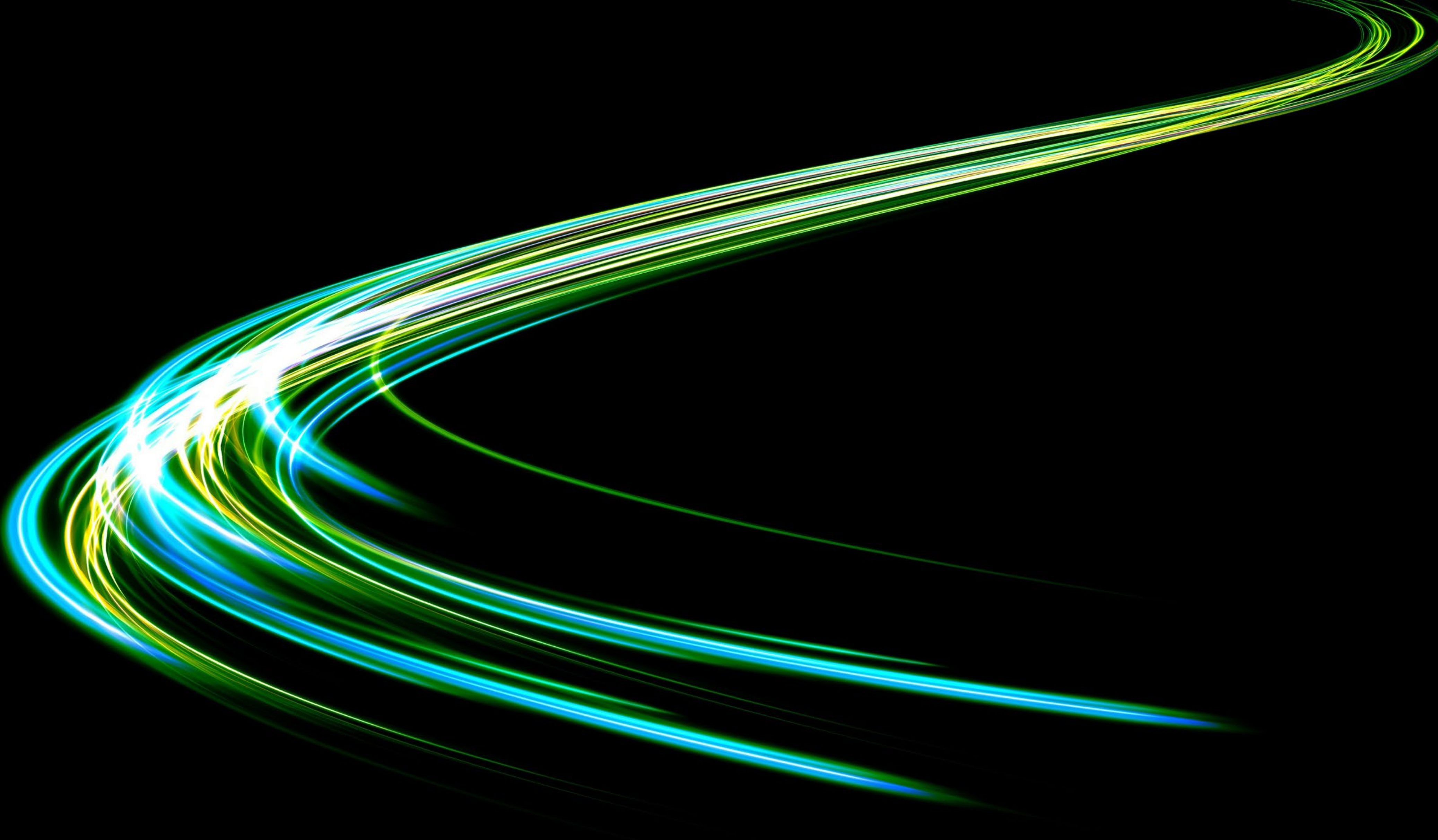
32% of the surveyed companies engaged in mergers and acquisitions (M&A) over the past five years as a growth strategy. 33% of non-scalers pursued M&A in the last five years, while 29% of established scalers did so. This suggests that growth-oriented companies primarily achieve expansion through organic means and is consistent with existing research[20].

The proportion of companies using M&A as a growth lever was similar in our pool of interviewees. Some companies leveraged acquisitions to enter new markets, while others used strategic acquisitions to expand their product offerings and market reach. All had VC or PE ownership (either full or partial).

The reliance on M&A also varied significantly across industries. The real estate sector had the highest participation in M&A, with 68% of companies engaging in such activities, followed by other business services at 49%. In contrast, the manufacturing sector has the lowest participation in M&A at 19%[21]. Overall, M&A activity is more prevalent in service-oriented and financial sectors than in industrial sectors.

[20] OECD, 2021

[21] Excluding the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector, which had only one observation.



4. Uncovering the factors that impact scaler success

What separates companies that scale from those that stall? For Denmark's established scalers, the journey from a promising mid-sized company to a global contender hinges not only on vision or market opportunity, but on the ability to navigate and master a distinct set of growth-critical factors. Drawing on extensive survey data, microeconomic analysis, insights from executive interviews with scalers and from executives and industry experts, this chapter identifies the most decisive factors along the growth path: regulation, access to talent, access to capital, and leadership and operational capacity. These factors do not act in isolation; they interact and evolve as established companies grow in size and complexity.

4.1. Scaling amid complexity: Navigating growth challenges and opportunities

As companies scale, they encounter a complex set of challenges and opportunities across external and internal dimensions. To provide a systematic understanding of how companies are impacted by various growth factors, we developed a five-dimensional analytical framework. This framework, inspired by the structure-conduct-performance paradigm[22], describes the external and internal forces shaping a company's growth journey[23] (cf. Figure 9). All factors are interdependent and can unfold simultaneously – together shaping the overall performance of a company.

Macrotrends affect all aspects of the business environment. They include large-scale shifts such as globalisation, technological advancements, demographic changes, and environmental challenges. These trends have far-reaching effects, driving transformations across industries and influencing how businesses adapt and compete over the long term.

The five dimensions applied in the report to explore factors affecting company growth.

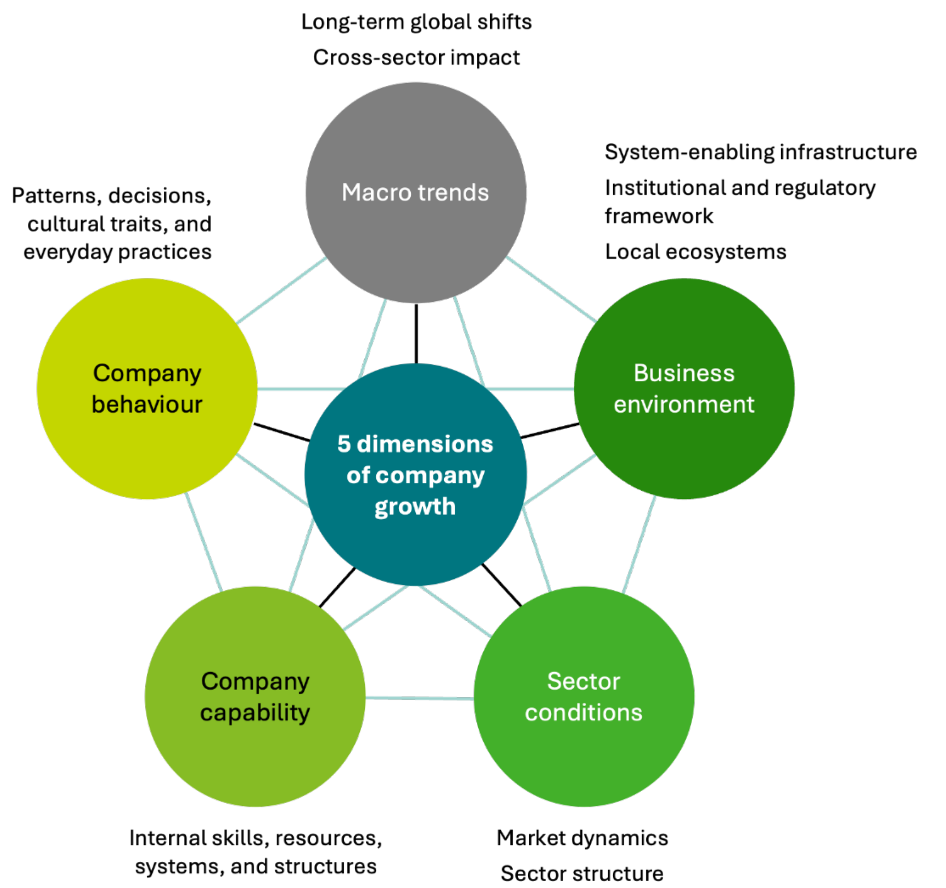


Figure 9: Five dimensions affecting growth

Source: Deloitte Denmark, 2025, based on work from Autio et al., 2007; Meissner and Kergroach, 2019; OECD, 2019a; OECD 2022a

[22] A conceptual framework linking market structure to company behaviour and outcomes, which has been seminal in shaping strategic frameworks like Porter's Five Forces. Cf. Bain, 1968

[23] Based on work from Autio et al., 2007; Meissner and Kergroach, 2019; OECD, 2019a; OECD 2022a

The business environment refers to structural items such as institutional and regulatory frameworks, digital and physical infrastructure like energy, and transportation networks, as well as local ecosystems, including knowledge institutions, test and innovation hubs, and local communities. These elements provide the foundation upon which sector conditions develop.

Sector conditions are market dynamics shaped by both demand-side factors (customer preferences, addressable market size, etc.) and supply-side factors such as technological innovation as well as their resulting elements like costs and pricing structures, market growth, and business cycles. The conditions impact the structure of the sector, including the number of companies, market concentration, market power and distribution of costs and profits.

Company capabilities refer to the means companies can mobilise to operate and grow. Hence, it is the skills, resources, systems and structures they possess that enable them to perform. This spans supply chain management, IT infrastructure, R&D capability, etc. Capabilities are strongly influenced by the company's financial and competitive position.

Company behaviour concerns how a company acts – its patterns, decisions, cultural traits and everyday practices. Examples are management styles, risk behaviour, ability to communicate effective with stakeholders, and agility. It defines strategic goals, how they should be attained, and ultimately determines the company's success in the marketplace. While company capability is more about the potential, the behaviour reflects the actual execution. Hence, companies might have the capability, but the behaviour determines how the capability is used.

4.2. Identification of key growth factors for established scalers

Explanatory factors for growth are plentiful, and many were explored in our research. The five dimensions of growth help us establish a frame for what should be prioritised in our analysis. As we focus on how companies harness their capabilities and environment to scale, and on identifying the concrete actions they can take to do so, we developed three main exclusion criteria for the growth factors to retain:

- Citations: Factors that are not cited sufficiently in neither our survey (>20%) nor in our interviews (qualitative assessment) have been left out of the analysis.
- Cyclical factors: Factors pertaining to the business cycle and major macrotrends, affecting most businesses in the market almost equally (i.e. no significant difference between scalers and non-scalers), for which companies have limited agency to harness or mitigate. Cyclical factors are at the intersection between macrotrends, the business environment, and sector conditions, and include, for instance, inflation or economic growth.
- Foundational factors: Factors that are considered a prerequisite to operate a business and concern all companies almost equally (i.e. no significant difference between scalers and non-scalers). Foundational factors are at the intersection of company capability and company behaviour and include, for example, management of the cost structure and margins. While these are necessary to ensure business success, they are not sufficient to explain successful scaling on their own.

We arrived at four cross-cutting issues that are the most impactful growth factors among established companies – both for established scalers and those not yet growing sufficiently to enter this group of companies. These four key growth factors are regulation, access to talent, access to capital, and leadership and operational capacity.

The selection is grounded in a robust data set with a survey of 207 companies to identify key growth barriers and enablers, and differences in how scalers and non-scalers address them. We also performed interviews with fifteen successful scalers to deepen the insights gathered in the survey and surface more information. Our findings were substantiated by our literature review and viewpoints from 24 industry experts.

4.2.1. Findings from our survey

Our survey shows that economic factors such as margins, access to capital, inflation and cost structure are top of mind for established companies (cf. Figure 10). Margins, inflation, and cost structure are difficult to fully disentangle from one another. It is, however, clear that inflation is driven by recent cyclical concerns, impacting the two other factors. Pressured margins are often cited in relation to competition, particularly at the international level. Technology is perceived as one of the main drivers of costs, as well as increased salary (a consequence of inflation too).

Among the four growth barriers explored in this study, "access to talent" is the most cited, with 22% of established companies identifying it as a constraint on growth.

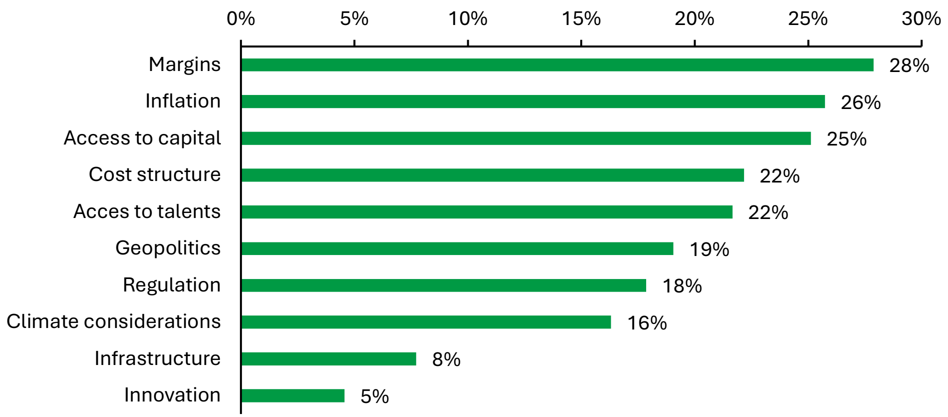


Figure 10: Factors perceived as limiting growth
Sample: 207 established companies
Note that Percentages are displayed rounded to zero decimal places.

In order to guide our focus, we looked at how scalers experience growth factors compared to non-scalers, so as to understand where limiting factors are for (i) non-scalers to reach scaling potential and (ii) for scalers to keep or increase their development pace. This approach allows us to shed light on the most impactful factors along the growth journey. Figure 11 provides insight into this picture.

According to the surveyed established companies, access to talents, regulation and access to capital are the factors that are experienced most differently between scalers and non-scalers. Inflation, cost structure and margins management do not significantly affect one group of companies compared to the other.

For scalers, access to talent, innovation and infrastructure are the relatively most impactful factors. Non-scalers tend to be more affected by regulation and access to capital, but also items pertaining to geopolitics (e.g., managing supply chain disruptions) and climate considerations (e.g., switching to more sustainable inputs).

Scalers are 2.6 times as likely to cite "access to talents" as non-scalers as a factor limiting their growth.

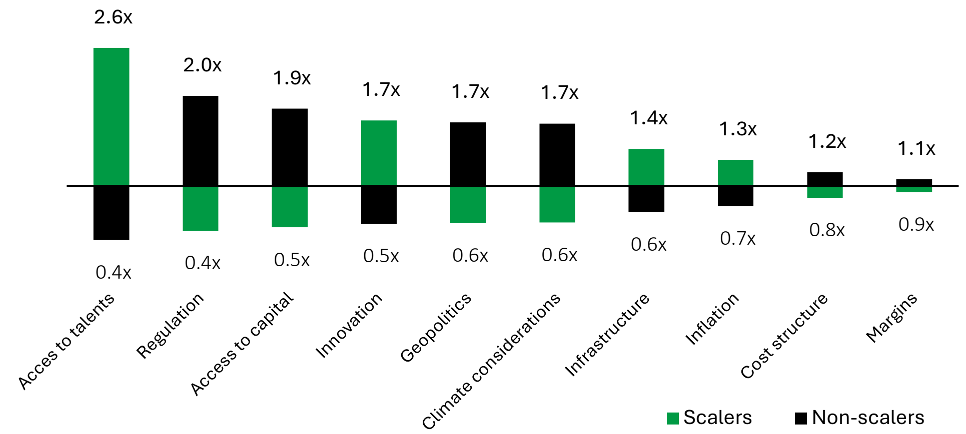


Figure 11: Relative perception of growth factors (relative likelihood of citing factor as barrier)
Sample: 207 established companies

4.2.2. Findings from interviews

In the process of identifying the four central growth factors presented in this report, the interview data served two main purposes: to validate the survey findings and to enrich them with additional context and dimensions not captured in the quantitative data. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, guided by a consistent set of questions while allowing respondents the freedom to raise any growth-related issues. Hence, the factors identified in the interviews as having the highest impact on growth may not directly map to those included in the survey questionnaire.

Overall, the interviews contributed valuable insights that complemented the survey – both by confirming several key findings and by shedding light on additional issues that have been critical to successful scalers on their growth journey. Figure 12 summarises the most frequently cited growth barriers.

Regulation stands out as the most cited barrier. It was raised as a challenge by most companies and will be further explored in chapter 5. Notably, the most persistent concern was the complexity of navigating regulations across borders, particularly within the EU. These challenges indeed reflect the current focus of EU initiatives based on the Draghi and Letta reports from 2024, which call for a stronger and more integrated internal market to minimise exactly the kinds of burdens these companies experience[24,25].

Talent-related challenges were also much mentioned, but at the same time several successful scalers noted that they had developed effective strategies to address them making it less of a concern. Such strategies include hiring from the margins of the labour market, cultivating talent internally, and investing in employer branding. This topic is examined in more detail in chapter 6.

Regarding capital, the interviews added valuable nuances to the survey results. While only a few companies identified access to capital as a core challenge, several emphasised the importance of financial readiness and the courage to invest ahead of demand. Others highlighted the strategic value of partnering with VC or PE firms. This is explored further in chapter 7.

The interviews also uncovered an additional, critical growth factor: Strong, forward-looking leadership and a professional operational backbone. Successful scalers consistently emphasised the shift from founder-led organisations to professional leadership teams, the cultivation of a growth-oriented mindset, and the gradual development of scalable operational systems as vital enablers of growth. 'Leadership and operational capacity' is the theme of chapter 8.

Other factors mentioned included the strength and uniqueness of the core product, which – perhaps unsurprisingly – was viewed as a key growth driver. Two companies also cited high production costs in Denmark, particularly wage levels, as a barrier limiting the scaling potential of manufacturing companies. Meanwhile, commonly cited survey themes such as competition and tight margins were generally described as part of standard business discipline, rather than as active constraints to growth.

Management of regulation and professionalising as complexity increases due to growth are the challenges that most of the successful scalers interviewed experience.

Regulations

12 out of 15 companies highlighted regulatory challenges affecting growth.

The most prominent issue was navigating complex regulatory environments across multiple markets – particularly within the EU. Companies also pointed to new legislation related to sustainability (e.g., the CSRD) and sector-specific regulations, such as environmental laws and fintech requirements. The growing burden of regulatory compliance and reporting slows down operations, while unclear legislation and inconsistent implementation standards lead to market uncertainty and increased administrative costs.

Leadership and operational capacity

10 out of 15 companies cited the challenge of professionalising the organisation during growth, as rising complexity demands stronger internal structures.

Key concerns included establishing effective leadership such as appointing a professional board and building organisational capacity through support functions like HR. Related issues also emerged, including the importance of cultivating a strong, growth-oriented company culture and maintaining a core value set.

Access to talent

7 out of 15 companies identified talent acquisition as a barrier to growth.

Two companies especially noted that the challenge concerned attracting talent to sites in Jylland, while other companies struggled with finding skilled employees, particularly those with expertise in technology.

Access to capital

4 out of 15 companies identified access to capital and financial resources as a barrier to growth.

In contrast, most other companies did not consider fundraising to be a challenge. Instead, they reflected on how growth was enabled by successfully securing funding through targeted strategies – such as private equity investment, franchise models, or selling company shares. Additionally, several noted that having a strong, high-demand product served as a powerful lever in attracting capital and accelerating expansion.

Figure 12: Main challenges to growth for successful scalers
Sample: 15 companies identified as established scalers

[24] European Commission, 2024a

[25] European Commission, 2024b

Table 2 summarises how we have identified the four key growth factors to focus on. It shows whether a factor was identified through the survey or the interviews (or both), and whether it should be excluded from our analysis on the basis of the exclusion factors articulated in section 4.2. The retained factors are highlighted in the light green rows, with a short observation summarising the main driver behind their selection:

- Access to capital is key to achieve the scaler state: without capital to boost growth, established companies are unlikely to reach a sustained 10% annual employee growth rate
- Access to talent is the factor that creates the largest relative challenge for established scalers in our survey and is perceived as a limit to their growth potential
- Regulation is the largest relative challenge for non-scalers and harnessing it may be key to increase the pool of established scalers. The interviews with established scalers also revealed that regulation is a hindrance to growth to most of them.
- Leadership and operational capacity are the foundation to create organisations that can transform into established scalers. This factor stands out particularly in interviews with both established scalers and industry experts.

The four growth factors further explored in the report are highlighted in green.

	Mostly cited in...		**Exclusion criteria**			**Relative impact on[26]...**		**Observations**
	Survey	Interviews	Citations	Cyclical	Foundational	Scalers	Non-scalers	
Margins	x				x	0.9	1.1	
Access to capital	x	x				0.5	1.9	Identified as key to transition to a scaler
Inflation	x			x		1.3	0.7	
Cost structure	x			x	x	0.8	1.2	
Access to talents	x	x				2.6	0.4	The largest relative hindrance for scalers
Regulation	x	x				0.4	2.0	Perceived as major barrier by non-scalers
Geopolitics	x	x	x			0.6	1.7	
Climate considerations	x		x			0.6	1.7	
Infrastructure	x		x			1.4	0.6	
Innovation	x		x			1.7	0.5	
Leadership and operational capacity		x				n/a	n/a	Identified as key to transition to and sustain scaler state

Table 2: Selection of key growth factors

Source: Deloitte Denmark, 2025

[26] How much more likely is one group of companies likely to cite.

4.2.3. What the literature tells us about scalers and growth dynamics

The established scalers represent a highly relevant segment of the business landscape. However, it is also a segment about which the knowledge is sparse. Much of the existing literature faces two key limitations when it comes to understanding the companies we refer to:

- Youth bias: Most studies focus on start-ups or young companies, excluding older companies that scale later in their lifecycle.
- Survivorship bias: Analyses often concentrate on the most successful high growth companies, overlooking firms that attempt to scale but face structural barriers.

Research on high-growth firms and scale-ups has expanded significantly in recent decades, with a particular focus on start-ups and young companies. These firms are often associated with innovation, job creation, and productivity gains[27]. In Europe, policy attention has increasingly targeted "scale-ups" – typically defined as companies with 10+ employees achieving 20% annual growth over three years – due to their perceived economic impact[28].

In Denmark, evidence on established mid-sized growth companies is relative sparse. Existing studies focus for example primarily on entrepreneurship, unicorns, or innovation performance at the national level. The unique challenges and success factors faced by established scalers are largely uncharted in both academic and policy-oriented work.

A study of the literature on growth dynamics shows that the identified key growth factors in this report – regulation, access to talent, access to capital, and leadership and operational capacity – are also rooted in the established academic discourse. Understanding and strategically addressing these factors, supported by the insights from existing literature, is essential for nurturing these companies into future economic champions.

Regulation as a growth constraint: Regulation is frequently cited as a key external barrier for growing companies, particularly in sectors subject to complex compliance requirements such as health, finance and tech[29]. Policymakers have acknowledged that inconsistent or excessive regulation may disproportionately burden mid-sized companies lacking legal and compliance infrastructure, limiting scalability and cross-border expansion.

Access to talent as a strategic enabler: The ability to attract, retain and upskill talent is consistently linked to company growth, especially in knowledge-intensive sectors. As companies scale, they face increased demands for specialised leadership, managerial and technical capabilities, making talent a strategic growth enabler and a potential constraint if not addressed proactively.

Access to capital as a growth catalyst: Scale-ups often require significant capital to invest ahead of revenue, especially when expanding internationally or entering capital-intensive phases of development. Literature highlights that growth-oriented SMEs face a "funding gap" where their needs exceed the risk appetite of traditional lenders[30]. Access to patient capital, equity financing and public co-funding mechanisms is crucial for sustained scaling.

Leadership and operational capacity as internal enablers: Organisational capabilities – particularly leadership and scalable systems – are critical internal factors to sustained growth[31]. Many companies fail to scale not due to lack of opportunity, but because they lack the operational maturity or leadership structure to manage complexity[32]. Transitioning from founder-led models to professionalised management is often cited as a tipping point for successful scalers.

[27] Henrekson & Johansson, 2010
[28] Eurostat, 2007; OECD, 2023a
[29] European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020
[30] OECD, 2025; Bank of England, 2019
[31] Lee, 2014
[32] Moedt et al., 2024

5. Navigating regulation for competitive edge and scaling

Among all established companies, 18% identify regulatory conditions as a significant barrier to growth. Non-scalers are 2.0 times as likely as scalers to cite regulation as a growth barrier, and most scalers interviewed considered regulation a major hindrance to growth. They tend to view regulations as complex and bureaucratic. Regulatory hurdles are particularly evident when scaling globally, especially within the EU, where inconsistent regulations across member states create significant obstacles. These inconsistencies complicate compliance and can impede companies' scaling efforts despite strong ambitions.

5.1. Sustainability, cybersecurity and tax regulations accelerate the scope and pace of regulation

Established scalers face a series of challenges as regulations evolve to address macrotrends. In particular, the global push for Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) compliance has introduced stricter regulations that require companies to prioritise sustainability and adapt more transparent governance practices. While ESG compliance creates opportunities by aligning companies with emerging market demands and may decrease future risks – such as those related to the availability of raw materials – it also presents cost burdens and operational complexities, an issue that politicians increasingly recognise and seek to address. Within the EU, the European Commission has adopted a simplification package aimed at streamlining EU rules, enhancing competitiveness and attracting investment. This initiative is part of the Commission's commitment to reduce administrative burdens by 25% for all businesses and by 35% specifically for SMEs[33].

Although much regulation is designed for large companies, mid-market companies are frequently affected through a trickle-down effect across the value chain. They may be required to meet the same standards as their larger counterparts – even when not directly subject to the regulations. This indirect compliance pressure can significantly increase costs and complexity, often disproportionate to their operational scale and resources.

[33] European Commission, 2025

Similarly, technological advancements have led to increased cyber regulations. As digitalisation accelerates, regulations around data protection, cybersecurity and privacy (e.g., GDPR) require companies to invest in secure infrastructure and compliance systems. Failure to comply may expose companies to reputational risks and fines.

Changing tax policies in response to globalisation and international trade pressures also pose challenges for companies. As governments adjust tax codes to close loopholes, ensure a level playing field and increase public revenues, companies must adapt quickly to avoid costly penalties. The complexity of tax regulations across borders can become a considerable burden for companies seeking to expand internationally, especially given Denmark's growing participation in global economic agreements and EU-wide tax reforms.

Furthermore, the ongoing uncertainty caused by geopolitical instability and trade wars significantly affects regulatory environments, posing additional challenges for established companies. As countries impose tariffs and other trade barriers – such as regulatory standards and licensing requirements – regulation becomes increasingly complex and unpredictable, forcing companies to constantly readjust their compliance strategies and often seek costly external support. Additionally, variations in political enforcement between countries complicate the implementation of stable, long-term regulatory frameworks, ultimately constraining companies' ability to plan and invest for the future.

While Denmark is often praised for its efficient and transparent regulatory environment – ranking among the top globally in ease of doing business[34] – companies may experience the landscape as dense and increasingly demanding. Particularly for established scalers, Denmark's ambition to be a frontrunner in areas such as the green transition results in a high volume and rapid pace of regulatory initiatives. This includes the implementation of complex EU directives and national legislation on climate, ESG reporting and circularity. This compliance burden can be difficult to absorb, especially when regulatory change outpaces companies' ability to adapt. While the long-term direction may be strategic, the short-term impact can act as a drag on growth – particularly for companies with limited legal and administrative capacity.

[34] World Bank, 2024

Denmark's strong regulatory framework is nevertheless conducive to, for example, intellectual property rights, and it is supported by an efficient bureaucracy when benchmarked against other countries[35]. Denmark also helps companies overcome challenges such as access to international markets through assistance from organisations like the Trade Council, Innovation Centre Denmark and the Export Credit Agency.

5.2. How established companies view expanding regulation

We found that non-scalers are overall twice as likely as scalers to cite regulation as a growth barrier. However, this difference is concentrated among upper mid-market and large companies (Figure 13). In the lower mid-market, perceptions are more aligned, though scalers remain somewhat more positive (16% vs. 20%). Company size itself also appears to influence regulatory concerns: only 5% of large established companies see regulation as a barrier, compared to 19% of the mid-market established companies.

Non-scalers of all sizes are more likely to see regulation as a barrier to growth. Interviews suggest this is both a matter of attitude and capability.

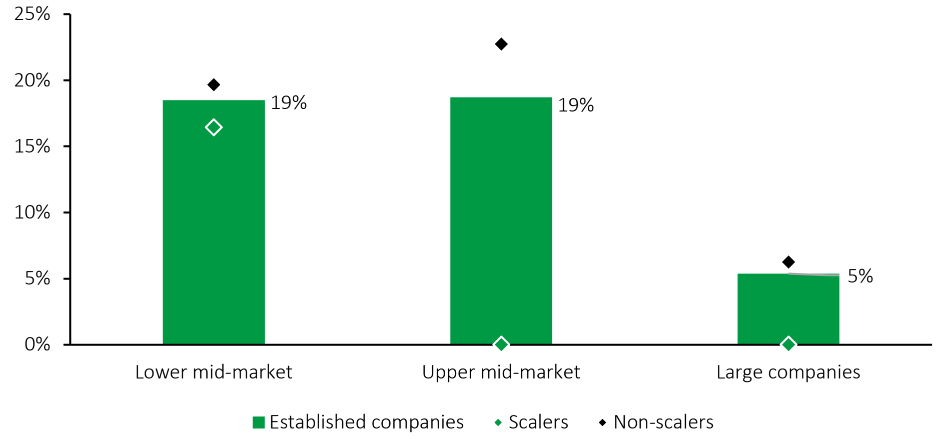


Figure 13: Percentage of companies citing regulation as a barrier to growth, per company size
Source: Deloitte 2025[36]

Our interviews helped refine these findings, highlighting two key issues. The first is that lower mid-market scalers (and, interestingly, also upper mid-market scalers, a trend not evident in the quantitative data) are particularly challenged when expanding across borders. The second relates to the role of organisational maturity – a factor that helps explain why fewer large companies perceive regulation as a barrier to growth. These themes are explored in the following sections.

5.3. Operating in different regulatory contexts is burdensome

Regulatory hurdles are particularly felt when scalers operate internationally. Inconsistent regulation across countries, including within the EU, creates difficulties in maintaining compliance across borders. For instance, labour laws, environmental regulation and tax codes often vary between jurisdictions, adding complexity for companies aiming to expand their operations into other markets.

During interviews, the lack of harmonisation of rules within the EU and with the US was brought forward, for example, in relation to digital privacy laws and ESG reporting. Requirements for local content, as well as the enforcement of regulation across EU countries, were also mentioned. Such inconsistencies may result in increased compliance costs, legal risks and a need for country-specific legal expertise. They can also hinder established scalers' ability to reach the critical mass needed to sustain a high-growth trajectory.

Diverging packaging regulations across the EU, which may require companies to set up local entities in each market, was another issue raised. This kind of complexity can force companies to consider withdrawing from certain markets due to an overwhelming compliance burden.

Our research also finds that regulatory challenges arise when operating in the US, the largest export market for Danish companies. Due to a markedly different regulatory landscape, some companies may feel compelled to establish a local market presence earlier than what is perceived as strategically optimal to effectively navigate complex compliance requirements.

[35] World Bank, 2024

[36] Note there are only six observations of scalers with >4,999 employees, this applies to all references in sections 5 through 8.

> *"In Europe you have 27 markets, which surprised us. We thought some of the basic regulation about how to do business was the same across member states – it is not!"*
>
> Undisclosed company

> *"Europe is a place where there are many good ideas. ESG is important and the world needs it... Whether it is regulations related to the environment, AI, or GDPR, the intentions are super good and there should be regulation, but the scope is sometimes misjudged. Also considering that we are in competition with the rest of the world. We need to think about how we position ourselves geopolitically here."*
>
> Undisclosed established scaler

5.4. The need for expert capabilities and organisational maturity

The ability of established companies – both scalers and non-scalers – to navigate regulatory constraints depends heavily on their internal capabilities, as confirmed by interviews with experts and company representatives. Small companies often have fewer resources in terms of manpower, expertise, support functions and finances to manage the regulations imposed on them, making effective compliance difficult. These companies typically lack the in-house legal and compliance teams that large companies possess, rendering them more vulnerable to regulatory changes and complexity.

Companies without robust systems to identify, assess and mitigate regulatory risks are more likely to face fines, legal battles and reputational damage. For established scalers, this can be especially detrimental, as their resources are often stretched across operational priorities while they work to professionalise their organisations and pursue new business opportunities – leaving limited capacity to absorb costly regulatory setbacks.

However, our research shows that is not enough merely to have the capabilities in place; scaling companies must also be able to continuously and effectively develop compliance infrastructure such as automated reporting systems, risk management software and governance frameworks. In sectors where compliance costs are particularly high, mid-market companies risk being crowded out by larger competitors who have more efficient processes for managing changing regulatory demands. This is evidenced by our survey, which finds that large companies are less likely to experience regulation as a barrier to growth.

5.5. What sets successful scalers apart

Interviews conducted for this study indicate that many established companies manage regulatory changes reactively, often waiting until new rules are enforced before acting. Such a reactive approach to compliance increases the risk of regulatory fines, delays and business disruptions. Reactive compliance practices often result from a lack of forward-thinking leadership or insufficient investment in compliance infrastructure.

By fostering a strong culture of governance and transparency and integrating compliance into everyday business practices, established companies can enhance operational efficiency and respond more effectively to regulatory changes. One way to achieve this is by investing in technology that improves compliance procedures and increases internal effectiveness. A global study of 1,800 respondents documents benefits from technology investments, including better risk management and decision-making (64% and 46%) and cost savings (42%). Additionally, 42% reported increased stakeholder trust in their compliance capabilities [37].

Furthermore, companies that invest in strengthening their compliance capabilities may gain a competitive advantage. Efficient compliance systems can lead to faster market entry and stronger relationships with regulators and other stakeholders. For example, companies that proactively integrate ESG principles into their governance structures can not only obtain regulatory compliance but also attract capital from sustainability-focused investors[38].

Regulation can also be a driver of innovation, as one interviewee highlighted. High regulatory standards in Denmark and the EU – particularly regarding AI, data privacy and ESG – can help build market trust, as consumers are increasingly concerned about how companies handle data and behave with respect to the environment[39].

If European companies leverage such regulation, they can get ahead of competitors operating in environments with lower regulatory standards, especially as issues like data security and environmental sustainability are expected to grow significantly in importance for consumers. Moving forward, established companies should, to the extent possible, try to view compliance not as a burden but as a strategic asset.

[37] PwC, 2025
[38] Deloitte Netherlands, n.d.; PwC, 2025
[39] Porter, M.E. & Van der Linder, C., 1995

5.6. Recommendations for managing the regulatory landscape

Proactive compliance with future regulation:
Scaling companies should proactively anticipate future regulations concerning, for example, transfer pricing, ESG and cybersecurity. Preparing for these evolving standards can enhance investor appeal and facilitate future public offerings.

View compliance as a strategic asset:
Rather than seeing regulatory compliance as a burden, companies should adopt a "blessing in disguise" mindset that encourages them to leverage compliance as a strategic asset to build trust, enhance operational efficiency and gain a competitive edge.

Plan international expansion with regulatory expertise:
For companies expanding internationally, early engagement with local regulatory experts is crucial. Understanding cross-border regulatory requirements in advance allows companies to navigate complexities smoothly and avoid costly delays in their expansion plans.

Build internal regulatory competencies:
Ensuring that the company has most critical in-house regulatory expertise can greatly help in navigating an increasingly complex regulatory environment. Identifying competency gaps, developing internal capabilities or seeking external expertise, when necessary, can support efficient adaptation to new regulatory demands.

The key strategic questions to be considered:

Are you working proactively or reactively with regulations and compliance requirements?

Do you know which regulatory areas potential future partners – whether investors or upstream/downstream players in your value chain – are most focused on?

Is compliance integrated into your core strategy and product roadmap?

Are you leveraging your compliance efforts in building your brand or in your dialogues with investors?

Have you considered whether the transparency fostered by regulatory requirements can be harnessed as a competitive advantage?

Are there regulatory requirements that your competitors struggle to meet, which you can leverage?

How do your compliance efforts align with your ambitions for international growth?

Do you have an overview of market access requirements such as certification, licensing and permitting in the markets you are targeting for expansion?

Do you understand how the countries or regions you are focusing on adopt and apply international rules within their local laws and practices?

Do you have processes in place to continuously reassess regulatory risks when entering new markets?

Do you have access to local expertise?

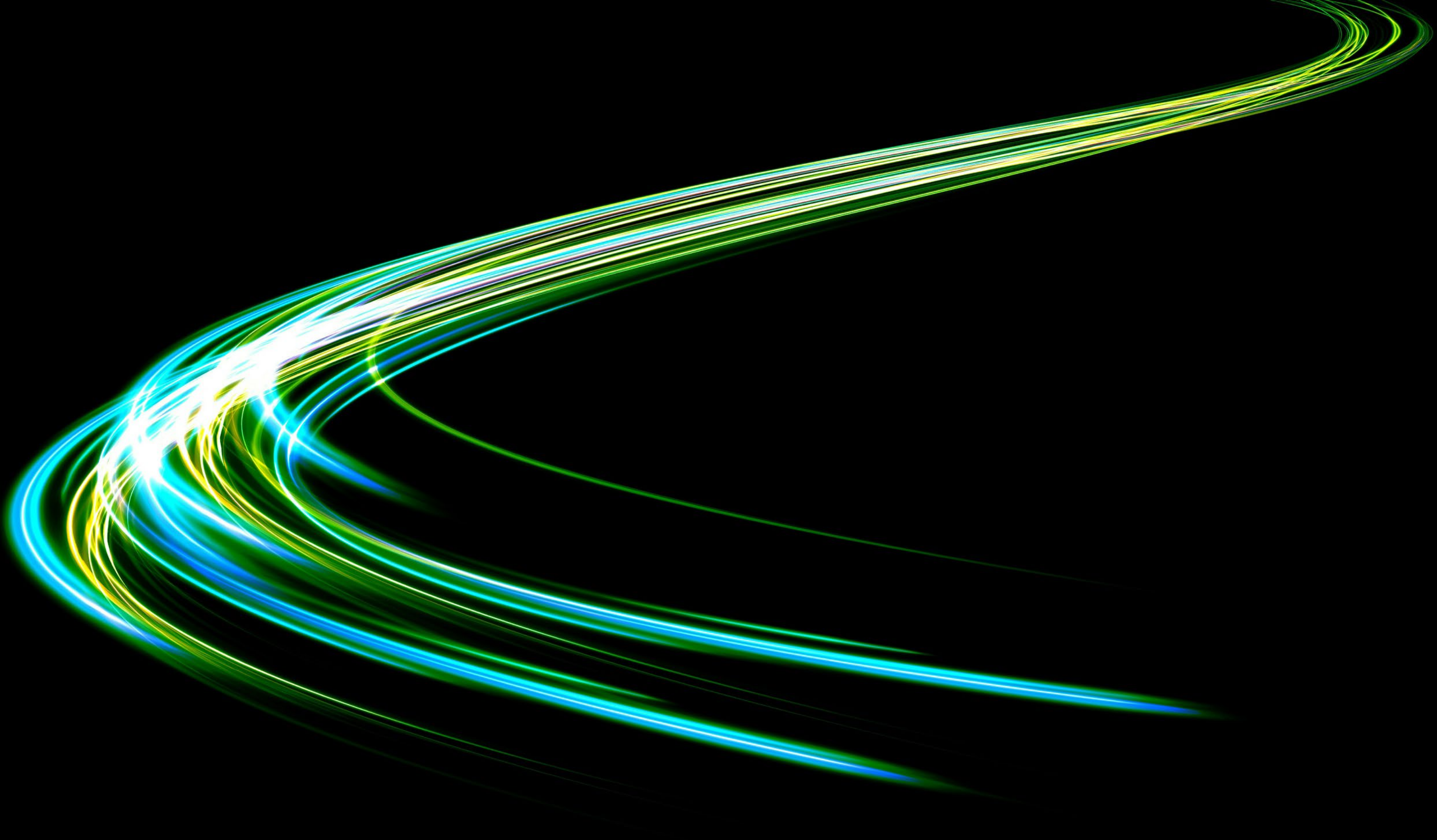
Do you have sufficient in-house expertise in major regulatory areas such as ESG, cybersecurity, data privacy and tax regulations?

Have you identified specific areas where your team may lack expertise, such as industry-specific regulations or international compliance standards?

Are employees regularly trained and updated on compliance and regulatory standards relevant to their roles?

Is your organisation and systems built to quickly adapt to new regulations?

Should you consider appointing a Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) or equivalent to oversee regulatory compliance efforts?



6. Winning the talent game

According to our survey, established scalers are 2.6 times more likely than non-scalers to cite access to talent as a growth challenge. In interviews, around half of the companies also stated that access to talent was an obstacle. Our research indicates that while the war for talent is intensifying across the business landscape, successful scalers reduce the challenge through proactive behaviour. Interviews revealed how they focus on cultivating their employer brand, anticipate future skill requirements, embrace flexible working models, and broaden their recruitment approaches. Their experience provides valuable lessons on how to scale effectively in a competitive labour market.

6.1. Megatrends are working both towards and against talent access

Talent shortage is a powerful macrotrend: nearly 75% of employers report hiring difficulties, up from 36% in 2014, according to ManpowerGroup's Global Talent Shortage Survey. This situation is driven by forces like demographic changes, globalisation, technological advancements, and mismatches between education and skills – all of which are reshaping how companies compete for and secure talent.

Demographic changes such as aging populations and declining fertility rates are pressuring the availability of labour supply: by 2045, the Danish working age population is expected to decrease by 4.7%, while total population will grow by 2.8%[40].

Globalisation can act as a counterweight to the demographic changes and enable companies to tap into a global talent pool, expanding their options. However, this also heightens competition, requiring companies to attract talent on a range of criteria beyond salaries, such as workplace flexibility, development opportunities and company culture. This dynamic inherently benefits larger, established companies which have more resources and flexibility to offer attractive compensation packages, potentially placing mid-market companies at a disadvantage.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing push for remote and hybrid work (aligning with globalisation trends) also provides companies with access to broader talent pools. Some interviewed companies highlighted remote work as a powerful enabler in overcoming talent shortages, allowing access to a broader talent pool both nationally and internationally. However, they also acknowledged that this approach comes with trade-offs, as it requires accepting the downsides associated with remote working such as reduced in-person collaboration and potential challenges in maintaining company culture – something important for successful scalers, as evidenced in chapter 8.

Technological advancements are reducing labour demand while enabling access to foreign talent through remote work. Automation and generative AI are increasingly viewed as key drivers of labour efficiency, enabling established companies to mitigate talent shortages. By integrating generative AI into workflows, companies can not only reduce labour demand but also deploy human talent more strategically and effectively. Various estimates have been made regarding its impact, with CEDEFOP[41] suggesting that around 14% of jobs in the EU could be displaced by algorithms[42]. A 2024 study concludes that AI will impact most types of jobs in the Danish labour market, but that only a relatively small share is at risk of being directly replaced by AI. The study finds that 71% of jobs contain tasks where between 10-50% of the workload could be automated, while 23% of roles are expected to remain unaffected[43].

Yet a fundamental bottleneck remains: an education and skills mismatch. In some areas, the education system has failed to produce a sufficient pipeline of graduates with the skills companies need, which impacts the growth potential of established companies. For instance, Denmark lacks IT and digitally educated professionals. 8% of all Danish companies in 2024 reported difficulties filling vacancies in ICT development and operations, and in the information and communications sector, the figure was as high as 33%[44]. The OECD's Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) further shows that around 11% of Danish workers report lacking skills required in their current job, with deficits most pronounced in IT and digital competencies[45]. The challenge of labour shortage is also seen within, for example, the construction sector[46], and is confirmed by our survey.

[40] Population aged 15-64, Statistics Denmark, FDRK124
[41] The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
[42] CEDEFOP, 2024
[43] The Economic Council of the Labour Movement, 2024
[44] Statistics Denmark, 2024
[45] OECD, 2023b
[46] Statistics Denmark, 2025

6.2. Growth ambitions among scalers makes access to talent a challenge

In our survey, scalers were 2.6 times more likely than non-scalers to cite access to talent as a growth barrier. This difference is relatively intuitive, as scalers typically require more manpower to sustain their growth ambitions. The issue is observed across company sizes but decreases in magnitude as companies grow: Large companies are substantially less challenged by talent attraction than their mid-market peers, with the issue being particularly salient in the lower mid-market.

Access to talents is a disproportionate challenge for scalers across all company sizes.

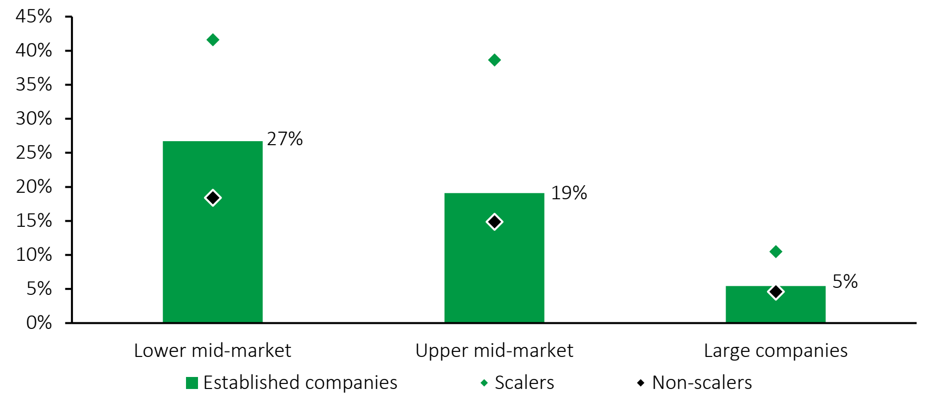


Figure 14: Percentage of companies citing access to talents as a barrier to growth, per company size
Note: For sections 5 through 8, there are only six observations of scalers with >4,999 employees
Source: Deloitte 2025

Regional and industrial sectoral considerations matter too: Nearly 80% of established scalers in the North Denmark Region and Region Zealand report access to talent as a growth barrier, as do more than 50% of those operating in the manufacturing and ICT industries.

Nearly 80% of established scalers in North Denmark and Zealand experience access to talents as a barrier to growth.

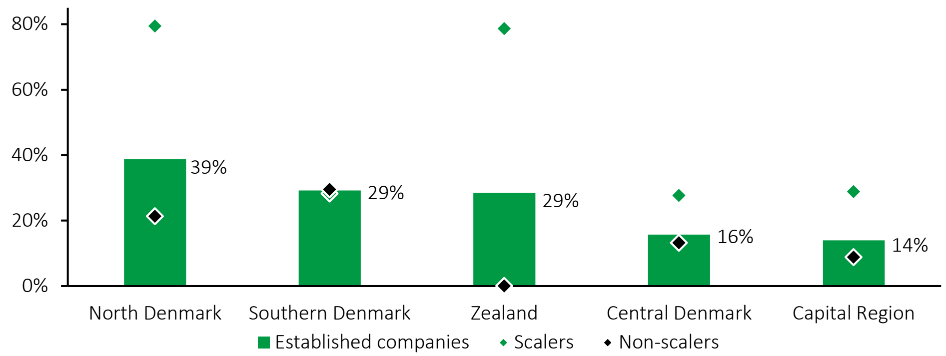


Figure 15: Percentage of companies citing access to talents as a barrier to growth, per company size
Source: Deloitte 2025

In the ICT industry, access to talent shows the largest gap: 56% of scalers see it as a growth barrier, compared with 1.5% of non-scalers.

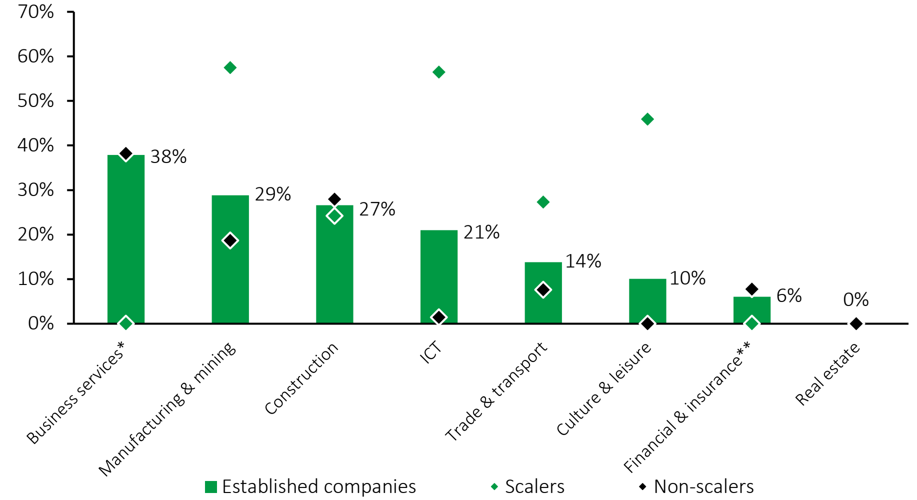


Figure 16: Percentage of companies citing access to talent as a barrier to growth, per industry
Note: *Only 1 established scaler; **Only 2 established scalers.
Source: Deloitte 2025

Our interviews shed light on what is driving these challenges and how successful scalers seek to address them. Firstly, shortages are mostly felt on a specific set of specialised capabilities, leading to a "war on talent". Secondly, while Denmark has many strengths to attract and retain employees, a number of barriers make tapping into the international pool of talents more challenging than it should. These issues and their underlying causes and potential solutions are explored in the following.

6.3. A growing need for specialised capabilities among scalers intensifies talent challenges

As companies transition from start-ups into established companies, their need for employees with broader, more strategic skillsets grows. Successful scaling demands more than technical expertise – it requires capabilities in process design, governance and organisational development. This finding was reinforced through interviews with established scalers, who emphasised that the key competencies for scaling span a broad range of functions: finance, supply chain and procurement, production, legal and risk management, HR, technology, data infrastructure, and customer relationship management. As companies grow, they also increasingly rely on data-driven operations, making expertise in scalable IT systems, cybersecurity and analytics indispensable. Similarly, effective risk management becomes more important as companies face growing exposure to financial, operational and market risks.

6.4. Talent as a structural constraint: Geography, costs and immigration

Our research indicates that the geographic location of the established scalers impacts their access to skilled labour. This is observed both in survey and interview data where companies operating in regions such as North Denmark noted the challenge of a narrower local talent pool compared to urban centres like Copenhagen. They also highlighted the difficulty of attracting skilled professionals to relocate and work in these areas. For such companies, location is not just a logistical consideration – it becomes a decisive factor in their ability to secure the talent necessary for sustained growth.

> *"It's a people's game. The winners will be the companies that succeed in attracting the best talents worldwide."*
>
> Undisclosed established scaler

Given this and the increased need for more – and also more specialised – labour as established scalers grow, some companies turn to foreign workers. Denmark benefits from a strong education system and well-developed infrastructure, both of which support talent development and attraction. Denmark ranks second in the EU for international research co-publications (nearly four times above EU average) and attracts 126% more foreign PhD students than the EU average[47]. Measures such as favourable tax schemes for high-skilled professionals can also support international recruitment.

However, challenges in recruiting foreign talent remain, particularly due to high living costs, restrictive immigration and visa regulations. According to a recent study by The Economist, Denmark has the world's second-largest relative "brain gain" potential – meaning that the inflow of talent could more than triple if relocation barriers were removed[48]. Our survey shows that 41% of established scalers view the cost of attracting talent as an obstacle to growth, while 59% stress the need to offer attractive compensation packages to secure key personnel.

Interviews suggest that Denmark's relatively high wage levels pose a challenge to cost competitiveness, at times rendering domestic production unviable. In 2022, Denmark recorded the highest median gross hourly earnings in the EU at EUR 29.83, compared to the EU average of EUR 14.91 – a difference of almost 67%. While neighbouring countries are closer to Denmark's level, it still tops the EU ranking (behind only Switzerland in a broader European context). One company described this dynamic as a "fundamental challenge", noting that high taxes and living costs can deter foreign professionals from relocating, despite the country's high quality of life.

Denmark's immigration and visa policies also present challenges for companies. Recent reforms – such as expanding the fast-track scheme to firms with as few as ten employees and lowering the minimum salary threshold for non-EU workers – have improved conditions. Still, the OECD recommends additional measures to improve access to highly skilled labour, including recognising alternative forms of compensation such as employee share options, which are more frequently used by scaling companies[49]. Major Danish business organisations also repeatedly raise concerns that the existing visa system remains rigid, administratively complex and slow.

[47] European Commission, 2024c
[48] The Economist, August 2024
[49] OECD, 2024

What sets successful scalers apart

The proactive approach to talent attraction observed among several interviewed scalers appears to be a key factor distinguishing them from non-scalers. One company described how it deliberately pursued early hires and prioritised in-house skills development. Others turned scarcity into opportunity by broadening their definition of talent. For example, one firm reported that 10-15% of its workforce consists of interns or individuals with limited access to traditional employment due to social, psychological or physical barriers. This inclusive hiring practice not only helps to fill critical roles but also enhances workforce diversity and social impact.

Scalers also employ a range of other strategies: sourcing talent internationally through remote or hybrid work, lowering experience requirements and recruiting graduates, offering equity-based incentives, and consistently investing in building a strong employer brand. Collectively, these measures have allowed them to tap into wider talent pools and strengthen organisational resilience.

The experiences of these companies provide valuable lessons. For non-scalers and other growth-oriented companies in Denmark, adopting elements of such approaches can support the development of more robust and inclusive talent strategies – ultimately reinforcing their ability to scale in a tightening labour market.

6.5. Recommendations addressing the access to talent gap

Hire ahead of the curve:
Companies should adopt a proactive hiring strategy, bringing in talent before the need becomes critical. This ensures the necessary skills and capabilities are in place for expansion, reducing the risk of being under-resourced during key growth phases.

Employer branding for global talent attraction:
Strong employer branding is essential for attracting top-tier global talents, especially for Danish companies aiming to reach international markets and draw in high-quality candidates, despite associated costs.

Remote work infrastructure:
To expand their talent reach, companies should build robust remote work infrastructure. This allows companies to hire skilled employees from across the globe, widening the talent pool beyond geographic limitations.

Look for alternative strategies to attract talent:
Scalers can benefit from challenging themselves to explore new ways of sourcing labour. There is a wide range of approaches, but the crucial point is to identify the methods that work best for each individual company.

Leverage external recruiters:
Established scalers should consider using external recruiters to access a broader pool of talent within specific fields. External agencies often have access to specialised talent pools that may be difficult for companies to tap into on their own.

The key strategic questions to be considered:

Do you have a clear FTE forecast across the organisation?

Have you assessed what specific skills are needed to support the expected expansion?

Have you planned for the necessary infrastructure and technology to support the forecasted growth in the workforce?

How strong is your brand recognition in key growth markets, both in Denmark and globally?

Does your employer brand resonate culturally with the talent you aim to attract?

Do you align your employer brand with your core values and mission while being adaptable to the expectations of a global workforce?

Are you effectively leveraging digital platforms to communicate your employer brand worldwide?

Do you have the capability to hire and onboard employees remotely?

Is your company infrastructure equipped to support remote work as you scale and attract talent from diverse locations?

Can you ensure cybersecurity, data protection and employee training for remote work tools, while safeguarding operations and sensitive information?

Have you considered how neurodiversity or other inclusive recruitment practices could increase your talent pool?

Would more in-house training add value by enabling you to onboard candidates with less formal education?

Would employee shares be an effective tool for attracting and retaining talent?

Do you have access to the specialised talent needed, or are there critical areas for growth where external support could be beneficial?

Are there business areas where external support could bring in fresh perspectives and industry insights that may be beneficial for your talent acquisition needs?

7. Unlocking capital to scale with success

For growth-oriented companies, access to capital is more than a financial matter – it is a strategic imperative that directly impacts scalability. As companies expand, their capital requirements become increasingly complex. Among established companies, 25% identified access to capital as a significant barrier to growth, ranking it as the third-largest concern after margin pressures and inflation. Yet, most established scalers interviewed did not perceive capital access as a growth barrier, instead having deployed strategies to effectively navigate this challenge.

7.1. Macrotrends are shaping the availability of capital

The tightening of monetary policy over the past two years has reshaped the financing landscape for established companies. Higher interest rates, introduced to counter persistent inflationary pressures, have materially increased the cost of capital. Several Danish companies interviewed for this study noted heightened challenges in their discussions with investors, with some experiencing reduced access to both equity and debt markets. This mirrors a broader global trend: in 2023, the lending gap was estimated at USD 2.6 trillion – up sharply from USD 1.5 trillion in 2020[50] – highlighting the growing strain on companies seeking external finance.

At the same time, geopolitical uncertainty – from energy security concerns to shifting global trade alignments – has further complicated the capital-raising environment. Rising risk perceptions have led investors to demand higher premiums, particularly in markets or sectors seen as vulnerable to volatility. For growth companies, this combination of elevated financing costs and more selective capital allocation translates into a more competitive funding environment where securing investment increasingly depends on demonstrating resilience, scalability and a clear path to profitability.

7.2. Access to capital is a major growth barrier for established companies

While one in four of the established companies view access to capital as a barrier to growth, non-scalers are generally twice as likely as scalers to face this challenge. However, company size adds an important layer of nuance: as scalers grow, access to capital increasingly emerges as a constraint. Among larger companies, more than half of scalers (52%) report capital access as a significant obstacle, compared with just 22% of non-scalers. This underscores a structural weakness in the Danish financing environment, namely, the difficulty of raising large-ticket investments, which has often been cited as a key factor behind the relocation of several Danish unicorns[51].

Upper mid-market companies are the most likely to cite access to capital as a growth barrier with a relatively small disparity between scalers (26%) and non-scalers (32%).

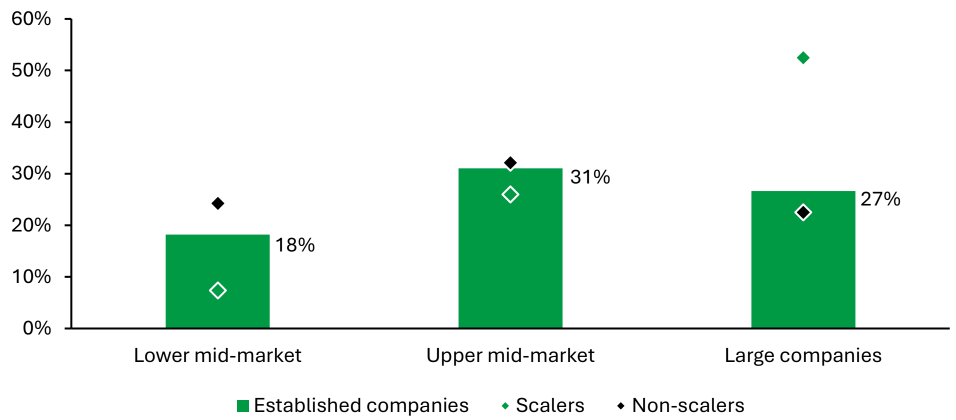


Figure 17: Percentage of companies citing access to capital as a barrier to growth, per company size

Source: Deloitte 2025

[50] JP Morgan, 2024

[51] Dansk Erhverv, 2024

Our interviews have helped structure some of the key issues surrounding access to capital. Firstly, several obstacles appear to be embedded in the Danish and broader European regulatory environment. Secondly, we found that these challenges are not insurmountable but overcoming them requires organisational maturity and a strategic approach to capital origination.

7.3. The structure of local capital markets remains a constraint

Denmark benefits from a stable, transparent and predictable regulatory environment, which is generally favourable to attracting investment. Compared to many other markets, investors value Denmark's institutional strength and rule of law. However, this stability comes with trade-offs. Relatively stringent banking regulations and conservative lending practices continue to restrict the availability of credit, particularly for companies pursuing riskier, innovative or longer-term growth strategies. Interviewed scalers repeatedly noted that their growth trajectories were shaped as much by access to working capital and flexible credit lines as by customer demand. When such facilities are constrained, even otherwise competitive businesses may be forced to slow expansion or defer opportunities. This underscores the structural importance of financial system design in enabling scaling.

> *"When a company grows, it faces a very rigid and risk-averse environment when seeking financial options. I believe that the market needs to be liberalised, and the major banks to be less risk-averse".*
>
> Undisclosed company

Beyond banking regulation, several other factors add to the complexity of raising capital in Denmark. The domestic tax regime makes stock exchange listings comparatively unattractive for growth companies, reducing the appeal of public markets as a financing option. Some interviewees further questioned the effectiveness of EIFO (The Export and Investment Fund of Denmark), suggesting that its support mechanisms are not sufficiently tailored to the specific needs of high-growth businesses. Instead of catalysing scale-up investment, EIFO's approach was at times perceived as overly rigid or administratively burdensome. Young founders also highlighted a more intangible challenge: perceptions of inexperience and credibility. Age and early-stage status were cited as barriers in attracting investors, compounding the number of hurdles.

Geography adds a further nuance. Interestingly, companies based in the North Denmark Region reported being less concerned about access to capital compared with peers elsewhere in Denmark, including the Capital Region. This points to the strength of regional ecosystems where tight-knit industrial clusters, long-standing ties with local banks, and dense supplier networks appear to compensate for the relative absence of Copenhagen's larger financial institutions. The North Denmark Region experience suggests that strong regional ecosystems can provide an effective buffer against capital-access challenges, offering lessons for how local networks might be leveraged more broadly across the country.

Established companies in the North Denmark Region have reported being considerably less challenged by access to capital (even after adjusting for scalers vs. non-scalers).

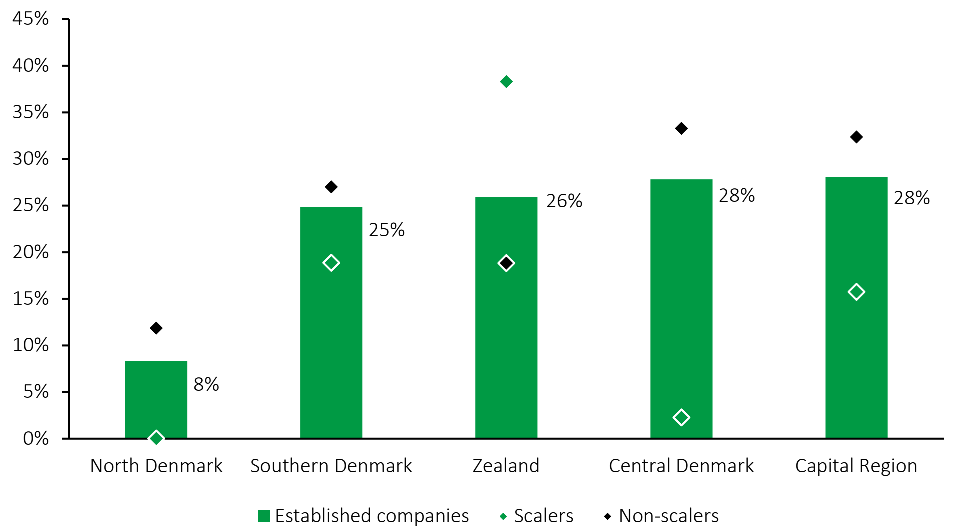


Figure 18: Percentage of companies citing access to capital as a barrier to growth, per region
Source: Deloitte 2025

Taken together, these findings highlight a paradox: Denmark's financial and regulatory framework provides stability and transparency, though certain rigidities, fragmented support structures, and regional disparities may limit the growth that policymakers are seeking to promote.

7.4. Organisational maturity and strategic capital thinking are critical

Interviews also made clear that access to capital cannot be understood purely as a structural or regulatory issue. Equally decisive is the level of financial maturity within the company itself. Businesses with strong financial governance, disciplined cash-flow management and strategic balance-sheet planning are considerably better positioned to attract external funding. Conversely, companies with weak internal controls, limited forecasting ability or inconsistent financial reporting often struggle to convince investors of their reliability, even if they operate in attractive markets. From that perspective, capital tends to follow governance.

Based on the sum of our research, several core capabilities stand out as particularly critical. Firstly, valuation competence: Companies must be able to articulate their growth potential and market position convincingly in order to negotiate fair terms with PE or VC investors. In practice, some companies reported walking away from external funding because they could not align with investors on valuation, choosing instead to self-finance. While this preserved ownership and autonomy, it also constrained their growth pace.

Secondly, balance-sheet strategy: Scalers must actively manage the mix of debt, equity and liquidity to ensure long-term resilience while safeguarding short-term stability. One company highlighted how franchising provided a capital-light route to expansion in its early stages before reverting to an ownership model to strengthen brand equity. Similarly, the rise of asset-light models, such as contract manufacturing, illustrates how capital strategy and business model design are increasingly intertwined.

Thirdly, working capital management: Companies in retail and consumer sectors, for instance, described how liquidity bottlenecks limited their ability to respond to high demand. Early in their growth journeys, some relied on letters of credit or supplier guarantees to keep operations afloat. As they scaled and built stronger reputations, they were able to reverse this dependency and secure more favourable terms. This trajectory shows that even when cash constraints are acute, successful scalers find ways to bridge the gap until they achieve the scale and credibility needed to strengthen their working capital position.

To sustain growth, companies need mature forecasting tools, strong finance functions and clear processes that integrate operational and financial planning. In short, organisational maturity transforms access to capital from a barrier into an enabler – positioning scalers for sustained growth.

7.5. What sets successful scalers apart

While access to capital emerged as a recurring challenge across interviews, it was striking that many established scalers did not rank it as a primary impediment. Their experience sheds light on what differentiates companies that secure funding more easily from those that struggle. Three lessons stand out.

The first is the power of a distinctive value proposition. Investors are more likely to support companies that can demonstrate a clear competitive edge, a scalable business model and a strong market narrative. Several interviewees emphasised that by excelling in their core offering and delivering visible market traction, they were able to attract investment with relative ease. In some cases, companies pursued growth almost exclusively through self-financing, leveraging strong margins and unique products to sustain expansion without external capital. This highlights that while a capital strategy is important, the underlying business fundamentals remain the most decisive factor.

Secondly, successful scalers engage proactively with PE and VC funds. More than half of the interviewed companies had PE or VC fund involvement, either as majority owners or through targeted investments. The benefits extended well beyond financial injections, as the investors brought expertise in operational scaling, governance, and internationalisation, pushing the companies to professionalise their organisations and sharpen their growth models. As such, successful scalers have been able to harness the competences and performance focus of PE and VC investors to fuel their growth.

Finally, successful scalers benefit from aligning themselves with sectors and themes that resonate with investor appetite and policy priorities[52]. High-growth industries such as ICT, clean energy and biotechnology are particularly attractive to investors because they combine capital intensity with high potential returns. Public subsidies and government grants in areas such as renewable energy further lower the cost of capital and reduce barriers to scaling. Moreover, some companies leveraged sectoral partnerships, such as joint sourcing or value-chain collaborations, to share risks and present a stronger case to investors. By positioning themselves at the intersection of market growth and societal priorities, these companies were able to secure larger funding rounds and sustain momentum.

Taken together, these experiences show that while access to capital will always be a constraint for some, the most successful scalers distinguish themselves by turning investor engagement into a strategic advantage, combining strong fundamentals, financial discipline and sector positioning to sustain growth at scale.

[52] Bank for International Settlements, 2023

7.6. Recommendations addressing the capital gap

Considering a full spectrum of funding options:
Companies should remain open to a variety of funding sources, including VC and PE investments, angel investors, crowdfunding, debt financing and public offerings. The key is to diversify funding avenues to align with growth needs and strategic objectives.

Build robust financial models:
By conducting early-stage financial modelling and thorough scenario analysis, scalers can better project short-term and long-term working capital needs. This approach improves decision-making, helps identify potential funding gaps and helps to ensure the financial flexibility needed for sustainable growth and resilience.

Optimise working capital:
Internal funding through working capital optimisation can be a critical tool for scaling companies. By streamlining operations and improving cash flow management, companies can free up resources for reinvestment in growth.

Forge strategic partnerships:
Engaging in strategic partnerships across the value chain, whether with suppliers, distributors or other businesses, can provide both financial and operational benefits. Such partnerships can bring new funding or access to resources that might otherwise be unavailable.

The key strategic questions to be considered:

Have you established a strategy for accessing various liquidity market options?

Have you explored funding options beyond traditional sources, such as VC or PE investments, angel investors, crowdfunding or government grants?

How do you evaluate funding options based on your company's growth stage, industry and long-term financial objectives?

Are you leveraging financial advisors and experts to gain insights into the full spectrum of funding options available to the company?

Do you have strong financial modelling and planning to accurately project short-term and long-term working capital needs?

Have you incorporated various scenarios and assumptions into your financial models to account for different market conditions, growth trajectories and potential risks?

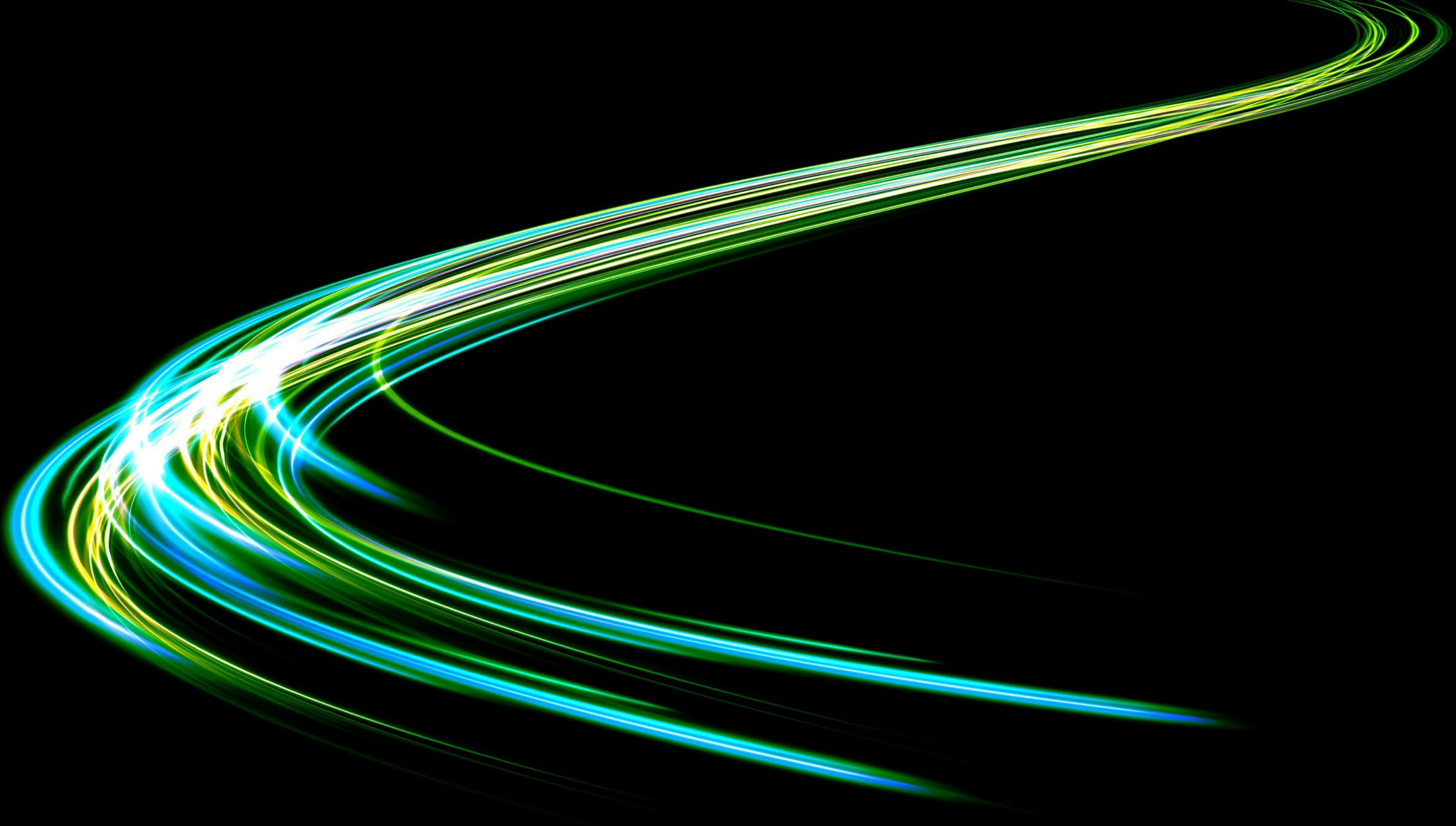
Do you ensure that your financial models are aligned with the company's long-term strategic objectives and growth plans?

Do you have a transparent overview of your cash conversion cycle and potential opportunities to free up cash internally?

In what ways are you leveraging technology and automation to improve the efficiency of your working capital management processes?

Have you identified potential strategic partnerships across your value chain that could enhance financial and operational efficiencies or provide access to new resources?

Are you actively engaging with suppliers and customers to discuss partnership opportunities that could possibly improve working capital requirements?



8. Build to scale: The role of leadership and operational capacity

As companies scale, adaptive leadership and a professional operational structure become essential for managing increasing complexity while continuing to drive innovation and growth. Established scalers exhibit key characteristics that have enabled them to navigate these challenges successfully, including an enduring ambition for growth, willingness to invest ahead, foresight, and an ability of the owner to acknowledge own professional shortcomings allowing for the onboarding of new competencies and the development of a professional set-up.

8.1. Trends shaping corporate culture

Some of most prevalent macrotrends affecting corporate culture today are diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I), socio-cultural demands from future workforce and the wide-scale development of remote work.

Firstly, ownership and leadership decisions are increasingly considered with a DE&I lens. There is a heightened awareness of DE&I principles in boardrooms and management teams, which are increasingly seen by investors as essential for fostering innovation and ensuring long-term competitiveness. Ownership models characterised by outdated governance structures and a lack of diversity at the leadership level are progressively experienced as a hindrance to growth both to attract investors and talent. However, given the evolving political landscape and its impact on business, companies may now need to reassess how they manage and communicate DE&I initiatives.

Secondly, the future workforce is increasingly seen to search for psychological safety, a strong sense of purpose, digital enablement, continuous skills development, and financial stability[53]. Psychological safety is becoming a non-negotiable element of workplace culture, where employees expect to bring their authentic selves to work, make decisions independently and express opinions without fear of repercussion.

Alongside this, a deep-rooted sense of purpose, where individuals feel their work contributes to a meaningful mission, is often seen to be crucial to employee engagement.

Thirdly, since the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing shift toward remote and hybrid work has been reshaping corporate culture. Companies that fail to adapt their leadership and culture to accommodate flexible work arrangements may struggle to attract top talents, further constraining growth. Having the right infrastructure in place for remote work can support rapid scaling by not only providing access to much broader talent pools (as described in chapter 6), but also foster a more modern workplace culture. Furthermore, remote work is typically associated to a wide set of factors increasing productivity[54].

As companies evolve, digital-first cultures are essential, with employees seeking access to cutting-edge technology and a work experience designed to maximise their potential. Career security and continuous skill development are increasingly valued, especially in the face of job automation. Lastly, financial stability, including support for medical care and retirement planning, is seen as critical for retaining a motivated and loyal workforce.

8.2. The impact of Danish culture on leadership approaches

Denmark's supportive welfare state in combination with a high-trust, consensus-driven business environment has cultivated an employee-centric culture much focused on work-life balance and high employee satisfaction. This egalitarian leadership culture is seen to stimulate innovation and sustainability and helps attract foreign talents coming from traditional work cultures characterised by vertical hierarchies and less empowerment[55]. Yet, the established scalers interviewed noted that consensus building and a tendency towards risk aversion can sometimes impede agility in decision-making.

[53] Deloitte, 2025
[54] See for instance Bloom, 2024
[55] World Economic Forum, 2018

Furthermore, sector-specific conditions such as the pace of innovation, industry maturity and market growth also shape how leadership and culture evolve. Mid-market companies, for example within sectors like technology and renewable energy, face intense pressure to stay ahead of industry trends in order to remain competitive. Leadership in such sectors therefore requires an even higher degree of agility, willingness to adopt new technologies and a culture that actively embraces innovation.

In more mature sectors where market dynamics are relatively stable, leadership and ownership structures may focus on incremental improvements and best practices derived from years of industry experience. Such a management approach can nevertheless increase the risk of leaving companies vulnerable to disruptive innovations. Moreover, companies that fail to foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation may struggle to maintain a competitive advantage.

All these factors are reshaping corporate culture as businesses strive to meet the expectations of a future-oriented workforce, and established scalers must pay attention to these and seek to proactively embrace the developments to avoid unnecessary setbacks.

8.3. The development of leadership approaches for scalers

Figure 19: Management approches
Source: Deloitte, 2025

For established scalers, managing complexity is a key challenge, particularly in balancing innovation with operational efficiency. This particular challenge was one of the most frequent ones stressed by the ten scalers interviewed who considered strong leadership and operational capacity a growth barrier. Through interviews, we identified a pattern of evolution across three phases, ultimately leading to a more structured and professional organisational setup, which made them "fit for growth" as phrased by an interviewee.

New companies are typically founder-led, driven by the vision and energy of the original team. As they grow to become established companies, leadership shifts to a culture-led approach, focused on ensuring that core values are embedded across an expanding workforce. Maintaining the kind of culture that initially fuelled success while scaling proved a key challenge in our study. Several scalers highlighted the importance of organisation-wide buy-in during growth phases, especially among elder employees who may struggle with rapid change. The development of a strong culture also relies on employees feeling seen and recognised, yet this focus can blur during intense growth periods. Some companies successfully addressed this by enhancing focus on culture in onboarding processes, but the continued effort required to embed cultural values beyond initial onboarding was considered challenging. One company tried to reorganise into autonomous business units to scale more effectively, however, the management realised that a strong culture could not be replicated as quickly as it had hoped.

Eventually, we observed that the established scalers adopted a structure-led management approach where the set-up of formalised processes and systems became central to continued efficient scaling and success. Our study found that growth companies must streamline operations and focus on core areas to be able to scale effectively without creating unnecessary complexity. The critical importance of building operational capacity with strong support functions, while maintaining agility, is a valuable insight for non-scalers and scalers in the lower mid-market segment who have yet to undergo such organisational and management transitions. This growth factor seems often to be underestimated. As with other key growth drivers highlighted in this report – management of regulation, talent and capital access – a proactive approach may help lay a strong foundation for future growth phases.

8.4. What sets successful scalers apart

8.4.1. Leadership traits

Leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering a culture that supports ambition and calculated risk-taking to ensure continuous growth. Interviews with established scalers revealed a persistent drive for growth – an ambition that seems to underpin their success. The commitment to expansion and entering of new markets pushes them to actively pursue innovative solutions to challenges. However, some established scalers interviewed noted how they struggled with a slowdown of innovation due to the growth of support functions (e.g., IT, finance). They experimented with creating separate innovation teams to improve processes but found limited success, ultimately focusing on separating must-win projects from routine operations.

Closely tied to this focus on growth, the leaders of successful established scalers emphasise how the willingness to invest ahead of the company's growth curve had been instrumental in capitalising on opportunities, even during unpredictable times like the COVID-19 pandemic. This forward-thinking mindset allowed them to anticipate challenges, helping ensure they stayed ahead of evolving industry demands. Some established scalers proactively sought support from recruitment firms to secure the right expertise before the need became urgent, while others took bold steps in strengthening support functions early on, ensuring that their operational backbone was equipped to handle future expansion without creating bottlenecks.

Both experts and the established scalers interviewed stress that growing successfully also hinges on the leader's willingness to delegate control and their openness to external expertise. This transition can be challenging, as the shift from an entrepreneurial mindset to more structured governance and systematic data collection often reduces the flexibility and ease with which leaders in less mature companies are accustomed to making decisions.

Relatedly, the ability to recognise and address own limitations to ensure an optimal mix of competencies to drive present and future growth was evident in the interviews. Many had gradually come to the realisation that increasing operational complexity, combined with new challenges arising as the company scaled, made it impossible to manage and grow without some external expertise. Overall, leaders of successful established scalers seem to demonstrate the ability to acknowledge their professional limits, understanding that they cannot do everything themselves but must prioritise building the right team with the necessary expertise at the right time.

Altogether, these insights highlight the importance of proactively managing complexity as companies scale, ensuring that innovation can thrive while operational processes are solidified for long-term success.

8.4.2. Operational capacity and professionalisation

The internal capabilities, including leadership development programmes, governance structures and ability to scale, are directly tied to ownership and leadership models. Established companies in Denmark can face challenges in scaling leadership capabilities, particularly when there is a gap between internal talent development and the evolving demands of a growing company. Our research shows that leadership training, succession planning and recruitment strategies are vital to ensure the skills and expertise needed for sustainable growth.

Interestingly, we saw that VC and PE funds have played a crucial role in driving growth and professionalisation for many of the scalers that we studied. As noted in the previous chapter (re. access to capital), five of the fifteen interviewed scalers were owned by a VC or PE fund, while another four had received investments from VC or PE funds.

> *"Letting strangers take over part of your business is a big step; in fact, quite anxiety-provoking. But it was necessary to realise our growth plans, and their ownership (private equity red.) has contributed to a professionalisation of the company".*
>
> Undisclosed company

However, accepting venture or private equity capital comes with high expectations and ambitious growth targets, which the companies must be ready for. One established scaler described how, before bringing in external investors, that it was highly founder-led, which had become a growth barrier. This changed when a professional board chair was appointed, leading to restructuring, including hiring of a new CEO. In general, this role of a professional board – and particularly a competent, professional chair – is widely recognised as critical to scalers both by the experts interviewed and in literature[56]. While financial backing and industry expertise proved invaluable, companies also noted that VC and PE involvement introduced a short-term focus due to exit strategies.

Ultimately, the ability to balance professionalisation with a long-term strategic focus emerges as a defining factor for Danish established scalers. External capital may play a key role in that process, becoming a catalyst for sustained growth.

[56] Dahl et al., 2016

8.5. Recommendations addressing leadership and operational capacity

Adapt to a structure-led approach:
As companies scale, maintaining the start-up culture of rapid decision-making becomes less feasible across all areas. It is essential to shift from a people-dependent approach to a more structured operating model in order to enable sustainable growth.

Standardise support functions:
To enable scaling, it is essential to standardise key support functions such as IT, quality and risk, and to integrate them into clear processes that balance efficiency with control.

Prioritise qualified leadership early:
Early identification and recruitment of experienced leaders is critical for scaling. Engaging external recruitment firms can help ensure that leadership teams evolve in line with the company's changing needs and culture.

Invest in succession planning:
Developing a robust succession plan is vital to sustain long-term leadership within the company. This includes proactive efforts in leadership development, mentoring and training programmes to cultivate internal talent.

The key strategic questions to be considered:

Do you have a clear overview of all your key processes, such as a process taxonomy?

Have you mapped how technology, people, and processes integrate to drive efficiency?

Are your systems and processes built for scale, or are they stretched beyond their limits?

Are strong governance structures established to ensure process consistency and accountability?

Have you standardised processes for key support functions such as IT, quality and risk to facilitate scalability and operational efficiency?

Are you promoting adaptability and continuous improvement within standardised support functions to meet evolving business needs?

Have you assessed what specific skills are needed to support the expected expansion?

Have you identified the leadership needs critical for scaling your company in the early stages?

Do you have strategies in place to attract and recruit experienced leaders who can effectively drive the company's growth and expansion?

Are you identifying key leadership positions critical to succession planning within the organisation?

What role does ongoing training and development play in preparing potential successors for leadership roles within the organisation?

Are you fostering a culture of mentorship and knowledge transfer to prepare future leaders for key roles within the organisation?

Plan for generational transition in family-owned businesses:
Family businesses should prioritise preparing the next generation for leadership to ensure smooth transitions and continued growth.

Leverage venture capital or private equity ownership:
VC and PE companies offer more than just funding, providing leadership expertise and professionalisation for scalers, despite typically introducing a relatively short-term mindset.

Evaluate the founder's leadership role:
As the business matures, the skill set of founders may no longer align with the leadership needs of a scaler. Recognising the right time to transition leadership roles is key to sustain momentum.

Cultivate a growth-ready culture:
Building a culture that embraces change and scalability is key for innovation and attracting top talent. Change ambassadors can foster a growth mindset, aligning the culture with long-term objectives. A strong culture also sets the company apart in attracting and retaining top talents.

The key strategic questions to be considered:

Are you identifying and preparing the next generation of leaders within the family-owned business for a smooth generational transition, while addressing potential challenges and risks associated with this transition and proactively mitigating these risks?

Do you promote open communication and transparency within your family-owned business to facilitate generational transition planning and integrate the values and vision of different generations for a seamless transition?

Additionally, do you have access to the specialised talent needed for critical areas of growth, or could external support be beneficial?

Have you evaluated the potential benefits and challenges of VC or PE ownership for the company's growth and expansion, including its impact on long-term growth, competitiveness and financial performance?

Have you aligned the company's long-term objectives with the investment horizon and expectations of VC or PE partners?

Have you prepared for potential changes in governance, operational strategy and reporting requirements associated with VC or PE ownership?

Have you prepared for implementing strategies to ensure cultural alignment with potential VC or PE partners for a successful partnership?

Do you assess the founder's current leadership role and its alignment with the company's evolving needs and strategic direction?

What strategies are being implemented to ensure that the founder's leadership role is adaptable and responsive to the changing market dynamics and competitive landscape?

Do you foster a culture of innovation, adaptability, and continuous improvement to support the company's growth objectives?

What measures are in place to encourage risk-taking, creativity and entrepreneurial thinking to foster a growth-ready culture?

How do you promote open communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing for a change-ready and growth-oriented culture?

Have you assessed the scalability of existing processes and systems for expected expansion?

9. Appendix I: Case studies

As part of our research, we conducted multiple interviews with established scalers, aiming to gain insights into their operations and their strategies for overcoming growth barriers. This has resulted in three in-depth case studies of European Energy, Pleo and Søstrene Grene that each showcase how they have successfully managed to continuously scale.

European Energy

With an employee CAGR of more than 45% over the past five years, European Energy has firmly established itself as a leading scaler in the renewable energy sector. The company has consistently demonstrated a strong ability to adapt and capitalise on opportunities in a rapidly evolving environment.

About the company

European Energy was founded by electrical engineers with extensive experience in the climate transition. The company aspires to be a global powerhouse that drives the green transition, develops sustainable energy solutions, and inspires the world to move towards a fossil-free society.

Today, European Energy is an international player in the renewable energy sector, specialising in the development, construction, and operation of wind and solar farms, as well as Power-to-X (PtX) projects, carbon capture, and energy storage solutions. Despite challenging market conditions, European Energy's resilient business model has consistently delivered strong financial performance. This success is further reinforced by strategic partnerships that provide capital, share risks, and contribute critical competencies.

Strategy

European Energy's growth strategy — centred on technological diversification to reduce exposure to country-specific policy shifts, operational excellence, and sustainability — has positioned the company as a notable player in the global green transition. To enhance scalability, European Energy has professionalised and centralised key functions and competences, including treasury, financial planning, and IT. With Mitsubishi HC Capital's current investment (20% ownership), the company is now better positioned to increase its equity through new capital infusion, enabling expansion and further project investments. European Energy believes this investment has the potential to catalyse a new phase of growth, further strengthening its position as a global renewable energy leader.

Company facts

Founded
2004

Headquarter
Søborg, Denmark

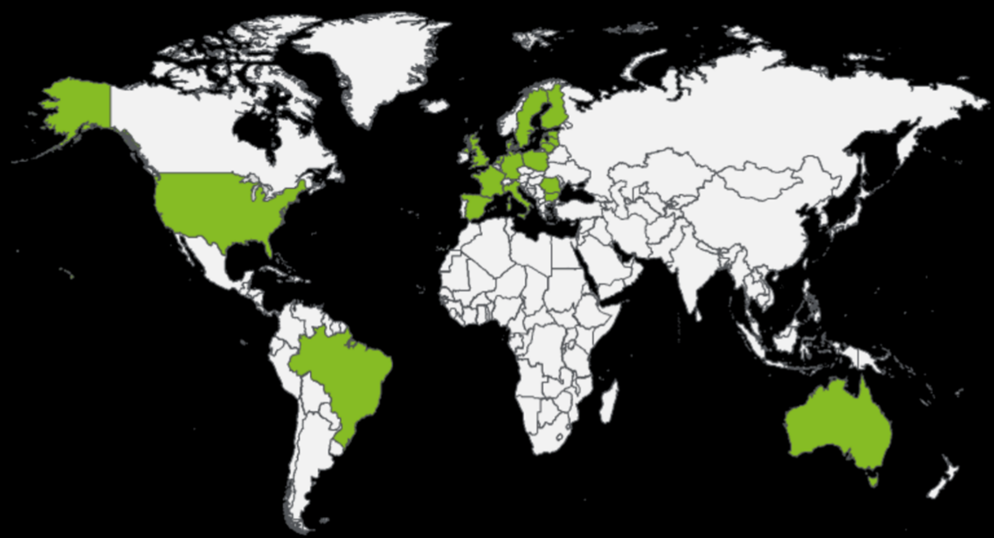
Industry
Energy

Location
29 offices across 21 countries

Ownership
20% by Mitsubishi HC Capital since 2024, and 80% privately owned

Key product offering
Develop, construct, and operate renewable energy projects

Company footprint[1]

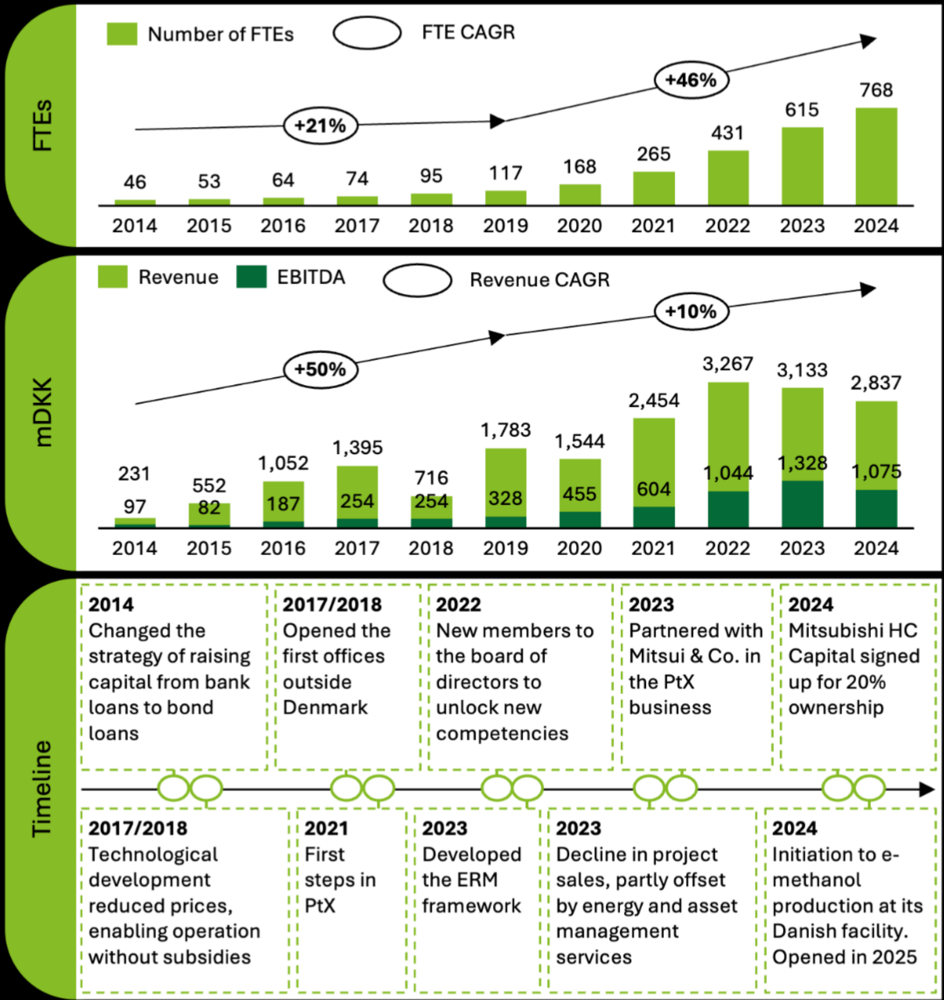


Sources: Company interview, annual report, company website

Note: 1) Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, North America, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, UK

European Energy

EUROPEAN ENERGY



European Energy's growth journey

Barriers to growth

In addition to industry-specific challenges such as fluctuating electricity prices, new technologies, construction risks, and regulatory changes, European Energy highlights a broader set of barriers. Policymaking is described as a double-edged sword: even well-intentioned reforms can slow projects when regulatory uncertainty rises, while fragmented EU rules increase costs and complexity.

The company also points to a "triangle of barriers": workforce shortages, limited project opportunities, and access to capital. While interest in green jobs is strong, competition for talent with large employers and restrictions on inflow of labour to Europe add pressure. Financing remains a challenge in this capital-intensive industry, where high interest rates increase costs; although growth is not directly stalled, it could progress faster under more favourable conditions. The company considers this triangle an inherent challenge — one in which at least one of the three barriers is always present.

Overcoming barriers

In 2014, the company addressed the challenge of financing by shifting from traditional bank financing to bond loans — a strategic move initiated by external advisors. This change in financing structure required the professionalisation of the board, which in turn helped fuel growth by further maturing the organisation.

European Energy has furthermore tackled its barriers through cost-effective measures and strategic partnerships. The company has also developed an Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) framework to monitor and manage risks across its operations. A key success factor has been the founders' recognition of the need to introduce new management capabilities at the right time. By ceding part of their leadership control, they ensured the company could continue to develop and professionalise.

Future strategy

European Energy's new 2026 strategy, "Powering Up", aims to drive the next phase of growth and innovation by strengthening its core business, achieving high operational performance, and establishing a scalable operating model. In 2024, the company initiated e-methanol production at its Danish facility, which is set to become one of the largest commercial plants of its kind in the world.

Sources: Company interview, annual report, company website

Pleo

With an employee CAGR well above 50% over the past five years, Pleo has rapidly positioned itself as a dominant actor in the fintech sector. The company has demonstrated strong organisational adaptability, innovation, and successful talent attraction.

About the company

Pleo emerged from the founders' firsthand experience with the challenges of traditional expense management, inspiring them to envision a transformative approach to the expense management software. The company's mission is to establish itself as the preferred spending solution for firms across various industries.

Today, Pleo holds a prominent position as Europe's leading business spending solution, specialising in the development and provision of an expense handling and payment platform for businesses and related activities.

Strategy

Pleo's growth strategy revolves around a product-oriented approach, prioritising continuous development to consistently deliver the best user experience to all customers. As Pleo raises capital, the company places strong emphasis on demonstrating its potential for international growth. The company believes in prioritising its people, allowing employees to work remotely around the world. The company's growth has required a reorganisation to ensure scalability, with a focus on decentralising decision-making and aligning product teams with specific customer challenges.

Company facts

Founded
2015

Headquarter
Copenhagen, Denmark

Industry
TMT

Location
7 offices across 7 countries[3]

Ownership
Owned by various privately investors[2]

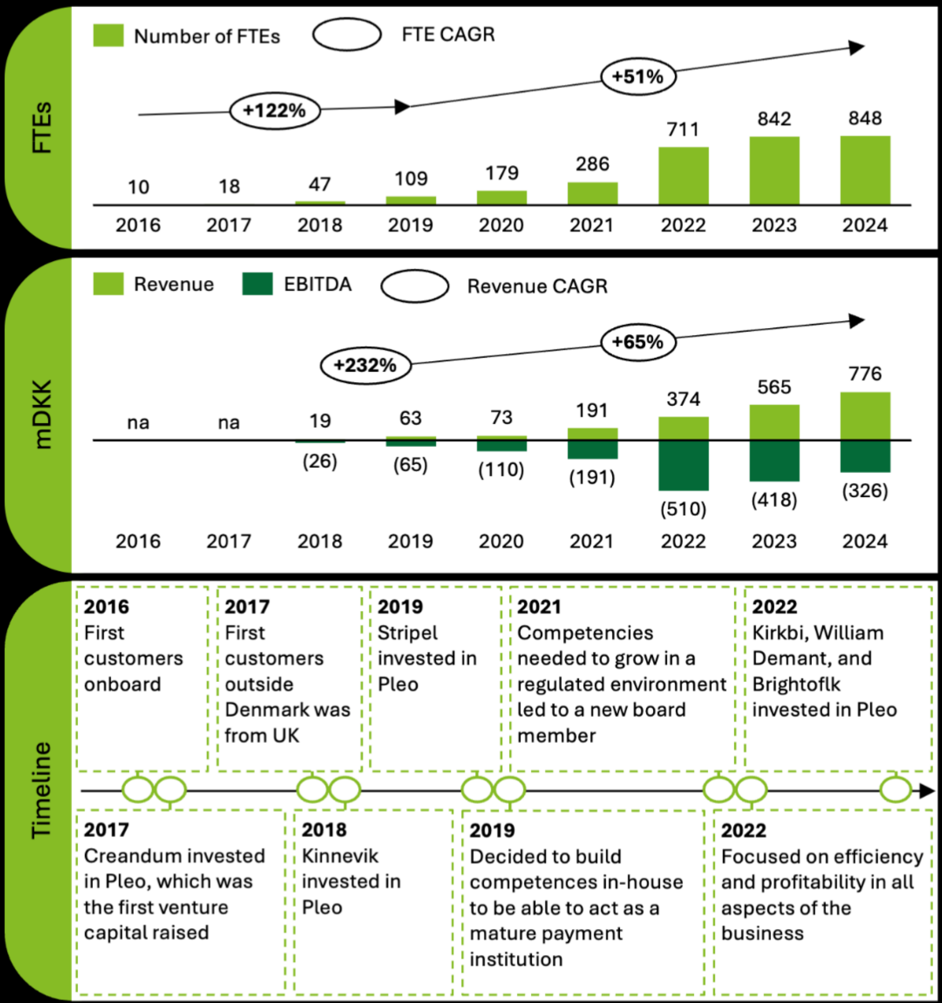
Key product offering
Full overview of company expenses with less manual work

Company footprint[4]

Sources: Company interview, annual report, company website

Note: 1) Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, North America, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, UK

Pleo



Pleo's growth journey

Barriers to growth

The most significant barrier for Pleo has been talent acquisition, particularly in its early startup phase when limited brand recognition and modest salaries made it difficult to attract qualified personnel. Denmark's high cost of living and relatively high taxes have further complicated efforts to attract international talent, making relocation less appealing. Access to venture capital was also a challenge in the early growth stages. The initial decision to accept external funding in 2017 was difficult, given the higher expectations and ambitions it brought.

As Pleo matured, however, subsequent capital raises became more attainable, with each round used as an opportunity to strengthen the organisation and raise its standards. As a financial services company, Pleo has also faced hurdles related to customer trust and regulation. Convincing customers to transfer funds and share sensitive information required careful attention to security and reliability. At the same time, Denmark's regulatory environment has limited competitiveness against international peers, further complicating its growth journey.

Overcoming barriers

Pleo has addressed the challenge of attracting talent by investing in a dedicated recruitment team and a stronger employer brand, while adopting a flexible approach that does not require employees to relocate to Denmark. This hybrid model has allowed the company to access a global talent pool, ensuring the right competencies are in place while reinforcing its people-first culture. Employees are expected to be entrepreneurial and act as owners of the business, a mindset that is further supported through warrants offered as their seniority and responsibilities grow.

Future strategy

Pleo's strategy involves ongoing investment in product improvements, new features, market growth, and training relevant personnel to foster knowledge and capabilities. Because the product works across multiple segments, the company recognises substantial potential in establishing a strong presence in Europe before pursuing globally. This will necessitate ongoing organisational adaptation.

Sources: Company interview, annual report, company website

Søstrene Grene

Søstrene Grene has had an employee CAGR above 20% in the past five years qualifying it as an established scaler. The company has demonstrated strong adaptability by transitioning from a franchise model to taking ownership of a larger share of its stores.

About the company

Søstrene Grene is a family-owned retail chain with over half a century of operational history, currently managed by the second generation of the founding family. The company's mission is to provide a unique retail experience for the customers.

Today, Søstrene Grene is a European player in the retail sector, focusing on the development of new designs within their product categories. The company operates both physical stores and online platforms and is focusing on creating great synergies between their offline and online sales channels as a strong omnichannel player.

Strategy

Søstrene Grene initially utilised a franchise model to facilitate business expansion, thereby enhancing its brand visibility and market presence. While this approach addressed the company's initial capital constraints, it also limited direct control over individual stores. Over time, the company has gradually shifted towards owning more of its stores and also increased its focus on strengthening the customer relationship. This has become even more critical in an omnichannel environment, where Søstrene Grene seeks to digitalise its business model, develop a customer-centric web shop, and ensure a seamless customer experience across all touchpoints. The company has experimented with different ownership models at different stages of its lifecycle, using them as levers to enable growth, but today most new stores are either joint venture stores or stores 100% owned by the group.

Company facts

Founded
1973

Headquarter
Aarhus, Denmark

Industry
Retail

Location
+350 stores across 17 markets

Ownership
Family-owned

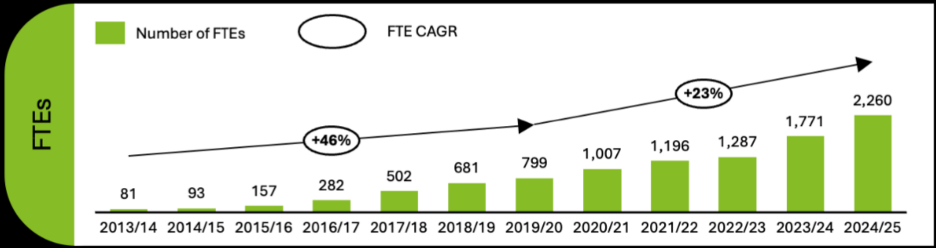
Key product offering
Product categories within e.g., interior design and crafts

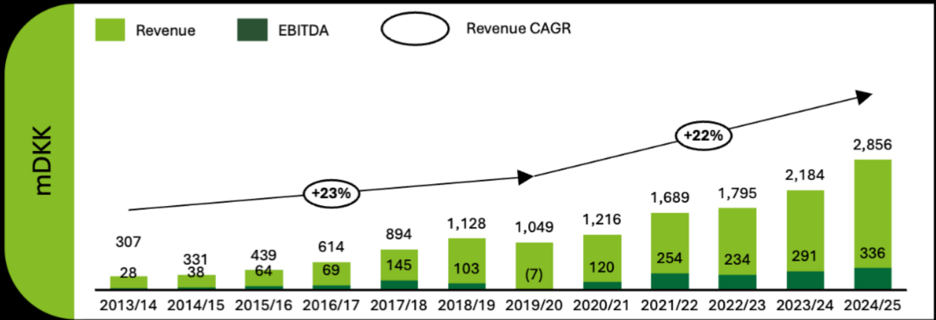
Company footprint[1]

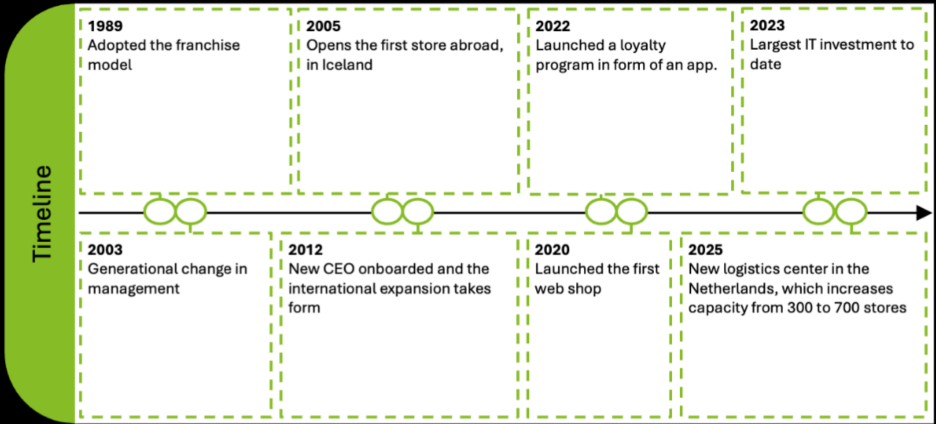
Sources: Company interview, annual report, company website

Note: 1) Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Faroe Island, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, UK

Søstrene Grene







Søstrene Grene's growth journey

Barriers to growth

As the company expanded, the transition from an entrepreneurial venture to a larger professional organisation brought new challenges — from securing financing in the early years through franchise models and supplier guarantees, to later managing the capital intensity of physical retail and the dependence on local know-how. Today, the main barriers lie in handling the increased complexity of a larger organisation and ensuring that growing support functions are adequately resourced. Regulation also plays a role: while Denmark remains relatively easy to do business in, operating across 17 markets exposes the company to very different regulatory environments. Balancing entrepreneurial agility with the demands of a much larger operational "machine" has become an ongoing focus, requiring constant effort to keep internal processes agile while sustaining growth.

Overcoming barriers

The company adopted a franchise model, which reduced liquidity demands, while also franchisees reducing operational costs and management responsibilities. The company has overcome other growth barriers by pursuing an opportunistic expansion strategy, targeting locations with favourable conditions such as low rent and strong local KPIs. Rather than following the traditional playbook of securing high-profile sites to build brand visibility, it deliberately opened stores in smaller towns and under-served areas where good deals could be made, and local attention generated. This approach allowed the company to scale cost-effectively and build visibility from the ground up. Complementing this, the company has also invested in employer branding and selective must-win projects to sustain agility as the organisation grew.

Future strategy

The company's growth strategy centers on opening more stores that are 100% owned by the group, reflecting, reflecting changing market dynamics and the need to be closer to the customer. Owning the customer relationship — and securing access to data across both physical and online channels – is seen as a strategic imperative, making the development of a strong omnichannel model essential. At the same time there are increased regulatory and compliance demands across European markets which need to be addressed in order to secure future growth and expansion.

Sources: Company interview, annual report, company website

10. Appendix II: Methodology and data

This chapter describes our analytic design, including data and methodology. The analysis is based on several quantitative and qualitative data sources that gave us a solid and unique foundation to develop and answer our research questions.

10.1. Overall analytic framework

We employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to ensure a robust understanding of the phenomena under investigation. By combining these different methods, we adhered to the principles of methodological triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of our findings through cross-verification of data from multiple sources. Our research design ascribes to a sequential/dominant paradigm (situation 4.c. in Figure 20): Quantitative data have had primacy in guiding our analysis (dominant strand) and were explored first before moving to qualitative data (but before reverting to quantitative data as part of the recursive triangulation process described below).

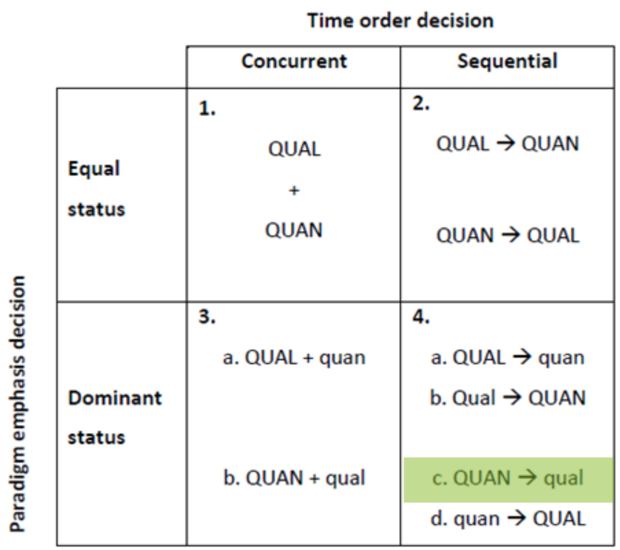


Figure 20: Mixed research design

Adapted from Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 22

Our research design was structured around four key phases: (i) a literature review and initial hypothesis development, (ii) empirical investigation (both exploratory and confirmatory), (iii) cross-validation (across data sets) and (iv) synthesis of findings. The empirical investigation is supported by three quantitative data sets and three qualitative data sets. Each phase was guided by specific methodological choices that aligned with our overall objectives. Figure 21 provides an overview of the research design. Our implementation of the mixed research design stands out using many diversified sources, but also by the use of innovative analytical techniques, such as the mobilisation of Deloitte's large language model (LLM) and the use of human-machine combinatory analysis to support the qualitative analysis.

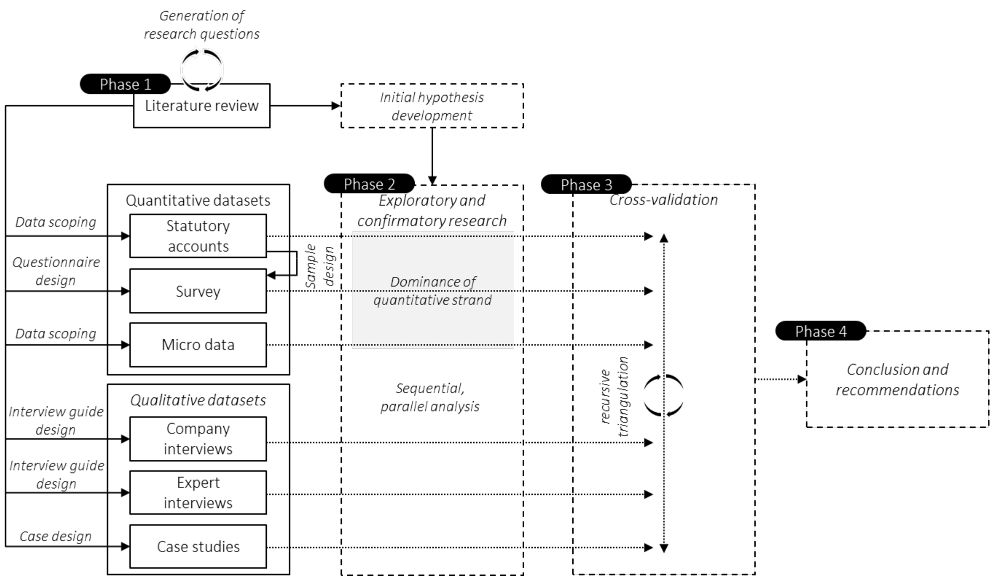


Figure 21: Research design

10.2. Overview of data

10.2.1. Quantitative data sets

Quantitative data served as a primary means for hypothesis exploration and validation. Among our three quantitative data sets, we placed an emphasis on the survey, allowing us to test our initial hypotheses (particularly on the nature of barriers to growth) on a large scale. The survey's primary aim was to test the hypotheses derived from the literature review by quantifying the extent to which various factors were perceived as barriers to growth. The survey also generated additional hypotheses which were ready to be examined in greater depth through qualitative research and microdata analysis in the next phase of the research.

Statutory accounts

Statutory accounts are the financial statements that companies are required to submit to the Danish Business Authority (Erhvervsstyrelsen). Statutory accounts were sourced from a structured database (Bisnode) collating all the statements submitted by Danish companies at CVR level. Statutory accounts have been used to perform a preliminary quantitative analysis to gauge the population of medium and large enterprises in Denmark (setting a threshold at >99 employees) in the years 2019 through 2023. The preliminary analysis informed the survey sampling and was later used to validate the microdata population.

10.2.1.1. Quantitative survey

The quantitative component of the research comprised a survey conducted with a sample of 207 medium to large enterprises (>99 employees). With an estimated Danish population of medium and large enterprises of 4,746, our sample represented 4.4% of the studied population.

Our survey sample was designed following a stratified random sampling approach, supplemented by convenience sampling. Companies were first stratified by industry and geography using statutory accounts data. Within each stratum, a random sample was drawn from a pre-existing panel with an additional filter for company size (>99 employees). 148 observations were gathered through this method, with companies taking the survey either online or on the phone. To reach our target sample size (200 observation), additional companies were randomly selected from a national company register and contacted directly (supplementary convenience sampling). 59 observations were gathered through this method, with companies taking the survey on the phone. Survey responses were weighted in a post-stratification process based on respondent's size, industry and location.

Table 3: Comparison of sample and population distribution across strata, prior to the post-stratification process

Industry	Capital Region	Central Jutland	Northern Jutland	Zealand	South Denmark	Grand Total
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,48%	**0,48%**
Arts, entertainment and other services	1,98%	0,76%	0,23%	1,93%	1,68%	**6,58%**
Construction	-0,28%	-0,54%	0,71%	-0,15%	0,56%	**0,29%**
Financial and insurance	-0,36%	1,17%	0,18%	0,81%	-0,31%	**1,49%**
Information and communication	-2,10%	5,31%	0,56%	-0,20%	0,61%	**4,18%**
Manufacturing, mining, quarrying	1,90%	-1,06%	1,67%	1,24%	1,44%	**5,19%**
Other business services	-6,07%	-1,40%	-0,38%	-1,07%	0,12%	**-8,80%**
Real estate	-0,21%	-0,41%	-0,05%	-0,05%	0,33%	**-0,38%**
Trade and transport etc.	-7,47%	-2,22%	-0,28%	0,45%	0,50%	**-9,03%**
Grand Total	**-12,61%**	**1,61%**	**2,63%**	**2,96%**	**5,41%**	**0,00%**

A positive value indicates sample observations are overrepresented in comparison to the population.

10.2.1.2. Microdata

The microdata is sourced from the IDA database provided by Statistics Denmark, encompassing the years 2008 to 2022. For each workplace (LBNR), the data set covers the variables: CVRNR[57], municipality, employees, FTEs, total salaries and year of establishment. Because our analysis focuses on enterprises, entities registered under an industry code pertaining to "public administration, education and health" were excluded.

Data validation was conducted by comparing it to general business demography statistics from Statistics Denmark and the statutory accounts. Minor disparities were identified, primarily attributed to IDAS' limitations in counting entities for cases where there are 0 employees, as they may not necessarily be affiliated with a workplace. However, the count of entities for the population of interest (medium and large enterprises with >99 employees) was considered sufficiently aligned with general business demographic statistics.

Data aggregation was performed based on CVRNR instead of LBNR. Consequently, aggregation, for, for example, the number of employees per workplace sums all employees within the same CVRNR for the respective year. The same principle applies to the rest of the data set's variables. When assessing geography, municipality and year of establishment, the variable for the oldest LBNR within the group of CVRNR and year is utilised when grouping data by CVRNR.

[57] Fictive CVRNR are provided by DST.

10.2.2. Qualitative data sets

We conducted qualitative research through interviews and case studies. These methods provided deeper insights into the experiences and perspectives of company representatives and experts, allowing us to explore the nuances and contextual factors that quantitative data alone could not capture (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). We used these qualitative insights to refine our hypotheses and explore new ones, following an inductive approach that is well suited to qualitative data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

10.2.2.1. Interviews

The qualitative research component comprised two types of interviews: Enterprise interviews and expert interviews. The enterprise interviews were conducted with company representatives to gain in-depth insights into their growth experiences, challenges and strategies. Expert interviews were conducted with industry analysts and academics to provide a broader perspective on the growth dynamics observed in the companies studied.

10.2.2.2. Case studies

In addition to interviews, the research included four qualitative case studies. These case studies were selected based on theoretical sampling, where cases are chosen to illuminate specific aspects of the phenomena under study rather than to represent a larger population. The case studies provided an opportunity to explore the growth trajectories of companies in detail, allowing for the examination of context-specific factors and the interplay between various growth barriers and enablers. The case study approach was informed by Yin's (2018) methodology, which emphasises the importance of multiple sources of evidence and the need for a rigorous approach to data collection and analysis.

10.3. Definition of growth companies

Table 4: Overview of definitions of growth companies.

Key terms	Source	Minimum no. of employees	Minimum revenue	Growth rate
Scalers or scale-ups	Nordic Innovation[3]	10	EUR 2m	20% annualised growth in employment or in revenues in the preceding 1-3 years
	Kauffman Foundation (2017)	No requirement	EUR 2m	20% annualised growth in employment or in revenues in the preceding 1-3 years
High-growth companies	OECD (2007)	10	No requirement	20% annualised growth in employment, over a three-year period
	European Union (2017)	10	No requirement	20% annualised growth in employment, over a three-year period
	US Bureau of Labor statistics (2013)	No requirement	No requirement	8 or more employees (if employment <10) 20% annualised growth in employment over a three-year period (if employment>=10)
	Kauffman Foundation (2017)	50	No requirement	Grow to at least 50 employees by tenth year of operation
Gazelles	Birch[4] (1995)	No requirement	USD 100k	20% annualised growth in sales over the interval
	OECD[5] (2007)	10	No requirement	20% annualised growth in the employment over a three-year period
Unicom[6]	Lee (2013)			Privately held start-up company valued at over USD 1 billion

10.4. Interview questionnaires

Interview guide – external experts

Question
Barriers to growth From your position (professional function) what do you consider to be the key barriers to mid-market and large growth companies – and why? Please refer to the list A below (please feel free to list other barriers as well). Do you see these barriers affecting companies differently in relation to their growth journey or life stage? If so, in what functional areas? Please refer to list B below.
Overcoming barriers to growth How do you see companies trying to overcome the barriers? What are the enabling factors inside the companies that enable them to overcome the barriers?
Supporting growth companies to overcome barriers? How do you seek to support growth companies in overcoming the barriers by leveraging their strengths (internal enabling factors)?
The growth journey How would you describe the growth journey of the mid-market and large growth companies that you have been working with/studied/observed? (e.g., linear, loops, “opportunistic”/random) *If time: Do you see an overall pattern of growth stages/life stages that these companies move through? If so, what are they?*
Growth archetypes Do you think there are different growth journey “archetypes”, i.e., different groups of companies that follow a somewhat similar growth journey?
Steps to support growth What barriers to reaching a higher maturity level do you see firms experiencing?
Other Do you have anything else that you would like to state?

List A
1. Geopolitics
2. Economy
3. Climate and environment
4. Regulation
5. Infrastructure
6. Competitive intensity
7. Knowledge and competences
8. Innovation
9. Other...

List B

10. Supply chain management
11. Production process
12. Sales and marketing
13. Financial resources
14. Culture
15. HR

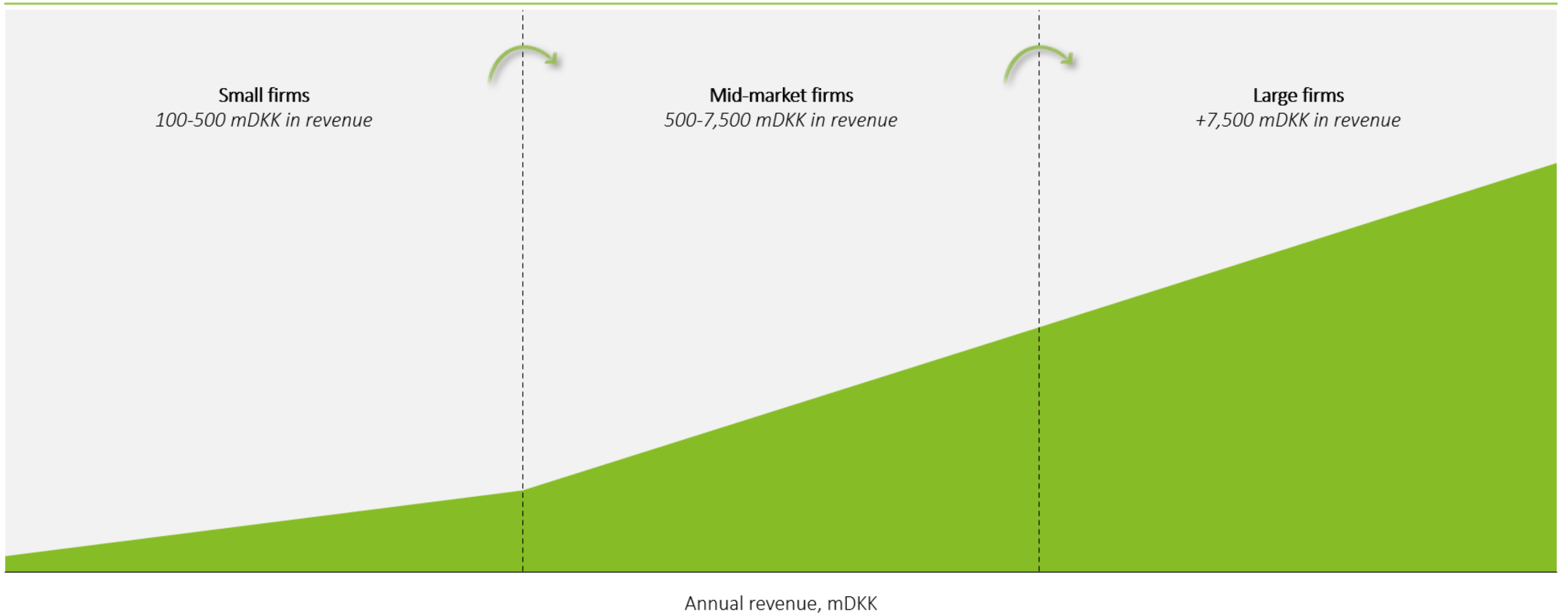
Interview guide – Deloitte experts

Growth strategies: If we split a firm's growth stages into moving from SME to mid-market and from mid-market to industry, what are the most used growth strategies applied in each stage?

Company revenue stages

Growth strategies and barriers when growing

We are investing growth strategies and barriers in relation to moving from small to mid-market, and from mid-market to large



Barriers to growth: With the same split, what are the top five barriers to growth in each stage?

SME to mid-market	Mid-market to industry
X	1. X
X	2. X
X	3. X
X	4. X
X	5. X

Strategies to overcome growth barriers: What have successful firms done to overcome the barriers mentioned previously?

SME to mid-market	Mid-market to industry
X	6. X
X	7. X
X	8. X
X	9. X
X	10. X

Framework conditions: What are the top things you would like to be changed about the framework conditions we have in Denmark?

Question
About your firm today Can you tell us a bit about your firm? What do you do, how many markets you are in, etc.
Growth strategies When reflecting on the life of your firm, can you identify some specific life stages that you have been through and what journeys you have had to take in each life stage to enable you to succeed and grow? *Journeys can for instance be international expansion, digitalization, marketing campaigns, M&A, etc.*
M&A Have you been part of a M&A to grow – and has it been a clear strategy? Why have you done so, or why not? If yes, what impact has it had on your growth?
Barriers to growth part 1/2: When reflecting on the life stages and the journeys, which barriers to growth did you experience, and did you experience different barriers depending on the life-stage of your firm? *Barriers can be internal, like organizational structure, or external, like the competitive environment, access to talent, access to capital, etc.*
Barriers to growth part 2/2: *Deep dive on this part if the participant has not mentioned a lot above, or if the answers provided are not the same as in the survey.* We have conducted a survey where 207 firms across Denmark have responded. The three top external barriers mentioned by growth companies is i) knowledge and competencies, ii) economic conditions, and iii) competitive intensity. Can you recognize these barriers, and if so, how do you experience these barriers? *Steer the participant to answer on what exactly they experience for each barrier, and how it impacts their firm internally. If the interviewee is in doubt, then mention what survey respondents have said regarding which internal functions that are impacted by the barriers.*
Overcoming barriers to growth: What have you done to overcome the barriers? Which of these activities have been successful and which activities have been unsuccessful? What have you learned from your efforts?
Future growth goals: What growth goals do you have for the future? How do you plan to be able to reach those goals? Which barriers to your ambitions do you foresee?
Framework conditions: What top three external challenges do you believe that politicians and regulators should solve to promote growth? Do you have any suggestions on how to solve those three challenges?
Other Do you have anything else that you would like to state?

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11.2. Interviews

Companies (established scalers)

- Anders Balmer, CEO, Kaffekapslen
- Birger Christensen, CEO, Tvilum
- Carsten Guldmann, CEO, Guldmann
- Carsten Schmidt, CEO, Skatepro
- Henning Nielsen, CEO, The Army Painter
- Jens-Peter Zink, CEO, European Energy
- Jeppe Rindom, Co-founder and CEO, Pleo
- Lars Vadsholt Jørgensen, CEO, Treco
- Mikkel Grene, CEO, Søstrene Grene
- Nikolaj Deichman, Founder, 3Shape
- Pernille Skindhøj Sivebæk, Senior Business Partner, Creative Company
- Rasmus Folsø, CEO, Desmi
- Steen Borgholm, CEO, Rains
- Steen Brødbæk, CEO, Semco Maritime
- Søren Birn, Chairman of the board, NIC Christiansen

Experts – external

- Henrik Holst Elstrøm, Managing Director & Karoline Garm Nissen, Team Leader for SMV & Iværksætteri, EIFO
- Philipp Schröder, Professor of Economics, Aarhus University
- Rolf Kjærgaard, former CEO, Vækstfonden (The Danish Growth Fund)
- Simon Rahlf Hauptmann, Chief for Iværksætteri og styrkepositioner, Erhvervsstyrelsen
- Sine Lindestrøm, Director for SMV and Iværksætteri, Dansk Industri

Experts – internal

- Adam Norsker, Partner in SRT M&A, Deloitte Denmark
- Brian Murphy, Partner in A&A Consumer, Deloitte Ireland
- Christina Burgwald, Partner in T&T Organizational Transformation, Deloitte Denmark
- Claus Jorch Andersen, Partner in A&A Private East, Deloittte Denmark
- Heather Gates, Partner in A&A Technology, media & telecom, Deloitte US
- Anthony Pedrotti, Senior Manager in A&A, Deloitte US
- Helena Broadbridge, Partner in SRT Sustainability & Climate Advisory, Deloitte Denmark
- Jacob Noermark, Partner in A&A Private Aarhus, Deloitte Denmark
- Jessica Deckard, Senior Manager in DTTL, Deloitte US
- Lars Nygaard Bertelsen, Partner in T&T Finance Transformation, Deloitte Denmark
- Marie Voldby, Partner in A&A AO ESG, Deloitte Denmark
- Michael Winther, Partner in T&T Artificial Intelligence & Data, Deloitte Denmark
- Morten Bramsen, Partner in T&T HR Transformation, Deloitte Denmark
- Morten Husted Permin, Partner in SRT CF Advisory, Deloitte Denmark
- Nikolaj Thomsen, Partner in A&A Private East, Deloitte Denmark
- Sarah Skou Andreasen, Senior Consultant in Private Excellence, Deloitte Denmark
- Thomas Rosquist, Partner in A&A private Aarhus, Deloitte Denmark
- Bob Rosone, Partner in Client & market growth, Deloitte US

Deloitte.