

Study on the "Hidden ReSTAINABILITY Champions" – Strategic Success of Family Businesses through Responsibility and Sustainability

Hamburg, July 24, 2025 – The Funk Foundation, together with a consortium of project partners, has sponsored a study on the impact and implementation of "ReSTAINABILITY." The aim was to analyse the extent to which relevant criteria and factors of socially responsible and environmentally sustainable business practices are realised in German family-owned businesses—and what advantages these practices may offer.

The study "Strategic Success of Family Businesses through ReSTAINABILITY" was initiated in collaboration with ESG.DNA GmbH, KNÖLL Financing Consultancy for Family Businesses GmbH, REM CAPITAL AG, Weissman & Cie. GmbH, and WEISSMAN E-LEARNING, and was successfully carried out under the patronage of the F.U.N. Family Business Network. The term "ReSTAINABILITY" is a blend of the English words for the megatrends Responsibility and Sustainability.

The central hypothesis of the study is: Family-owned businesses that act in a socially responsible and environmentally sustainable manner—and build an innovative, scalable, and regulation-compliant business model on this foundation—will be the winners of tomorrow. Impact in this context means financial independence, profitability, stability, and legal compliance achieved through responsible action.

The research design focused on the question of who, and above all how, strategic convergence of social responsibility and environmental sustainability is most successfully achieved—in terms of corporate strategy, organisational structure, technology, and corporate culture.

Prof. Dr. Arnold Weissman, F.U.N. – The Family Business Network GmbH:

“Sustainability and social responsibility have always been part of the DNA of true family businesses. They think in terms of generations, act based on strong values, and often prioritise the long-term continuity of their companies over personal interests. Their commitment to society and the environment is deeply rooted—often without seeking the spotlight, but with significant impact. So, if any group of companies has the right to claim the term ReSTAINABILITY for themselves, it is our family businesses. For them, careful use of resources is not a short-term reaction to trends, but a reflection of a deeply held mindset—not opportunistic behavior.”

Due to geopolitical and economic developments, as well as increasing and tightening regulations, medium-sized companies in particular are facing major challenges. Ensuring business success is the top priority. This makes it even more important to regularly reassess and further develop one's business model. The study highlights the opportunities that investments in a ReSTAINABILITY transformation can offer—especially for German family businesses.

Hendrik F. Löffler, Funk Foundation: “Sustainability strategies are increasingly becoming a competitive factor—even for medium-sized companies.”

To emphasise that the ReSTAINABILITY model is not merely an “add-on,” but a competitive factor capable of securing future viability and competitiveness, the following key questions were analysed:

- To what extent is the positive correlation between a company's “Total ReSTAINABILITY Impact” and its future resilience and sustainable financial growth recognized?
- How well are German mid-sized companies strategically positioned for the convergence of growth, responsibility, and sustainability?
- What does the strategic “ReSTAINABLE Target Operating Model” (strategy, organisation, culture, technology) of German family businesses look like?
- Are German family businesses already leveraging their core business in ways that generate positive ReSTAINABILITY impacts, or are they developing products and services with added ReSTAINABILITY value?

The project started in 2024. Following a practice-driven and theory-based preparation phase, online and telephone surveys were conducted to gain detailed insights into the practices and strategies of relevant companies.

The results of the study can help raise awareness among companies and decision-makers about the importance of the topic. By analysing the impact of implementing ReSTAINABILITY, the study particularly highlights the opportunities of a strategic transformation. Investments in a ReSTAINABILITY transformation generate clear business advantages: lower capital costs, reduced market risk perception, and access to new target groups are just a few examples of the positive effects identified. Ultimately, responsible and sustainable family businesses often achieve stronger financial performance than purely profit-driven competitors, thanks to their hard-to-imitate strategic competitive advantages. It becomes clearly evident that successful transformation impacts all key aspects of a company and brings the dimensions of planet, people, and profit into alignment.

Detailed analyses and findings can be found in the comprehensive study report, which is available for free download at: <https://www.funk-stiftung.org/de/mediathek/studien>

Image material (high-resolution versions available upon request):



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About the Funk Foundation:

In 2014, Funk shareholder Dr. Leberecht Funk, together with his wife Maritta, established the non-profit Funk Foundation. The foundation's mission is to support research, education, and practical projects in the field of risk and insurance management. In addition to targeted project funding, the foundation also aims to award prizes and host professional events. Another area of support includes cultural projects.

For more information about the Funk Foundation, please visit: www.funk-stiftung.org

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About ESG.DNA:

ESG.DNA GmbH is a specialised service company that supports businesses in developing, optimising, and communicating their sustainability profiles, strategies, and reports to meet the ESG-related expectations of stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, investors, lenders, and employees. As a partner to banks and financial service providers, companies, associations and their members, auditors, and consultants, ESG.DNA develops tailored solutions to address the specific ESG challenges faced by medium-sized companies.

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