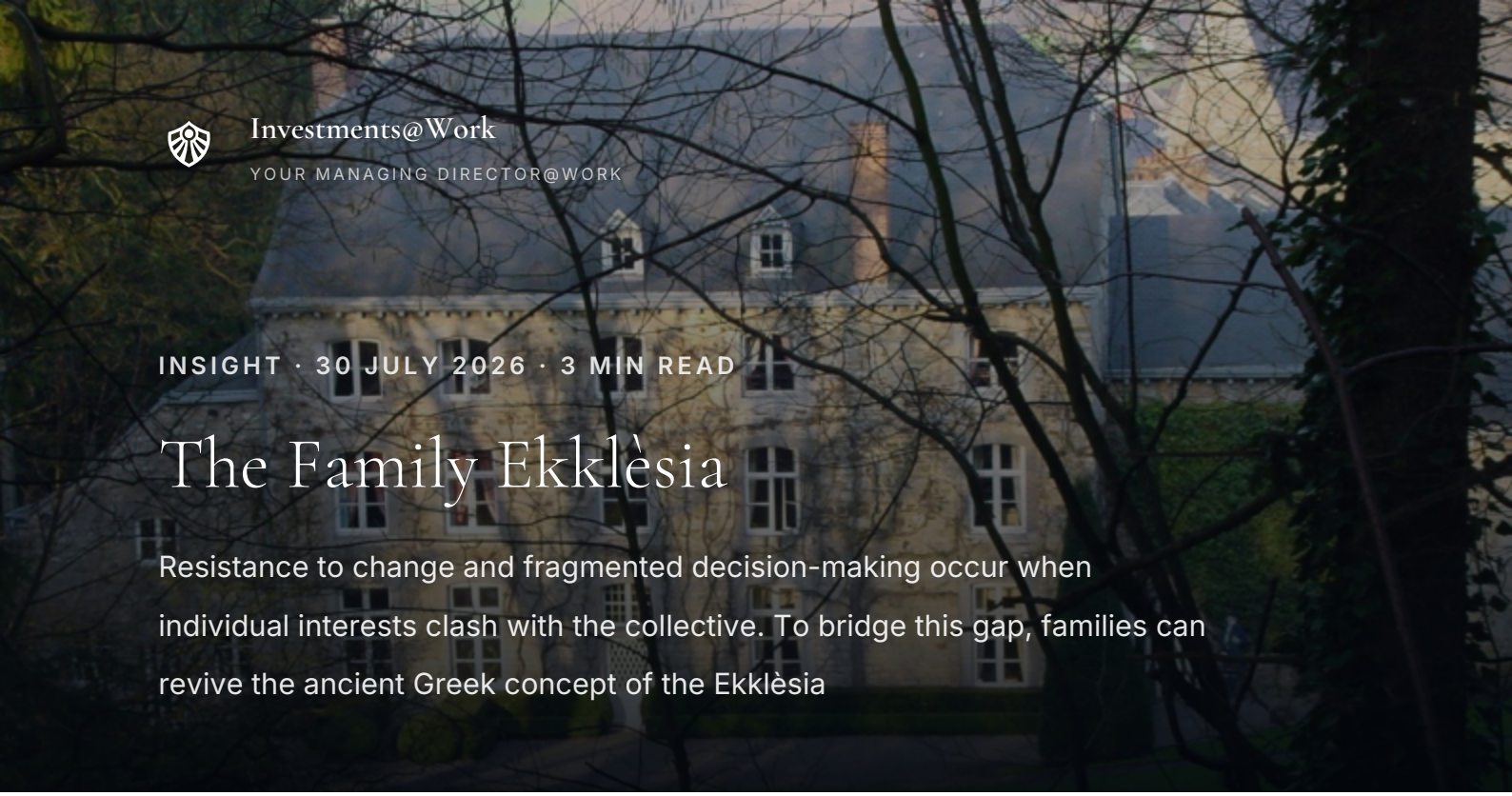


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The Family Ekklèsia

Resistance to change and fragmented decision-making occur when individual interests clash with the collective. To bridge this gap, families can revive the ancient Greek concept of the Ekklèsia

The contribution of entrepreneurial families to society extends far beyond economic metrics. While public corporations are often driven by salaried executives detached from ownership, family enterprises anchor their growth in human, ethical, and moral values. To safeguard this legacy and serve individual family members, the Family Office concept has risen significantly. Yet, a common paradox exists: “Once you’ve seen one Family Office, you’ve seen one Family Office.”

In practice, many European Multi-Family Offices function merely as wealth management firms. Staffed by professionals with private banking backgrounds, they often focus strictly on liquid assets and administrative tasks, shying away from complex asset classes and true family governance. Conversely, while Single-Family Offices offer a broader, integrated scope, the largest families often lose this holistic view by fracturing into independent, specialized investment silos. True heritage orchestration requires looking beyond the balance sheet. It demands an answer to a deeply personal question for every family member: “What do I want in life, and does the family collective serve as a means to achieve that goal?”

The Family Ekklèsia: A Framework for Alignment

Resistance to change and fragmented decision-making occur when individual interests clash with the collective. To bridge this gap, families can revive the ancient Greek concept of the Ekklèsia—a frequent, structured assembly open to all adult members to discuss and vote on community matters.

The core objective of the Ekklèsia is to establish alignment or structured and approved ways of separation. Since a 100% consensus is rarely possible, the value of belonging to the collective must outweigh an individual pursuit. Where necessary and decided roads may separate.

The General Agreement vs. The Family Statute

Unlike a Family Statute, which serves as a permanent constitution governing structures and successions, the Ekklèsia culminates in a General Agreement and specifies:

Time-Bound Scope: It outlines objectives for a specific period or until defined milestones are achieved.

Actionable Guidelines: It provides explicit execution frameworks for businesses, wealth, and private matters.

Off-Ramp Options: It explicitly details the managed, respectful separation of individual members who choose their own financial freedom.

The Role of the Independent Family Officer

Navigating these intimate dynamics requires an Independent Family Officer who acts as an objective orchestrator. Their independence ensures they can freely source and manage (top-tier) external specialists without conflicts of interest.

The T-Shaped Capability Profile

A successful general advisor must possess a T-shaped capability model, balancing broad process expertise (psychology and process capabilities) with broad or specialized knowledge in the fields of

- Corporate Law & Trust Structures
- Business Value Management
- Private Equity & Venture Capital
- Wealth Management

Best Practices for Advisory Compensation

To ensure flawless alignment of interests between the Family and the Independent Family Officer, fee structures should scale with the complexity of the family dynamic:

Large, Multi-Generational Families: A fixed-fee agreement is highly recommended. This ensures complete objectivity and avoids incentivizing transaction volume over family harmony.

Smaller Families and with Specific Goals: A balanced mix of fixed, variable, and result-based compensation drives performance toward targeted milestones.

By embedding the advisor's role directly into the legally binding General Agreement, every family member holds the advisor accountable, ensuring transparency, trust, and structural integrity across generations and vice versa to all family members.

This article is based on and adopted from a former publication of the author in Family Office Magazine



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Michael Pullens is the founder of Investments@Work. The firm was established in 2000 and builds on his professional experience since 1988 in value management, family offices, private equity and cross-border advisory across Switzerland, Italy, Monaco and the Netherlands.

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