

The emerging role of the Chief Learning Officer¹

Christian Stewart²

In the book Complete Family Wealth³ James (“Jay”) E. Hughes Jr. and co-authors point out a new development starting to gain strength in family offices around the world is serious attention to learning (not just education) as a family activity. Hughes says families need to take learning seriously and predicts the chief learning officer or “CLO” – whether outsourced or in-house - will be a regular feature of family systems similar to a trustee or chief investment officer.⁴

I was approached by a family with a family office that could see the need for learning and development and investing in human capital; they initially wanted to engage me as CLO. But then it took the family office a very long time to approve my proposed engagement contract. It turned out one of their concerns was that, because of the term “officer” they thought this implied a C-Suite or family office board role, which was not their intention. They questioned whether this CLO role would be an organisational role working with the employees of the family office, which was also not the intention. To resolve these questions I proposed the alternative term of “Family Learning and Development Advisor”, which was approved. Even then, some of the members of the existing team of advisors asked: “what is the difference between this new role and what we already do as advisors to the family?”

What is a CLO in the context of a Family Office or Family Enterprise?

Jay Hughes has defined the “wealth” of a family in terms of its human, intellectual, social, spiritual and financial capital – the “Five Capitals Model”. According to Hughes the CLO is responsible and accountable for assessing and growing the qualitative capitals of the family both individually and collectively. The CLO has five questions to consider;

- (i) are the individual family members flourishing?
- (ii) is this family a learning organization?
- (iii) are the family members able to make effective joint decisions?
- (iv) is there a vision of everyone in the family flourishing in 100 years’ time? and
- (v) are the family members able to integrate inherited financial capital into their lives?

Where there are trusts, the CLO is responsible for the quality of the experience of the beneficiaries.

¹ This article was first published in the International Family Offices Journal, published by Globe Law & Business, September 2023.

² The author gratefully acknowledges the help of Stacy Allred, Jeremy Cheng, Katherine Dean, Mary Duke, Dennis Jaffe, Mell Hoffman, Jay Hughes., Holly Isdale, Kristin Keffeler, Amy Hart-Clyne, Greg McCann, Matthew Wesley and Stuart Wesley with this paper.

³ Complete Family Wealth, James E. Hughes Jr., Susan Massenzio, Keith Whitaker, Bloomberg Press, 2018.

⁴ Other voices in pointing out this emerging role include Greg McCann

<https://www.familywealthreport.com/article.php?id=179415#.YtKSvXZBy3A>, Matthew Wesley

<https://familyofficeassociation.com/podcast-chief-learning-officer-matthew-wesley-family-office/>

and Mary Duke <https://familyenterpriseadvisors.libsyn.com/08-growing-the-familys-human-capital> .

Other possible definitions are that the CLO is responsible for introducing learning organization practices into the system⁵; or for developing and implementing the Family Learning Curriculum; or that the CLO is the executive or professional who supports the work of the family’s learning and development committee. Ideally this is someone who has experience in both adult and organizational development. In this article, the term “Learning” refers to both learning and development.

Governance as Learning

The idea of a CLO is not limited to family offices and has been extended to entrepreneurial families in the FFI 2086 Society research report *The Governance Marathon: Dynamic durability in entrepreneurial families amid disruptions*⁶ (the “**FFI Report**”). According to the FFI Report entrepreneurial families that are aiming for dynamic durability in their governance system need to be purposeful in their family Learning; which needs overarching coordination and the discipline for “Governed Learning”. Further, Governed Learning requires dedicated learning structures such as a “Family Learning Curriculum” and the introduction of specific roles such as the CLO.

What’s the difference between a CLO and a family enterprise advisor?

The FFI Report says that a family enterprise advisor (“**FEA**”) has the role (among other roles) of being a “Learning System Enhancer”. Therefore there could indeed be a high degree of overlap between the FEA role and the CLO role. On a spectrum with the expert advisor on one end (content) and the helping professional on the other end (process), the FEA might sit in the middle of that spectrum (balancing content and process to help the family develop their governance structures, processes and roles) and the CLO might be closer to the helping professional end of the spectrum.

Content			Process
Expert advisors		CLO	Helping Professionals
e.g. lawyer, accountant, investment advisor, trust officer	FEA supporting the development of family governance	providing context & helping	e.g. coach, counsellor, therapist, social worker, minister

In the context of a family enterprise system or a family with significant shared financial capital, the CLO needs to understand that system and all of the different roles comprised in it. A CLO should have an understanding of family governance structures and processes, and ownership structures such as family trusts and partnerships; they should understand the

⁵ For a discussion of learning organization practices in the context of a family enterprise see Barton Parrot’s article, The role of Lifelong Learning in Family Leadership and Managing Family Wealth, Investments & Wealth Monitor 2017.

⁶ Jeremy Cheng, Kevin Au, Marta Widz and Marshall Jen (2021). Available at: https://digital.ffi.org/pdf/ffi_the_governance_marathon_report.pdf

Three Circle Model⁷, the family as an emotional system, the process content distinction, they should be able to facilitate family meetings, understand that it's a helping relationship and the family are the expert. When the CLO is coaching and mentoring individual family members it is important the CLO can understand the different roles of the individual within the system and use this awareness to give context, and to normalize and reframe issues.

One possible simple distinction is that the FEA will help the family to design and develop their governance system including the elements of Governed Learning. The FEA may support the family in recruiting non-family professionals and independent directors to play roles in that system - including a CLO, an executive or professional charged with supporting the implementation of Family Learning and the growth of the family qualitative capitals.

Once the family have built their system and have practiced implementation, the engagement of the FEA might then come to an end, while that of the CLO continues.

Hughes' has a further important insight which is that the CLO is a long-term relationship with the family. He says it's a 10-year journey together with the family. This could be an external "coach-consultant" – a term coined by Kristin Keffeler to indicate a combination of consulting and coaching skills. It doesn't have to be a full-time or in-house role, but the idea is a very long-term timeframe. It is not a matter of hiring a consultant to come in and run an educational event or workshop. This is someone who can come in and grow together with the family, over an extended period of time.

To further understand the distinction between a CLO and a FEA, we need to look more closely at what we mean by family Learning.

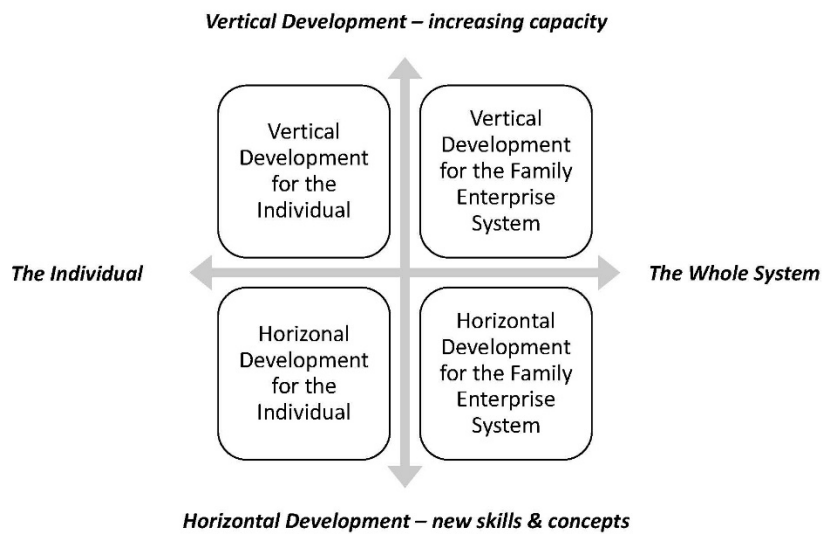
The Learning Matrix

It is helpful to make a distinction between (i) horizontal development – putting more "liquid" (i.e. content) into the container – and (ii) vertical development – making the original container even bigger, increasing the capacity of the container. Horizontal development is teaching new skills and concepts. Vertical development goes to the socio-emotional development of the individual, it includes the field of adult vertical development, and in the group context it's referring to improving the effectiveness, cohesion and maturity of the Group.⁸

In a family office or family enterprise system we also have to distinguish between working with the individual (both as part of the system and apart from the system) and working with the system. This gives rise to the following way of thinking about four conceptually separate domains of family Learning or the family "Learning Matrix".

⁷ Taguiri and Davis (1982).

⁸ Matthew Wesley suggests as an alternative to the terms vertical and horizontal development, to distinguish between capacity development (which he refers to as the ability to handle greater complexity in novel situations) and capability development (which he refers to as building skills around dealing with complicated problems).



The CLO can use this matrix for planning their work. The kinds of questions to explore for each of these four quadrants include the following:

Quadrant	Questions to Explore	Examples
Vertical Development for the Individual –increasing the Capacity of the individual	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What practices will support the growth of the individual family members? 2. How can we help them detect their strengths, authentic values and purpose? 3. How can we help individual family members integrate inherited financial capital into their lives? 4. Who are their mentors? 5. What is appropriate for this individual at his or her stage of life? 6. For individuals in their third stage of life, what is the pathway towards elderhood? 	Providing one to one coaching or counselling. Mentoring. The immunity to change process ⁹ .
Vertical Development for the Family Enterprise System – increasing the Capacity of the system.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can we develop the capacity of the group? 2. How effective are the meetings, committees and boards? 3. Is there the capacity for this group to engage in Generative Dialogue¹⁰? 4. How can we evolve the culture? 5. What is the developmental stage in the life of this family? 	Facilitating family meetings, improving group effectiveness, introducing new frameworks or skills for group decision making and conflict resolution, teaching family members to collaborate together. Relationship growth. Supporting board and committee effectiveness.

⁹ Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey.

¹⁰ See the discussion of four different levels of listening in The Essentials of Theory U, Core Principles and Applications, by C. Otto Scharmer, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2018.

Quadrant	Questions to Explore	Examples
	6. What is the developmental stage in the life of this ownership group?	
Horizontal Development for the Individual – new skills & new concepts for the individual	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What skill and knowledge is this individual interested in learning? 2. Are there skills and knowledge that would help this individual be successful away from the family enterprise system? 	Providing family members with financial education. Teaching them frameworks they can apply in their own careers away from the family.
Horizontal Development for the Family Enterprise System – new skills & concepts for the system	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What collective knowledge does the family or this stakeholder group, or generational group, in the family need? 2. What skills do we need to work together? 3. What are the roles that need to be developed? 4. What are the skills, experiences and capabilities each role in the system requires? 	Teaching family members about the trustee and beneficiary relationship, teaching them to read financial statements, or to understand the terms of the family buy and sell agreement. Developing the ownership role and the board role. Having a member of the current generation reaching out to members of the rising generation and giving them an explanation of the family enterprise governance system and explaining to them the mission vision and objectives of the family as well as the values principles and practices the family value.

There is going to be overlap between these four quadrants. As framed here the distinction between horizontal development for individual or enterprise system can be understood as the distinction between “what are the skills this individual needs to be successful away from the system” and “what are the skills this individual needs to be successful as part of the system. The quadrants where there is the highest potential for overlap between the CLO and the FEA are those of vertical and horizontal development for the family enterprise system.

The Learning Matrix & the CLO

As the CLO role in the family enterprise is a new and evolving area, there are different descriptions as to the CLO role from different commentators. The Learning Matrix referred to above can be used as a way of making sense of these different descriptions - and as a framework for analysing the Learning needs of a family. Jay Hughes with his emphasis on the role of the CLO as being to grow the qualitative capitals of the family, is not limited to, but does emphasize the quadrant of vertical development for the individual. Other commentators seem to emphasize working with the culture of the family (vertical development of the system)¹¹ while others appear to focus on tasks such as financial education for family members (individual horizontal development)¹². The key point is that all four quadrants are important and need attention.

¹¹ Matthew Wesley falls into this category.

¹² A key resource with respect to financial education is Joline Godfrey’s Raising Financially Fit Kids, Ten Speed Press, 2013.

The one quadrant which likely does not get as much attention as the other three, is the area of vertical development for the individual, and this is where the CLO could make a major contribution to the system¹³. If the CLO can help individual family members to individuate and differentiate, to go on their own hero's journey, and to know themselves, then they become mature participants in the governance of the family and the governance of its business or enterprises. Dennis Jaffe in his research on significant 100 year families¹⁴ concludes that such families are Generative Families, where in the second generation the members realized they need to focus on growing a great family, as opposed to growing a great business. By helping the individual family members to know themselves and removing obstacles that might be standing in the way of their individual flourishing, they will be better able to contribute to the flourishing of the whole family enterprise system.

Further clarifying the CLO role (or function)

- 1. What's the difference between a coach and a CLO?** Perhaps in a simple family enterprise a person who is a coach, counsellor or mentor could perform the CLO function¹⁵. There is important value in a family enterprise in making coaches or mentors available to family members from all generations.¹⁶ However, in a more complex family, the CLO is also responsible for the Learning strategy, planning and oversight, and may have one or more coaches who are a resource for the family and to help implement the Learning strategy and plan.
- 2. The CLO is not a therapist:** It's not the role of the CLO, nor is it the role of the system to provide therapy to family members. A CLO who has a therapy background needs to be careful to stay in the realm of coaching, mentoring and development – and should refer any family members in need of psychological help to external qualified professionals. It is important for the CLO to understand the distinction between coaching and therapy¹⁷. Jay Hughes has talked about traditional psychology as being focused on how to reduce suffering, and positive psychology¹⁸ as being concerned

¹³ The typical Family Enterprise Advisor is unlikely to have skills in this domain.

¹⁴ Borrowed from your Grandchildren. The Evolution of 100 Year Family Enterprises, by Dennis Jaffe, Wiley, 2020.

¹⁵ Aside from this exploration of the role of the CLO, there is merit in FEAs who are supporting a family enterprise with its governance structures, processes, and roles, in working collaboratively with a coach to support the family in that work.

¹⁶ This could also take the form of permitting individual family members to find and work with their own external coaches or other helping professionals, with the expenses being paid for by the family.

¹⁷ It might also be sensible to educate the family on the differences between a coach, a mentor, and a consultant or expert advisor.

¹⁸ On the origins of positive psychology see the writings of Martin Seligman such as *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to realize your potential for Lasting Fulfilment*, Atria, 2004 and *Flourish: A New Understanding of Happiness and Wellbeing: The practical guide to using positive psychology to make you happier and healthier*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2011. On the application of positive psychology interventions including a focus on strengths, mindsets, understanding narratives and gratitude in the context of the trustee-beneficiary relationship see *Family Trusts, a Guide for Beneficiaries, Trustees, Trust Protectors and Trust Creators*, by Hartley Goldstone, James E. Hughes Jr., and Keith Whitaker, John Wiley & Sons, 2016.

with how to increase positive experiences and promote flourishing. Hughes counsels that the role of the CLO and the system is to help support individuals through coaching and positive psychology and referring out to external professionals individuals or couples where a positive approach is not sufficient (for example, cases involving trauma).

- 3. The CLO doesn't have to do it all themselves:** The CLO doesn't have to be a jack of all trades. If a family member has agreed to undertake a particular assessment, the CLO can administer the assessment if it's one in which they are already qualified and experienced. But if they don't have that expertise then the role would be to help coordinate the assessment and feedback with an appropriate external expert facilitator. The CLO would be responsible for determining which assessments are valuable and then identifying, and qualifying experienced facilitators. The CLO can provide support after the assessment has been done by participating in the briefing on the results, helping to keep a record of those results and providing long-term ongoing follow up for the family member on any insights that came out of the process and how they can integrate them into their behaviours and perspective. Greg McCann has referred to a CLO as "the referrer or recruiter of talent, specialists and resources."
- 4. Could a family member with appropriate developmental qualifications be the CLO?** This might be a possibility if the role is defined in terms of setting the Learning strategy, planning and curriculum. However development work requires a system where family members can feel safe, where they're not being assessed and judged by others in the family. This requires confidentiality and discretion, and non-family members providing that support. Individuals will resist change if they are being asked to change by others especially by a family member.
- 5. Is the CLO a role or is it a function?** Dennis Jaffe asks the question, is the CLO a role or is it a function? Could it be shared across a group of people? I think it could be as long as a family has one or more advisors with coaching, developmental or behavioural expertise as part of that team. There may need to be somebody to arrange learning programs and coordinate and to be able to point to external resources, especially in a larger family. At the same time there also needs to be one or more individuals with coaching and development and facilitation skills. Across the family enterprise system, it is important to ensure that both of these functions are addressed. Additionally, there also needs to be that understanding of the context, e.g. the knowledge of the family governance, the family trusts, issues associated with integrating financial capital etc.
- 6. The ability to work with paradox:** A CLO in a family enterprise system should have the capacity to hold the tension between different polarities¹⁹. If the CLO is a role

¹⁹ A key feature of a polarity is that there's an on-going tension to be managed, and there's no resolution, there is nothing that can be finally "solved".

that is played by two or more people, then this committee need to have that same capacity.

- One polarity is the need to work with the whole system or subsets of that system, (e.g., generational cohorts), while at the same time creating individualized Learning programs, and working with the individual.
- Another polarity is the need to be able to collaborate with the family office executives or the advisors working with the family, (e.g. tax, trust, legal, financial, and FEAs) and at the same time, recognizing that the client is the family and the individual family members – not the family office and not the advisor team.
- A third polarity inherent in the role itself is that it is important to have some structural & governance knowledge, some context of the family enterprise system, or family of wealth²⁰, and the typical issues that arise from that context. And at the same time the role requires one or more individuals with coaching, counselling and developmental experience. This is the content/process polarity.
- Finally when a family create the CLO role and recruit or assign one or more individuals into that role, there is naturally going to be a tendency to then want to get organized, and to plan and to be seen to be doing something for the family members, letting them know what the curriculum is and what support and programs can be offered. On the other hand there is the paradox that “adults only learn when they need to learn”.²¹ There needs to be an intrinsic motivation to learn and/or to engage in personal or relational growth.

7. Helping not rescuing: When considering the relationship between the family office and the family it supports, Greg McCann points to the publications of David Emerald²² who explores the Karpman Drama Triangle²³ and proposes as the antidote The Empowerment Dynamic (“TED”). Whenever there is a dynamic of anxiety or fear operating it is common to find the three roles of victim, persecutor and rescuer present. Emerald proposes that the antidote to these three Drama Triangle roles is to shift from victim to creator, from persecutor to challenger and from rescuer to coach. According to Emerald, the rescuer role is an anxiety or fear-based role and often a rescuer is so focused on others that they don’t take care of themselves. The rescuer gets psychic energy from the role. The person playing the rescuer role traps the person being rescued in the victim and/or persecutor role.²⁴ To shift to the coach role requires recognizing that the other person is resourceful and capable and responsible for the choices they make. The coach will ask questions to clarify and

²⁰ Jay Hughes advocates for understanding the word “wealth” to really mean “well-being”.

²¹ Stuart Wesley.

²² The Power of TED (The Empowerment Dynamic), Polaris Publishing 2015, and 3 Vital Questions: Transforming Workplace Drama, Polaris Publishing, 2019.

²³ A Game Free Life: The New Transactional Analysis of Intimacy, Openness and Happiness by Stephen Karpman, Drama Triangle Publications, 2014.

²⁴ When the Drama Triangle is at play, people can shift around the three roles like playing musical chairs.

encourage the other to commit to actions. The CLO has to understand the difference between rescuing and coaching. Perhaps this point is addressed by saying that a CLO will have competency in coaching. Always work in the direction of promoting individuation and differentiation of the family members²⁵. This same question of how to help the family without rescuing also applies at the level of the relationship between the family office system and the family it supports.²⁶

The 10Cs Model of the CLO

To finalize this paper I spoke to a small number of individuals working in this new emerging role of the CLO, either for a single-family office or for a multi-family office. Below is a synthesis of learning from these conversations:

- 1. Capacity** CLOs focus primarily on building the **Capacity** of the family and the family members; and helping to shift the culture of the family in a healthy or positive direction. A key context or vehicle for this Capacity and culture building work is through the planning and facilitation of family meetings.
- 2. Culture of Learning** CLOs cultivate a **Culture of Learning** within the family they support, helping the family adopt the practices of a Learning organization as adapted to a family context. This includes the principles of **Co-creation** and **Contribution**.
- 3. C-suite** In corporate America, the CLO is increasingly an executive in the C-suite. Kristin Keffeler agrees that the same high status should be conferred on the role in the family office / family enterprise context. Building the Capacity of the family through family Learning is such an important undertaking it needs to be held on par, if not higher than, the work of managing the family's financial capital and planning and administrative needs. Keffeler points out that the CLO is a strategic function; Learning needs to be integrated into the family meetings and other governance processes of the family²⁷.
- 4. Contribution** CLO's look for opportunities for the family members to **Contribute** to the family learning. On the one hand it is important for the CLO to encourage family members (especially the rising generation) to individuate and differentiate, to go away from the family. On the other hand, the CLO role supports the family as a learning organization which means encouraging family members to come

²⁵ See the article by Barton Parrot referenced above.

²⁶ Whether the family office is rescuing the family or over-functioning and thereby undermining aspirational values of resilience and independence is discussed by Scott Peppet in his blog *Whose Values and Culture? The interdependence of a Family and its Family Office* <https://scottpeppet.com/articles/whose-values-culture-the-interdependence-of-a-family-and-its-family-office/>

²⁷ How to reconcile my own experience on this point where my client did not want to appoint me to the board of the family office? It does take time for a CLO who is new to a system to build credibility and trust.

back to the family and **Contribute** what they have learned or are learning.

5. **Coaching** The first foundational skill and a common denominator for the CLO role is a **Coaching** qualification. A CLO will have Coaching skills with respect to values and purpose, communication and strengths, in addition to facilitation skills. (As covered above, Coaching means coaching, not therapy, and coaching, not rescuing.)

6. **Context** The **Context** of working for families with significant financial capital is critically important. The CLO role includes supporting the family members in their work to integrate financial capital into their lives, to learn about the money together and to learn what it means to be a steward of financial capital. The Context includes understanding the different roles and the different ownership vehicles including family trusts.

It is also vital to remember this is not a corporate context, this is a family context, and a family is a multigenerational emotional system. Ideally experience with Bowen Family Systems theory²⁸ is a second foundational skill set of a CLO working for one or more families.

7. **Care** CLOs have a deep **Care** for the families they serve. The CLO is a heart-centred role. However, this means that self-Care is critical for the CLO in order for it to be a sustainable role.

8. **Collaboration** The CLO has to be adept at **Collaborating** with the other advisors and professional members of the system. In either a family office or family enterprise context there will be multiple advisory roles and other parties such as independent directors, professionals on the investment committee, and trustees. Part of the role is also likely to be the need to educate more technical advisors on the importance of growing the qualitative capitals of the family.

9. **Co-creation** Building the Capacity of the family also points to the importance of **Co-creating** the curriculum and the Learning plan together with the family, and of the importance of Learning being supported, if not led, by a Family Learning Committee.

10. **Commitment** Family Learning requires **Commitment** and leadership from the family. The family need to be ready for the Chief Learning Officer. The family need an aspiration to be a generative family or a family

²⁸ There are other schools of family systems theory, but that of psychiatrist Dr. Murray Bowen is popular in the world of family enterprise advising.

of affinity, they need to understand the importance of wealth as well-being and the Five Capitals Model.

When is a family ready for a dedicated CLO, whether part time or outsourced?

As mentioned above, the family have to be Committed to the importance of Learning and developing the qualitative capitals of the family. Look for a family champion who will drive this. Look for members of the current and elder generations who will be role models and who are willing to work on their own growth and development. On the other hand, don't overestimate the needs of the system either; Learning needs to be voluntary and not all family members will be ready at the same time. Remember that this is a long-term process and family members will come in and out as their needs change over time.

How to get started?

A starting point is to think about the system as a Learning system:

1. First start with why? Why is Learning important for the family to invest in?
2. What are the Learning goals, objectives and philosophies of the family? What is the family's theory of growing human capital?
3. Form a Learning Committee of family members which co-creates the Learning Curriculum.
4. Establish a process for the advisors – including at-least one with developmental or helping experience – to periodically assess the Learning needs of the family members.
5. How is the family going to provide developmental support for the family members, both as participants in the system and in their lives away from the system? What would be an easy first step to take? What is the family already doing that is working?
6. Make it easy for family members to pursue their own Learning opportunities away from the system. Give them independence. Give them support them to hire their own independent coach, to join external programs etc.
7. What support is there for the effectiveness of the whole system and its components, boards, committees, forums?²⁹
8. In a large system, there may be a need for somebody to arrange Learning programs and coordinate external resources.
9. Additionally, what are the Learning needs of the advisors; what do the advisors and family office executives need to know about helping relationships?

A family can be creative in how it puts these elements together.

Christian Stewart is an independent family advisor based in Hong Kong and the founder of Family Legacy Asia. He assists family enterprises with family governance, succession, learning and development. Christian is a Fellow of the Family Firm Institute (“FFI”) and the recipient of the FFI’s 2021 Interdisciplinary Practice Award. He has also received the Wealth Briefing Asia 2017 award for Leading Individual Advisor. For more information see www.familylegacyasia.com

²⁹ An aspect of what Jeremy Cheng refers to as “meta-governance”.