WHITE PAPER · FAMILY OFFICE AVIATION

The Unique Nature of *Family Office Aviation*

Scheduling, staffing, economics and oversight: where family flying differs

JULY 2026

David Clark · Managing Director, Integris Aviation Consultancy

Integris
AVIATION CONSULTANCY

Clarity. Perspective. Peace of Mind.

Contents

01 **Origins**
From decommissioned military transports to the Fortune 500.

02 **A third strand**
Family office aviation, with a rhythm of its own.

03 **People & money**
Hiring for the fire department, not the trucking company.

04 **Oversight**
What corporations have built in, and families must build up.

05 **Conclusions**
Three strands, one standard of safety and structure.

ABOUT THIS PAPER

Family office aviation is not corporate aviation in miniature. Scheduling, staffing, economics and oversight all work differently when the operation serves a family rather than a company.

This paper traces the origins of private aviation, the rise of the family office strand, and the practical differences that shape how a family flight operation should be staffed, financed and governed.

Originally written and published by David Clark. Republished in the Integris Aviation Consultancy white paper series, July 2026.

David Clark
Managing Director, Integris Aviation Consultancy

01 · ORIGINS

The origins of private aviation

Six decades of going anywhere, anytime

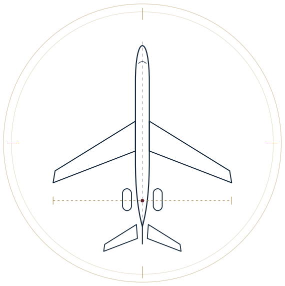
The private side of aviation has always been somewhat of a mystery. Ever since corporations and high net-worth individuals began using decommissioned military executive transport aircraft in the 1960s, privacy and convenience were the main reasons for such an investment.

The ability to go anywhere, anytime, on their own terms was breathtaking, especially at that time, when aviation had only existed for just over half a century.

Fast forward to the present time and we see a much more evolved landscape, with clear threads and utilization strategies developing rapidly over the last thirty years. Corporations most certainly have embraced private aviation, using it to accomplish strategic objectives by leveraging their key employees' time.

In fact, the vast majority of Fortune 500 companies use private aircraft, many owning one or more units and running entire departments that are staffed by professionals who are at the top of their game. Many companies would simply not be where they are today without the use of a private aircraft.

Even Warren Buffett once famously said that he went from calling his private aircraft "The Indefensible" to "The Indispensable". Berkshire Hathaway went on to buy NetJets, the world's largest fractional ownership company, which today boasts a fleet of over 800 aircraft.



02 · A THIRD STRAND

The rise of family office aviation

A third strand with its own rhythm

In parallel to the corporate use of aviation (also called business aviation) is family office aviation: private aviation used in service of one particular family, with one or more family units sharing the amenity.

As family offices have gained popularity in the past ten years, more are taking on the responsibilities of overseeing the aviation program for their family. This has brought unique challenges which are not insurmountable, but must be carefully considered when staffing and operating a family aviation program.

Scheduling can be challenging

One of the key differences between business and family office aviation is that of scheduling. Whereas most business occurs Monday through Friday, this allows a certain predictability when scheduling crews, and offers quality of life, which is very important for employee retention these days.

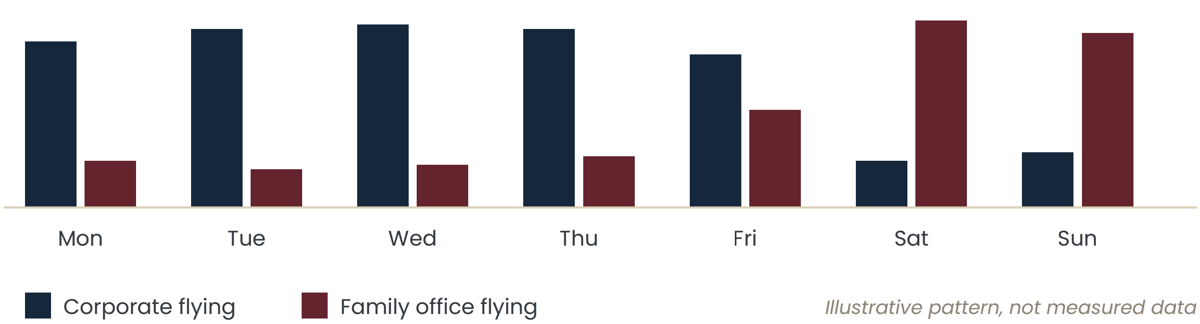
Many larger corporate aviation departments have gone to a quasi-airline style scheduling model, with guaranteed days off and the ability to bid a schedule which fits with each crewmember's individual situation.

With family office aviation, just the opposite may be true. Many trips occur on weekends and holidays, and may involve being on-call more than the counterparts who fly for a company.

FIGURE 1

Two operating rhythms: when corporate and family flying happen

Qualitative pattern described in this paper, not measured data.



Source: Integris Aviation Consultancy.

03 · PEOPLE & MONEY

Staffing aligned with the family

Culture fit and financial reality

When a family staffs its aviation department, it is very important that all crewmembers have realistic expectations of what is involved with the schedule.

Vetting candidates is extremely important in order to find the best personality fit with the family culture. Set the right expectations for how the family travels, how they make changes, and how last-minute those may be. The differences may be subtle, but one starts to see some stark contrasts between flying for a business and flying for a family.

Think of it as the difference between staffing a trucking company and a fire department. The trucking company will seek candidates who value fixed schedules, completing a mission on time and guaranteed time off. A fire department, though, will want people who are more flexible, able to handle periods of waiting while maintaining a great attitude, and able to jump into action when called upon with short notice.

By putting the right people in place for the specific demands of the situation, a family can build a flight services team that can function at a high level no matter what the circumstances, since those will have been anticipated and factored in from the beginning.

Financial considerations

Another big difference between business aviation and family aviation is that of operational expenses and accounting. Most businesses have a tax benefit when owning an aircraft, whereas a family does not. A corporation can leverage its buying power to reduce costs in the aviation department, but a private aviation program for a family will pay close to retail for everything, with no ability to write it off.

One strategy that families can use is to place their aircraft under a dedicated management company, which will actually produce other benefits. Not only will they be able to take advantage of bulk pricing, unlike a standalone flight program, but the family will also tap into an entire safety program that will directly impact their operation. There are some downsides to using a management company but overall, those can be compensated for.

THE ANALOGY

“The trucking company seeks candidates who value fixed schedules. The fire department wants people who can jump into action when called upon with short notice.”

On staffing for family flying

04 · OVERSIGHT

The importance of oversight

Building up what corporations have built in

One final big difference between a corporate flight operation and a high net-worth family is that of oversight.

A corporate aviation department will have access to all of the built-in functions of the company, from HR to Purchasing, Finance, IT, Risk Management, Facilities, and an executive team hired to make complex decisions. The aviation department becomes an extension of the company, with the support of all of these departments orchestrated through the Aviation Director.

With the family office, these functions may not be as robust as those found in a corporation. While the family flight department will be staffed by highly competent aviation professionals, the family office itself may not have the experience or framework to deal with all of the issues that a corporation is set up to handle.

One solution is for the family office to have a highly experienced aviation advisor to help talk through everything from budgeting to strategic planning, fleet planning to use policy, hiring standards, safety, risk management, tax, and much more. It can get complicated if the aviation professionals at the hangar are not well versed in these issues, and neither is the family office team.

This can present some real challenges, which can fortunately be mitigated by hiring a competent aviation consultant on a project or retainer basis to advise the family, the family office, and the aviation department through these different issues in a coherent, coordinated way.

WHERE AN ADVISOR HELPS

One seat, many disciplines

- Budgeting and strategic planning.
- Fleet planning and use policy.
- Hiring standards and safety.
- Risk management and tax.

05 · CONCLUSIONS

Three strands, one standard

Best practices and risk mitigation

Today we have a well-evolved private aviation landscape with three well-defined strands: corporate aviation, fractional ownership and charter, and family/UHNWI aviation. Fractional ownership is the most structured, followed by corporate aviation. Family office aviation runs the gamut from a structure standpoint.

If they lack the expertise and structure to meaningfully work through all pertinent issues, then family offices can tap into the expertise of a specialized aviation advisor who can help them create an overarching strategy while also zooming in to the granular details.

With a focus on best practices and risk mitigation, any family office can function at the highest levels of safety while providing the flexibility required by the family units they serve.

David Clark

Managing Director, Integris Aviation Consultancy

Clarity. Perspective. Peace of Mind.

8500 Normandale Lake Blvd, Suite 350
Minneapolis, MN 55437
david@integrisaviation.com · +1 952 261 5945
integrisaviation.com