

3 Dangers of Dysfunctional Practice Groups

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Characteristics that will Wreak Havoc on Your Reputation and Resources



Take a good long look at your practice group in your firm. What kind of reputation does it have? How friendly are you toward other members in the group? How is work delegated?

You could be bringing yourself down - and the firm - with a **DYSFUNCTIONAL PRACTICE GROUP**.

Negative groups breed gossip, bad reputations, and wasted resources. Not only that, they reflect poorly on the firm!

If you're questioning the influence of your own practice group, here are some characteristics to watch out for.

1. Lack of camaraderie.

Dysfunctional groups have **no social fabric**. The lawyers are not friends, they rarely socialize as a group, and they have difficulty integrating new people.

A strong social fabric is critical because it builds commitment and trust within the group and it strengthens the group's culture. The fact is, groups that work hard and play hard have a better

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sense that membership in the group is worth something. Functional groups are more collaborative, creative and often more profitable.

2. High attrition rates.

Excessive terminations - both planned and unplanned - should signal that the group has poor mentoring and training resources. Pay particularly close attention to unplanned attrition of certain demographic groups (women, minorities, ect.) which can be evidence of partners who play favorites and who don't give everyone in the group equal opportunities to succeed.

3. Low profitability.

Here's where a dysfunctional group becomes a drain: low profitability. **Negative groups often cling to one or two top-line successes and bask in the victory.** Meanwhile, they will struggle to continue their successful streak. Furthermore, dysfunctional practice group members will use their competitive victories as a threat when it comes time to negotiate compensation or contracts. They will either threaten to walk, or use their top-line numbers to make sure any new rules implemented by the firm don't apply to them.

Take a close look some key performance indicators. For example:

- **Percentage of partner hours will tell you if partners are delegating to associates and paralegals.**
- **Billed value of hours on a file will be an indicator of pressure on rates.**
- **Partners with poor work habits will attract high costs that are often not specifically tracked and allocated to them.**

There's no question that a dysfunctional practice group can bring danger to a firm's reputation. The key is to learn when you're a part of one, or steer clear of one you're about to join. It's just not worth it.

Adapted from article [The Dangers of Dysfunctional Practice Groups](#) by Karen MacKay.

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