

2011 Practice Group Performance

An Altman Weil Flash Survey

2011

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2011 Altman Weil Practice Group Performance Survey

The **2011 Altman Weil Practice Group Performance Survey** finds law firm practice group performance that is mediocre at best across a series of measures.

On average law firm leaders report that fewer than half of their Practice Groups are "Very Good" or "Excellent" in overall performance. Ratings were similarly low on the effectiveness of Practice Group planning, plan execution, new business generation, and cross-selling.

Although the results were generally disappointing, the survey revealed several variables that consistently boost Practice Group performance: leadership training, time spent by practice group leaders on leadership and management activities, and formalized Practice Group planning efforts.

Practice Group Performance

When asked what percentage of their Practice Groups they would rate as Very Good or Excellent in overall performance, law firm leaders responded that only 49% of groups deserved that distinction. This result – in which half of all groups are considered fair or poor – highlights a missed opportunity for otherwise highly-performing law firms.

The factors that improve overall Practice Group performance are time spent on group leadership and mandatory leadership training, according to the survey. The differential between firms in which group leaders spend over 250 hours per year (the top time allocation surveyed) versus firms where they spend under 100 hours a year (the lowest range surveyed) is almost 15 percentage points. Firms with mandatory training for group leaders outperform those without training by 8.4 points.

Despite this clear – and relatively easy – path to improvement, only 13% of law firms require Practice Group leadership training, and only 14% of group leaders spend 250 or more hours each year on group leadership. Practice Group Leaders are given responsibility for major business units of law firms, but in most firms they are not given the tools and resources needed to excel.

Practice Group Planning

Sixty three percent of law firms say they have a formal Practice Group planning process, but planning quality is inconsistent and many firms fall short on plan execution. On

average, on a scale of 0 to 10, firms rate the effectiveness of Practice Group planning at 6.0 and the effectiveness of plan implementation at a meager 5.6. Again the survey found that leadership training and time spent have a clear, positive impact on performance.

The fact that almost two thirds of law firms do formal Practice Group planning is encouraging. But ultimately each group needs to make <u>a good plan</u> – one that is short, focused and achievable – in order to really benefit from the process. Too many Practice Groups create plans that are too long, too general, or too internally focused and have little chance of ever being implemented successfully.

Business Development and Cross-Selling

The survey respondents report that only 42% of their Practice Groups are Very Good or Excellent in generating new business. The single greatest accelerator of performance in this area is training. In firms where Practice Group Leader training is required, performance jumps almost 15 points above the average score, and there is a 20 point differential compared to firms that offer no training.

It's not surprising that planning also affects business development performance. Practice Groups that regularly plan outperform those that don't by almost 12 points.

Firm leaders said that only 41% of their Practice Groups are Very Good or Excellent at cross-selling other firm practices. Again we found that mandatory leadership training accelerated performance significantly in the surveyed firms.

Internal / External Orientation

Another important factor is the primary orientation of law firm Practice Groups. The survey found that firms split about evenly between an internal focus (48%), i.e., groups that exist primarily for administration, organization, operations and management reasons, and an external focus (52%) oriented primarily to clients, strategy, competitiveness and growth.

When Practice Groups were first used in law firms, they were designed to be externally oriented business units. But over the years groups have been saddled with too much administrative process – and too many functions altogether – that could be better handled elsewhere in the firm. Practice Groups should exist primarily to achieve the

business goals of acquiring, retaining and growing clients at a profit, and firms should focus on supporting them in those efforts.

There is recognition of these goals in the respondents' assessment of Practice Group success factors, according to the survey. Law firm leaders identified the acquisition of new business, revenue growth, and profitability as the top three responses in this category. However, as the survey shows, many practice groups are failing to fully deliver on these goals.

Practice Group Leaders

When asked to rate the overall performance of their Practice Group Leaders, law firms reported that only 52% of their group leaders are Very Good or Excellent.

The variables that boost Practice Group Leader performance are clear. Practice Group Leaders that spend over 250 hours per year on group leadership score 15 points higher than those that spend under 100 hours. Leaders in firms that have mandatory leadership training outperform those in firms that do not offer any training by 11.2 points.

There are other factors that relate to group leader performance — job descriptions and evaluations. Sixty one percent of firms report that their Practice Group Leaders have written job descriptions, while 39% do not. Additionally 58% of firms formally evaluate their Practice Group Leader performance, while 42% do not.

Role clarity (from job descriptions) and accountability (through evaluations) are both fundamental principals of any serious performance program. When these elements are not uniformly present in law firms, it is not surprising that many Practice Group Leaders fall short of expectations.

Non-Lawyer Professionals

Law firms are using non-lawyer professionals to support Practice Groups in a variety of roles including litigation support, marketing, business development, technology, financial analysis and administration. These individuals are considered to be reasonably effective – with each category of professionals scoring between 7.4 and 8.1 on a 0 to 10 effectiveness scale.

Non-lawyer professionals present an obvious outlet for the growing burden of administrative tasks that are currently distracting Practice Group Leaders from their core

functions. Law firms would do well to consider these resources as they review group plans and group leader job descriptions.

Improving Law Firm Practice Groups

What are firms doing to improve Practice Group and group leader performance? They report that they are focusing mainly on planning, training and accountability, demonstrating that they're aware of the opportunities inherent in each of these activities.

As we've noted, the survey also shows that the simple act of spending more time can make a huge difference. If law firms combine a good training program with an effective Practice Group plan to ensure that time is well spent, they can expect Practice Group performance to improve.

Most law firms already have some of these pieces in place. We recommend that firms consider each of the following to consistently accelerate Practice Group performance:

- 1. Rethink your Practice Groups as externally-focused business units
- 2. Create a formal planning process that results in short, focused, achievable plans for every Practice Group
- 3. Clarify the Practice Group Leader role with a clear, focused job description
- 4. Require leadership training for every Practice Group Leader
- 5. Hold leaders accountable for performance through a formal evaluation and feedback program.
- 6. Move as many administrative tasks as possible to non-lawyer professionals who support the groups or to others in the firm

Conclusion

Overall, the survey results tell us that Practice Group performance is important to law firms in 2011 – *but not that important*. The investments in training, planning, time and resources aren't being made at the levels they should be. There is not the degree of accountability needed to drive real excellence.

In an era in which law firms face ever-greater competition, Practice Group performance should be recognized as a method to achieve competitive advantage. As with all performance improvements, the firms that realize this first will set themselves apart.

Survey Methodology

Conducted in October 2011, the **2011 Altman Weil Practice Group Performance Survey** polled Managing Partners at 855 firms in the US and Canada with 50 or more lawyers. Completed surveys were received from 81 law firms.

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About the Authors

Thomas S. Clay is a principal of Altman Weil, Inc. With 30 years experience consulting to the legal profession, he is an acknowledged expert on law firm management principles and is a trusted advisor to law firms throughout the United States. Mr. Clay heads complex consulting assignments in strategic planning, law firm management and organization and law firm mergers and acquisitions. He is a thought-leader on the key issue of law firm practice group strategy and leadership.

He is Fellow of the College of Law Practice Management (COLPM) and serves as a Judge for the College's InnovAction Awards which recognize outstanding innovation in the delivery of legal services worldwide. He is a member of the COLPM Futures Committee. In 2008, Mr. Clay was named as one of the "100 Legal Consultants You Need to Know."

Eric A. Seeger is a principal of Altman Weil, Inc. He works with large and small law firms in the areas of strategy formulation, practice group planning, merger search, merger assessment and organizational audit. Mr. Seeger directs Altman Weil's market research department. Over the years he has managed hundreds of strategic research projects for law firms and legal vendors.

Prior to joining Altman Weil, Mr. Seeger was an independent consultant to law firm and corporate executives. He served as strategic planning officer of an AmLaw 200 law firm for four years. Previously, he performed market analysis for a global manufacturer, holding leadership positions in the industry's trade association, and served in budgeting and planning capacities for a major university.

About Altman Weil, Inc.

Founded in 1970, Altman Weil, Inc. is dedicated exclusively to the legal profession. It provides management consulting services to law firms, law departments and legal vendors worldwide. The firm is independently owned by its professional consultants, who have backgrounds in law, industry, finance, marketing, administration and government. More information on Altman Weil can be found at <u>www.altmanweil.com</u>.

Notes and Definitions

Practice Groups, for the purposes of this survey, are defined as actual operating groups, as opposed to practice areas used for marketing purposes only.

Abbreviations:

PG – Practice Group **PGL** – Practice Group Leader

Assessment scales:

Effectiveness – Using a 0 to 10 scale 0 = Not at all effective 10 = Extremely effective

Importance – Using a 0 to 10 scale 0 = Not at all important 10 = Extremely important

Performance - % 'Very good' or 'Excellent'

We asked law firms to assess what percentage of their Practice Group and Group Leader performance is 'Very good' or 'Excellent' in a number of key areas.

For ease of understanding we have shown these results in deciles. For example, all firms that reported between 0% and 10% of their Practice Groups were Very Good or Excellent are in Decile 1; firms reporting between 11% and 20% of their groups as Very Good or Excellent fall into Decile 2, etc.

Assessment scores:

For the 0-10 or 0%-100% scales, we have categorized the responses as follows:

Poor: Firms that respondents rate at '5' or below on the 0 to 10 scale, or report 'Very good' or 'Excellent' performance at only 50% or less.

Fair: Firms that respondents rate at between '6' and '8' on the 0 to 10 scale, or report 'Very good' or 'Excellent' performance in the 51%-80% range.

Stars: Firms that respondents rate at '9' or '10' on the 0 to 10 scale, or report 'Very good' or 'Excellent' performance in the 81%-100% range.

Key variables:

After some of the Performance charts we have added a breakdown of results based on three key variables:

Planning: Is there a formal Practice Group planning process?

Training: Is leadership or management training offered to, or required of Group Leaders?

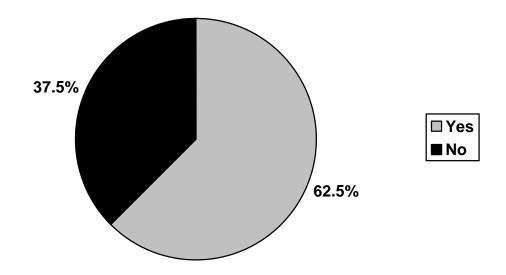
Time: How much time does a PGL spend on group leadership and management each year?

The Basics

Practice Group Performance Survey

1. Formal Planning Process

Does your firm have a formal Practice Group planning process?

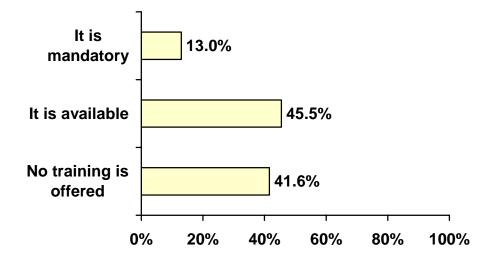


Formal Practice Group planning process – by firm size

Firm Size	Yes	Νο
50-99 lawyers	42.9%	57.1%
100-249 lawyers	73.0%	27.0%
250-499 lawyers	70.0%	30.0%
500+ lawyers	80.0%	20.0%
All	62.5%	37.5%

2. Leadership or Management Training

Do your firm's Practice Group Leaders receive any leadership or management training?

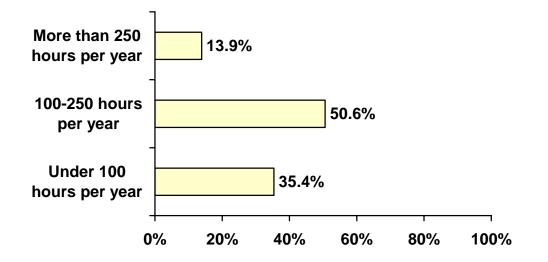


Leadership or management training for PGLs - by firm size

Firm Size	Mandatory	Available	Not offered
50-99 lawyers	7.1%	35.7%	57.1%
100-249 lawyers	15.2%	45.5%	39.4%
250-499 lawyers	10.0%	60.0%	30.0%
500+ lawyers	33.3%	66.7%	0%
All	13.0%	45.5%	41.6%

3. Time Spent on Practice Group Leadership

On average, how much time does a Practice Group Leader in your firm spend on group leadership and management?

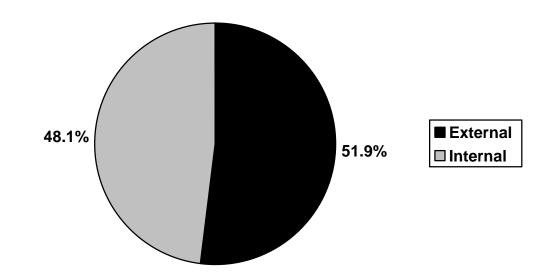


Time spent on group leadership and management- by firm size

Firm Size	Over 250 hours per year	100-250 hours per year	Under 100 hours per year
50-99 lawyers	3.6%	42.9%	53.6%
100-249 lawyers	17.1%	57.1%	25.7%
250-499 lawyers	10.0%	60.0%	30.0%
500+ lawyers	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%
All	13.9%	50.6%	35.4%

4. Internal or External Focus

In your firm, do your Practice Groups exist primarily for internal or external reasons?



Internal reasons	External reasons
Administration	Clients
Organization	Strategy
Operations	Competitiveness
Management	Growth

Performance

Practice Group Performance Survey

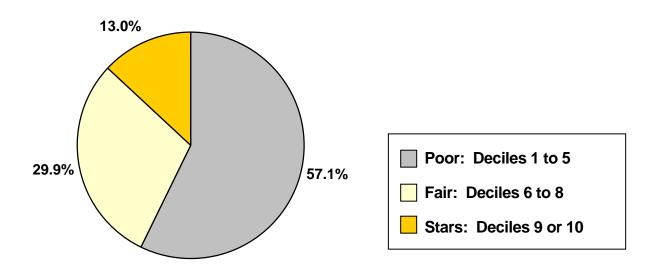
5. Overall Practice Group Performance

In assessing the overall performance of your Practice Groups, approximately <u>what</u> <u>percentage of your groups would you rate as Very Good or Excellent</u>?

Responses are shown in deciles. For example, all firms that reported between 0% and 10% of their Practice Groups were Very Good or Excellent are in Decile 1; firms reporting between 11% and 20% of their groups as Very Good or Excellent fall into Decile 2, etc.

DECILE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
% of FIRMS	10.4%	13.0%	6.5%	16.9%	10.4%	10.4%	11.7%	7.8%	2.6%	10.4%
			57.1%				29.9%		13.0)%

Average response: 49% of PGs are Very Good or Excellent

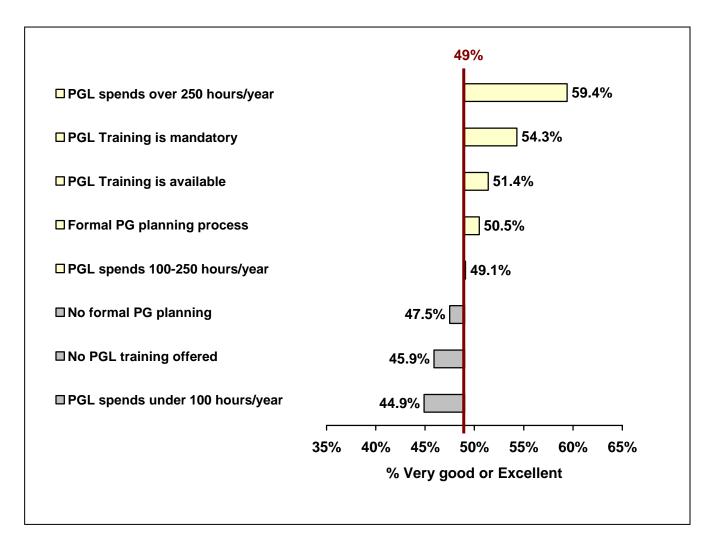


57.1% of firms surveyed fall into deciles 1-5, reporting that between 0% and 50% of their Practice Groups are Very Good or Excellent in overall performance. 29.9% say that between 51% and 80% of their PGs are Very good or Excellent. Only 13% said that 81%-100% of their groups perform at a Very Good or Excellent level.

Performance Variables: Overall Practice Group Performance

The average response for all firms: 49% of PGs are 'Very Good' or 'Excellent.'

Practice Group performance is affected by three key variables: Time spent, Leadership training and Formal planning. In firms where the Practice Group Leaders spent 250 hours or more per year on group leadership and management, the overall performance rating goes up by more than 10 percentage points. The differential between that category and those firms where the PGL spends under 100 hours per year is even greater – almost 15 points.



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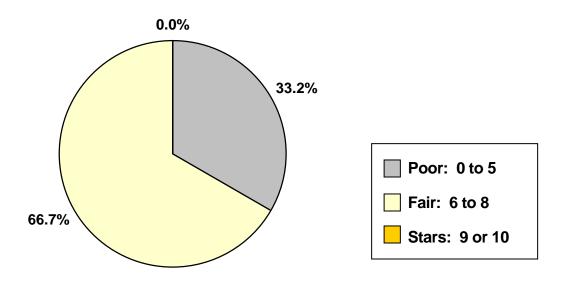
PGL spends 250+ hours/year

6. Effectiveness of the Practice Group Planning Process

Please rate the effectiveness of the Practice Group planning process in your law firm using a scale of 0 = not at all effective to 10 = extremely effective.

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RESPONSE	0%	0%	3.9%	3.9%	7.8%	17.6%	21.6%	29.4%	15.7%	0%	0%
			3	3.2%				66.7%		0	%

Average rating: 6

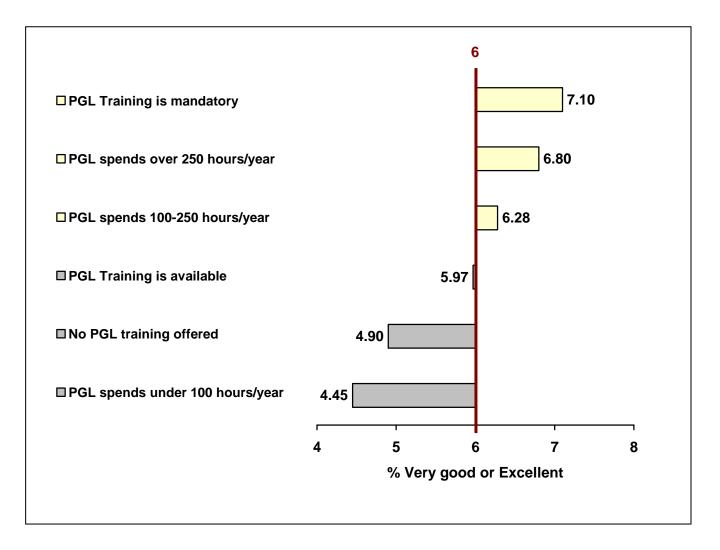


Law firms rated the effectiveness of their Practice Group planning process at an average of 6 on a scale of 0 to 10, with all responses falling between 2 and 8. Not a single firm rated their planning process at the top ratings of 9 or 10.

Performance Variables: Effectiveness of the Practice Group Planning Process

The average rating for all firms: 6 on a scale of 0 to 10

The effectiveness of Practice Group planning is affected by two variables: Training and Time. In firms where the Practice Group Leader training is mandatory, planning effective increases significantly. Additional time spent is also a positive factor in planning effectiveness.



PERFORMANCE ACCELERATOR

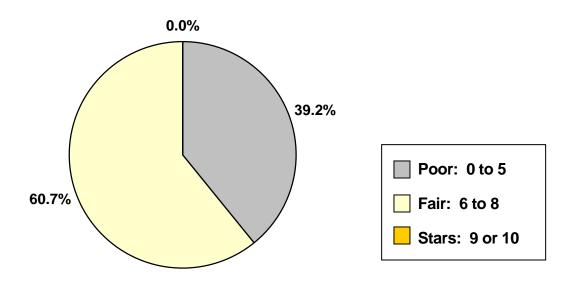
PGL Training is Mandatory

7. Effectiveness of Practice Group Plan Implementation

Please rate the effectiveness of Practice Group plan implementation in your law firm using a scale of 0 = not at all effective to 10 = extremely effective.

RATING	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RESPONSE	0%	0%	3.9%	5.9%	11.8%	17.6%	35.3%	17.6%	7.8%	0%	0%
		39.2%						60.7%		0	%

Average rating: 5.6

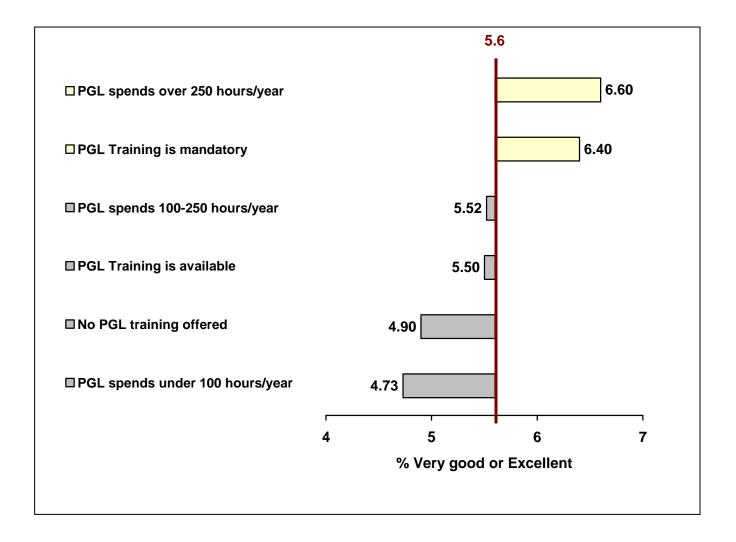


Law firms rated the effectiveness of Practice Group plan implementation at an average or 5.6 on a scale of 0 to 10, with all responses falling between 2 and 8. None of the firms rated plan implementation at 9 or 10.

Performance Variables: Effectiveness of Practice Group Plan Implementation

The average rating for all firms: 5.6 on a scale of 0 to 10

Practice Group plan implementation is affected by two variables: Time and Training. In firms where the Practice Group Leader spends over 250 hours per year on group leadership and management, plan implementation improves. Mandatory training is the only other variable to positively affect the effectiveness of plan implementation



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PGL Spends 250+ hours/year

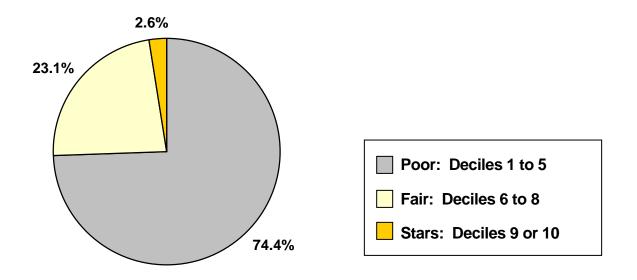
8. Practice Groups' Ability to Generate New Business

In assessing your Practice Groups' ability to generate new business, approximately <u>what percentage of your groups would you rate as Very Good or</u> <u>Excellent</u>?

Responses are shown in deciles. For example, all firms that reported between 0% and 10% of their Practice Groups were Very Good or Excellent are in Decile 1; firms reporting between 11% and 20% of their groups as Very Good or Excellent fall into Decile 2, etc.

DECILE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
% of FIRMS	6.4%	21.8%	11.5%	15.4%	19.2%	3.8%	10.3%	9.0%	0%	2.6%
		I	74.4%				23.1%		2.6	%

Average response: 42% of PGs are Very Good or Excellent

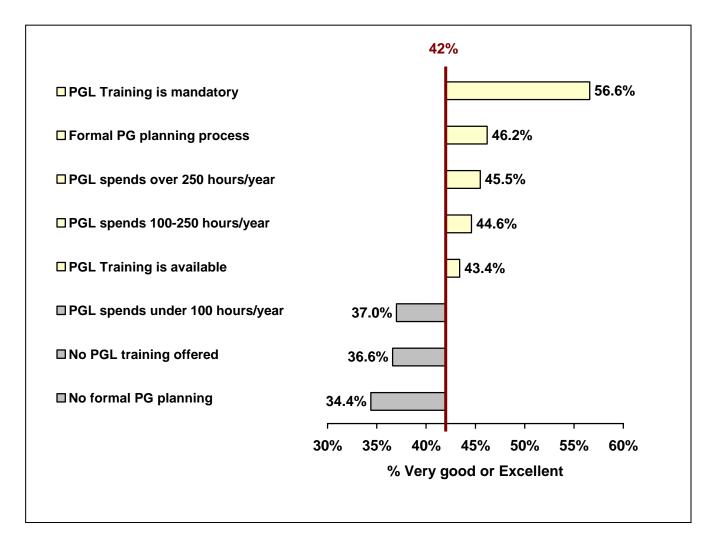


74.4% of firms surveyed fall into deciles 1-5, reporting that between 0% and 50% of their Practice Groups are Very Good or Excellent in generating new business. 23.1% say that between 51% and 80% of their PGs are Very Good or Excellent. Only 2.6% of firms said that 81%-100% of their groups perform at a Very Good or Excellent level in generating new business.

Performance Variables: Ability to Generate New Business

The average response for all firms: 42% of PGs are 'Very Good' or 'Excellent.'

Practice Groups' ability to generate new business is affected most dramatically by mandatory leadership training in law firms. In firms that require training, the new business generation rating goes up by almost 15 percentage points. Formal planning and increased time spent also had positive impacts on the ability to generate new business.



PERFORMANCE ACCELERATOR

PGL Training is mandatory

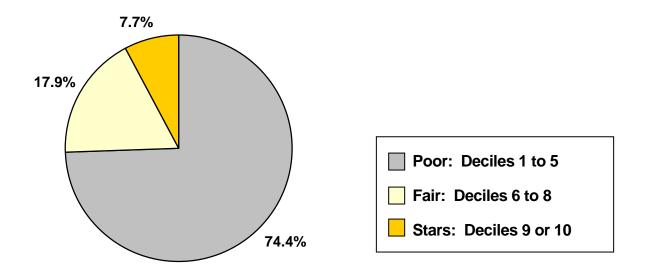
9. Practice Groups' Ability to Cross-Sell Other Practices

In assessing your Practice Groups' ability to cross-sell other practices, approximately what percentage of your groups would you rate as Very Good or Excellent?

Responses are shown in deciles. For example, all firms that reported between 0% and 10% of their Practice Groups were Very Good or Excellent are in Decile 1; firms reporting between 11% and 20% of their groups as Very Good or Excellent fall into Decile 2, etc.

DECILE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
% of FIRMS	17.9%	9.0%	16.7%	11.5%	19.2%	3.8%	7.7%	6.4%	2.6%	5.1%
			74.4%				17.9%		7.7	%

Average response: 41% of PGs are Very Good or Excellent

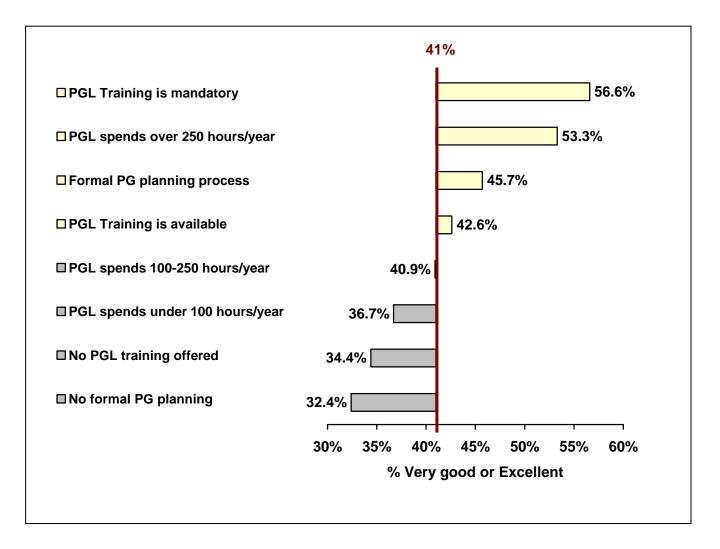


74.4% of firms surveyed fall into deciles 1-5, reporting that between 0% and 50% of their Practice Groups are Very Good or Excellent in cross-selling other practices in the firm. 17.9% say that between 51% and 80% of their PGs are Very Good or Excellent. Only 7.7% of firms said that 81%-100% of their groups perform at a Very Good or Excellent level in this area.

Performance Variables: Ability to Cross-Sell Other Practices

The average response for all firms: 41% of PGs are 'Very Good' or 'Excellent.'

Practice Groups' ability to cross-sell other practices is affected most dramatically by mandatory leadership training in law firms. In firms that require training, the new business generation rating goes up by more than15 percentage points. Spending over 250 hours per year also had a significant positive impact on Practice Groups ability to cross-sell.



PERFORMANCE ACCELERATOR

PGL Training is mandatory

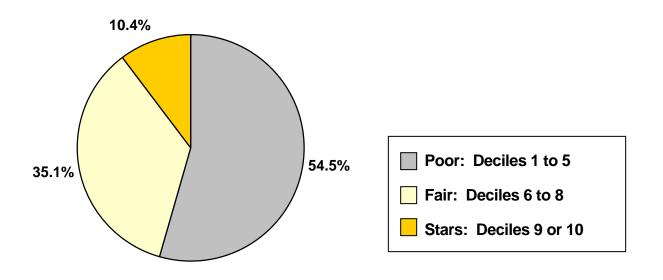
10. Overall Practice Group Leader Performance

In assessing the overall performance of your Practice Group leaders, <u>approximately what percentage of your group leaders would you rate as Very Good</u> <u>or Excellent</u>?

Responses are shown in deciles. For example, all firms that reported between 0% and 10% of their Practice Groups were Very Good or Excellent are in Decile 1; firms reporting between 11% and 20% of their groups as Very Good or Excellent fall into Decile 2, etc.

DECILE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
% OF FIRMS	5.2%	2.6%	11.7%	23.4%	11.7%	10.4%	10.4%	14.3%	5.2%	5.2%
			54.5%				35.1%		10.4	4%

Average response: 52% of PGLs are Very Good or Excellent

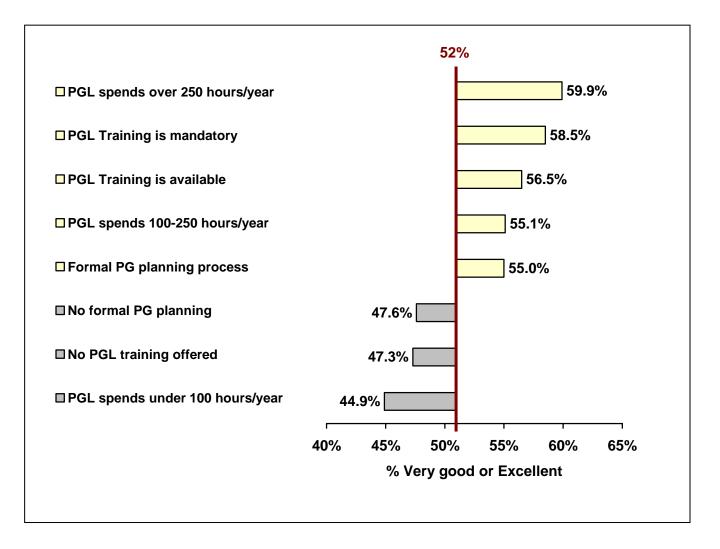


54.5% of firms surveyed fall into deciles 1-5, reporting that between 0% and 50% of their Practice Group Leaders are Very Good or Excellent in overall performance. 35.1% say that between 51% and 80% of their PGLs are Very Good or Excellent. 10.4% of firms said that 81%-100% of their group leaders perform at a Very Good or Excellent level overall.

Performance Variables: Overall Practice Group Leader Performance

The average response for all firms: 52% of Group Leaders are 'Very Good' or 'Excellent.'

The overall performance rating for Practice Group Leaders is most affected by two variables: Time spent and Leadership training. In firms where PGLs spend over 250 hours per year on group leadership, performance goes up almost 8 percentage points. The performance differential between those PGLs that spend the most time and those who spend the least (under 100 hours/year) is 15 points. Leadership training is also a positive performance variable.



PERFORMANCE ACCELERATOR

PGL Spends 250+ hours/year

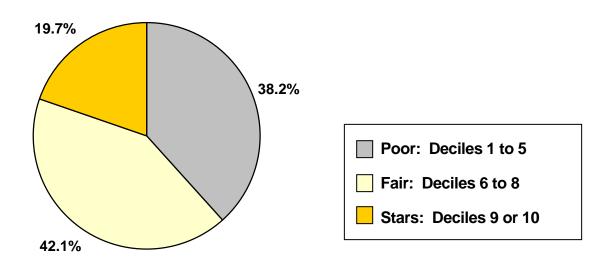
11. Practice Groups' Ability to Integrate New Lateral Hires

In assessing your Practice Groups' ability to integrate new lateral hires into their groups, <u>approximately what percentage of your groups would you rate as Very</u> <u>Good or Excellent</u>?

Responses are shown in deciles. For example, all firms that reported between 0% and 10% of their Practice Groups were Very Good or Excellent are in Decile 1; firms reporting between 11% and 20% of their groups as Very Good or Excellent fall into Decile 2, etc.

DECILE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
% of FIRMS	2.6%	5.3%	6.6%	10.5%	13.2%	6.6%	13.2%	22.4%	6.6%	13.2%
			38.2%				42.1%		19.7	7%

Average response: 62% of PGs are Very Good or Excellent



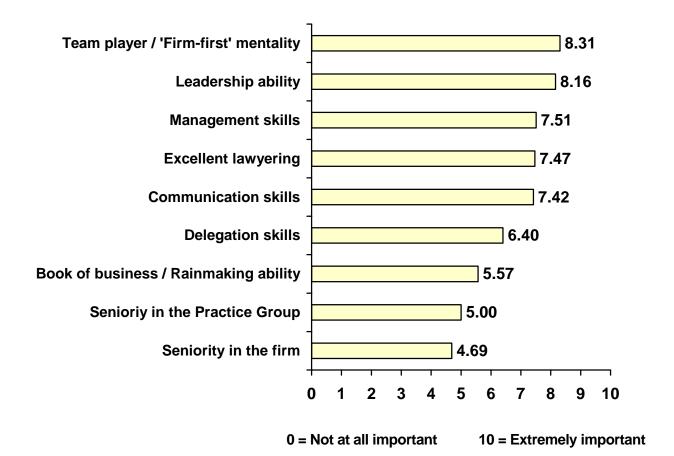
38.2% of firms surveyed fall into deciles 1-5, reporting that between 0% and 50% of their Practice Groups are Very Good or Excellent at integrating new lateral hires. 42.1% say that between 51% and 80% of their PGs are Very Good or Excellent. 19.7% of firms said that 81%-100% of their groups are Very Good or Excellent at integrating new lateral hires.

Leaders

Practice Group Performance Survey

12. Practice Group Leader Selection Criteria

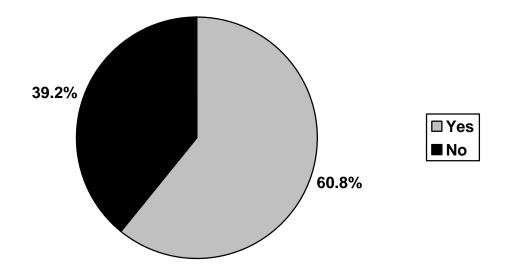
Please rate the importance of each of the following selection criteria in how your firm chooses Practice Group Leaders, using a scale of 0 = not at all important to 10 = extremely important.



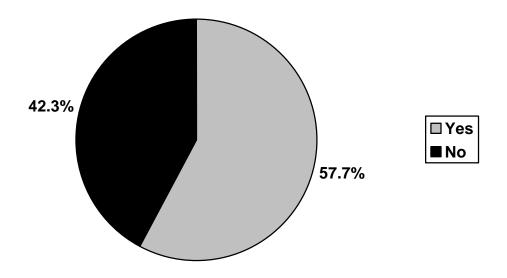
12a. Please identify and rate any other selection criteria

- Commitment to the firm's strategic plan: 2 responses, average rating 9.5
- **Respect and support of colleagues in the group**: 3 responses, average rating 9.0
- Desire / willingness to serve: 2 responses, average rating 8.5

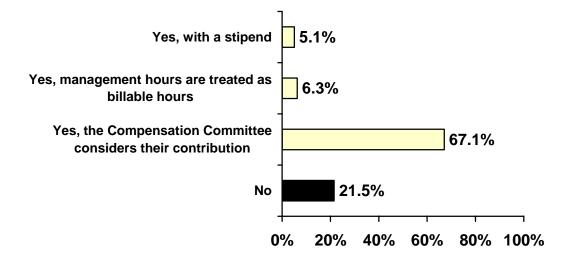
13. Do your firm's Practice Group Leaders have <u>formal job descriptions</u> or written description of their roles and responsibilities?



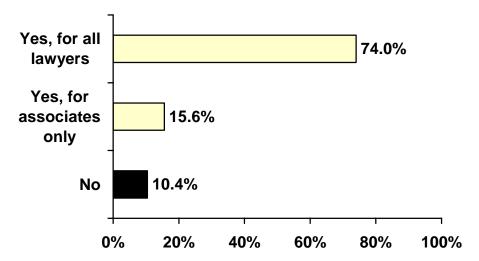
14. Is the performance of Practice Group Leaders <u>formally evaluated</u> by firm leadership?



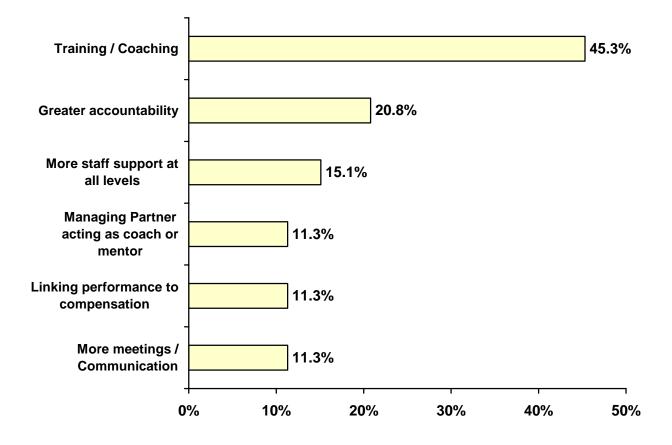
15. Are Practice Group Leaders compensated directly for their management role?



16. Do Practice Group Leaders have <u>input into the compensation of lawyers</u> in their groups?



17. What is your firm doing to <u>improve Practice Group Leader performance</u>? (open ended question)



Other

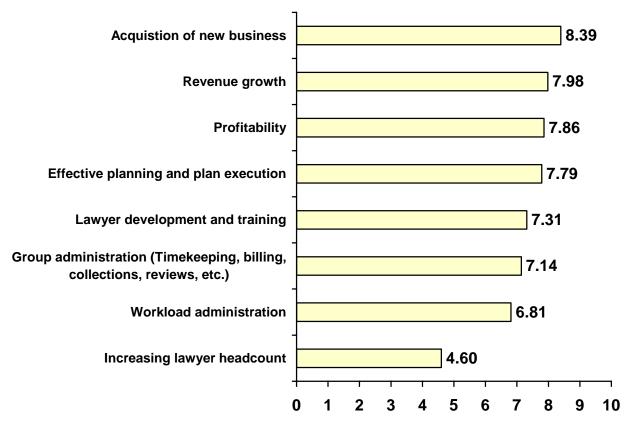
- Selecting better leaders
- Improved planning
- Sharing best practices
- Developing formal job descriptions
- Team building

Groups

Practice Group Performance Survey

18. Practice Group Success Factors

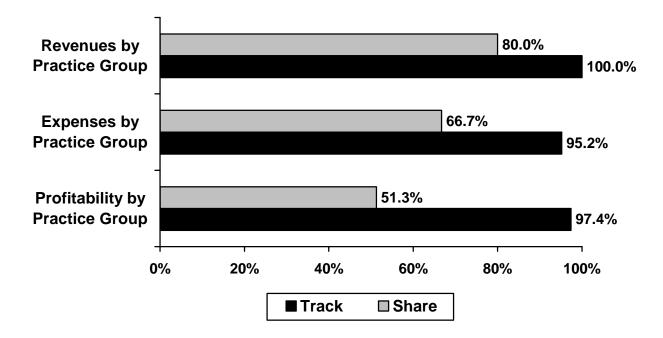
Please rate the importance of each of the following factors in successful Practice Group performance in your firm, using a scale of 0 = not at all important to 10 = extremely important.



0 = Not at all important 10 = Extremely important

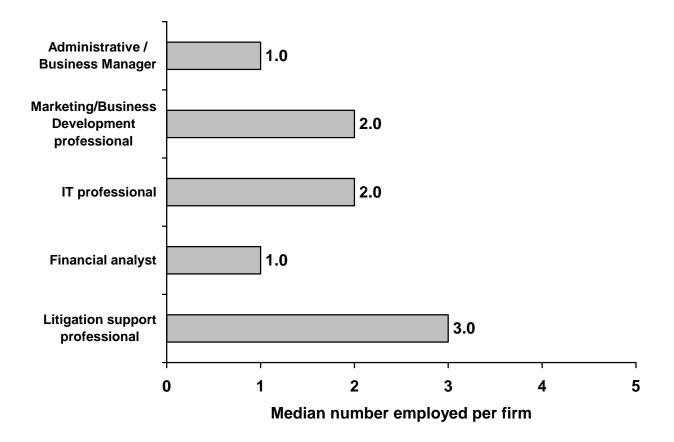
19. Practice Group Performance Data

Does your firm track the following data? Is the data shared with Practice Group Leaders?



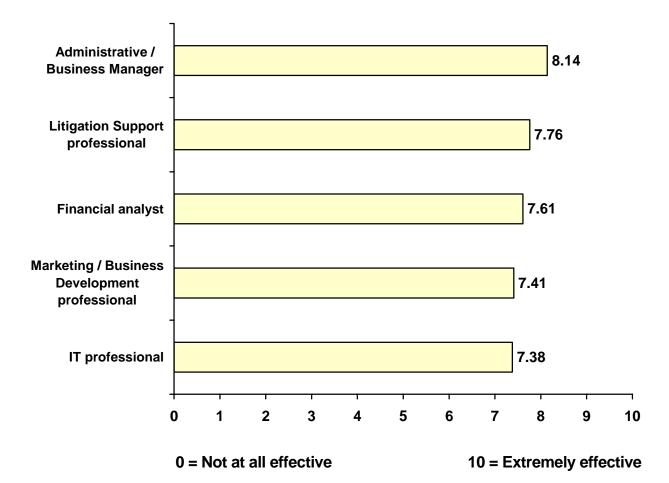
20. Non-Lawyer Professionals Assigned to Practice Groups

If your firm employs any of the following non-lawyer professionals assigned to support one or more practice groups exclusively, please indicate how many individuals are employed in your firm in each category. <u>Do not count individuals</u> who support the whole firm.

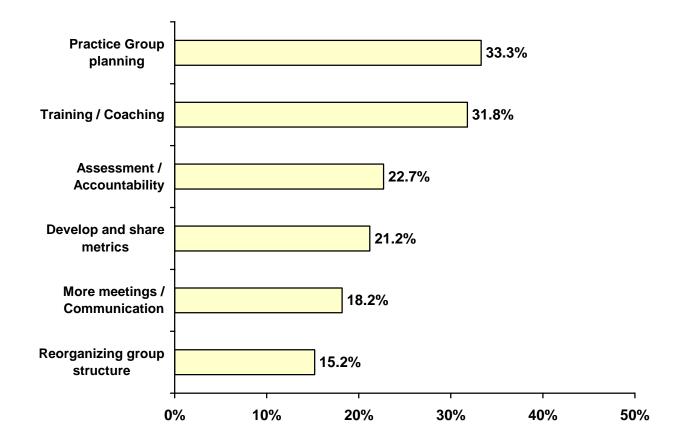


21. Effectiveness of Non-Lawyer Professionals

Please rate the effectiveness of your firm's non-lawyer practice group professionals, using a scale of 0 = extremely ineffective to 10 = extremely effective.



Average rating: 7.65



22. What is your firm doing to <u>improve Practice Group performance</u>? (open ended question)

Other

- Selecting better leaders
- Getting the Managing Partner / Management Committee involved
- Adding or increasing non-lawyer support positions
- Emphasizing revenue growth
- Providing more marketing support
- Adding laterals with books of business
- Sharing best practices
- Developing formal job descriptions

Performance Scorecard

Practice Group Performance Survey

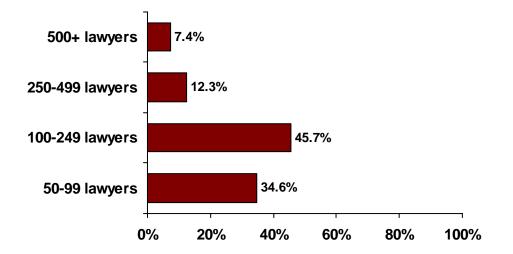
PRACTICE GROUP PERFORMANCE SCORECARD										
FACTOR	SCORE	RATING SCALE								
Overall Practice Group performance	49%	% Very Good or Excellent								
Overall PG Leader performance	52%	% Very good or Excellent								
New business generation	42%	% Very Good or Excellent								
Cross-selling	41%	% Very Good or Excellent								
Integrating new lateral hires	62%	% Very Good or Excellent								
Planning process	6.0	On a 0-10 rating scale								
Plan implementation	5.6	On a 0-10 rating scale								
Effectiveness of non-lawyer PG staff	7.7	On a 0-10 rating scale								

Demographics

Practice Group Performance Survey

Survey Demographics

Participant firm size:



Departments and Practice Groups

	Average # of Departments per firm	Average # of Practice Groups per firm	Average # of Lawyers per Practice Group
500+ lawyers	7.2	20.3	32.6
250-499 lawyers	4.9	14.4	24.7
100-249 lawyers	3.3	11.0	14.7
50-99 lawyers	3.6	8.1	8.6
All	3.4	11.1	17.2

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