



Workloading: Strength in numbers

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Feature

Using facility data to balance staffing levels and identify opportunities for improvement.

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For nearly any type of organization, cleaning represents 20 to 35 percent of the total maintenance and operations budget.

In other words, the cleaning department is a big piece of the budget pie, and often a big target.

Within that slice, labor costs account for the largest share of total cleaning costs.

If your organization is constantly under pressure to do more with less, you must be prepared to justify staffing needs.

Your cleaning business or department is only as good as your workforce, and cleaning managers are only as good as their task management skills.

Finding a balance

The process of workloading a facility, building, or cleaning job helps establish a scope of the work, staffing level, and an accurate estimate of cost to perform the work.

Workloading also can help identify productivity strengths and weaknesses and help support or justify a bid for building service contractors (BSCs).

Understanding the fundamentals of workloading and using the right tools will help you identify improvement opportunities and get the most out of your workforce.

Clean the slate

Many people in our industry believe that they can walk into a facility and, using their experience, quickly determine how many hours or employees are needed to clean the building.

This guesswork is not a reliable or an accurate method for developing a staffing plan.

Neither is relying on the way you've always staffed a building.

Even if you do produce estimates that appear correct, your figures cannot be relied on or defended because they are not data-driven.

Before starting the workloading process, you must forget everything you know for now.

Forget your staffing numbers, labor hours, and current scope of work.

You may come back to these numbers later to see if you've improved after following four workloading steps.

Step 1: Take inventory

Determine the facility's or building's total amount of cleanable space.

Not to be confused with gross square feet, cleanable space is only the area that is actually cleaned.

The best ways to get an accurate measure of cleanable space is to look at the building's architectural drawings (assuming that they are correct) or to walk through each area and physically measure and categorize each one.

Your goal is to get a precise number of square feet for each cleanable surface by floor type for each area (i.e., 15,000 square feet of carpeted general office space).

Also, make note of cleanable objects in each space that may not be accounted for within the square footage, such as desks and chairs.

Step 2: Determine tasks and frequencies (scope of work)

Break tasks down into three categories: Daily, detail and project.

Examples of daily tasks include cleaning restrooms, emptying trash, and vacuuming.

Detail work, including high dusting and spot cleaning, is usually specifically scheduled.

Project work occurs less frequently — weekly, monthly or annually — and includes carpet and upholstery cleaning and floor stripping.

Next, assign a frequency to each task.

The frequency is the number of times per year the task needs to be performed.

For example, a task that is performed five days per week is performed 260 times per year — five times per week multiplied by 52 weeks.

Together, your task list and annual frequencies make up the scope of work.

Step 3: Calculate labor hours

Once you have a scope of work, you can determine how many labor hours are needed to clean each area by assigning a cleaning time or production rate to each task.

You can calculate cleaning times by conducting your own time motion studies or by consulting resources from associations, such as ISSA, that have published average cleaning times for the industry.

For example, let's say the task of vacuuming all carpeted floors in a 15,000-square-foot area is to be performed 260 times a year, and its production rate is 10,000 square feet per hour.

If you divide the area square feet by the task production rate (15,000 square feet/10,000 square feet per hour) you will get the task time, which is 1.5 hours.

Calculate annual time in hours by multiplying the task time by the annual frequency (1.5 hours x 260) to get 390 hours per year.

Next, repeat this process for each task and each area of the building.

Step 4: Determine labor cost

Once you have figured the total annual time in hours needed to clean each area you can then find out your labor cost by multiplying the total hours by the wage rate.

You should include an additional percentage for taxes, insurance, and benefits.

Final cost will also include supply costs, equipment depreciation, and miscellaneous job costs, such as background checks, drug testing, mobile phones, uniforms, overhead, administration and profit.

Simplify with software

Whether you manage an in-house cleaning operation, outsource services or head up a cleaning business, knowing the number of labor hours is the key to effective management.

Calculating these numbers faster and easier is even better.

Many software tools are available today to streamline the workloading process, while providing much more.

Software can help build a cleaning plan, work the plan, measure results, and help your organization continually improve.

Some tools track supplies and equipment, capture employee training, work history, and schedule cleaning tasks as well.

Software can also help BSCs win more bids by creating professional bid documents with a detailed breakdown of how the numbers are calculated.

It can ensure that jobs are estimated properly so BSCs do not lose money (underbid) or customers (overbid).

Jotting down a few numbers on a piece of paper is no longer sufficient.

Software is also configured to calculate everything automatically, taking into consideration traffic patterns and types of equipment used, providing more accurate results.

Answers to customers' questions, such as "What if we reduced this task frequency to one less day per week?" can be accurately and quickly determined from this kind of software.

Make better decisions

There are many ways cleaning managers can use the data collected during the workloading process.

With square footage, cleaning times, and tasks calculated, managers can note areas where their facilities or cleaning jobs might be overstaffed or understaffed.

If necessary, they can shuffle staff to increase performance and reduce labor hours.

Even if managers find they already have a pretty accurate number of workers in each area, the workloading process helps validate staffing levels, especially when they are under scrutiny.

Workload reports, in addition to building data, are excellent tools in the boardroom for justifying a budget request or backing up the need for an additional full-time-equivalent employee (FTE).

These data are also great for explaining to workers why one employee might be cleaning twice as much area as another employee.

It may even keep another employee from walking out the door.

Again, your cleaning business or department is only as good as your workforce, and cleaning managers are only as good as their task management skills.

By putting proper workloading to use, you can be a great cleaning manager, get the most out of your workforce, and improve your cleaning business or department.

Jim Peduto is the president of Matrix Integrated Facility Management and the co-founder of the American Institute for Cleaning Sciences, an independent third-party accreditation organization that establishes standards to improve the professional performance of the cleaning industry.