



# AUTOMATE DAILY OPERATIONS: GET OFF THE PHONE LINE AND ONTO THE FRONT LINE

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**- Director of Planning & Support**

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One way to positively affect a business' bottom line is by maximizing productivity. But there are finite resources for a nearly infinite amount of work. Knowingly or unknowingly, regulators, customers and shareholders ask employers to do more with less. To make that happen, critical infrastructure companies -- including supervisors at airports, manufacturing facilities, utility companies and refineries -- are saddled with spending hours sorting through staffing for the next day's shift. To increase safety, performance and consistency, employers need to get supervisors off the phone line and onto the front line.

## THE CHALLENGE

"If our workers can't make their shift, they're supposed to call in at least four hours ahead, so we have time to find a replacement," said the director of security for a contract security and monitoring service at a major North American airport. "If those 'call offs' happen in less than four hours, which is often, we don't have time to fill the shift; if we leave a post open, the airport authority fines us \$250 per incident. We had \$60,000 in fines last quarter."

In spite of challenges with shift scheduling, timekeeping, or payroll systems, supervisors have to deliver on the goal of safely and efficiently providing quality services or products. Doing that means balancing a workforce, material resources and staying compliant with regulations. Even if you have solid scheduling and plans in place to get the work done, inevitably there is a squeeze to do more with less. Critical infrastructure companies (e.g., electric utilities, railroads, power plants, etc.) need better visibility into staffing situations and flexibility in response to manage day-to-day disruptions. This may be a planned or unplanned event, a maintenance issue, employee absences, or the need for rest based on union or workforce agreements. These daily issues can cause back-

ups when supervisors take time making dozens, if not hundreds, of calls to fill shifts or plug gaps in shift schedules. This keeps managers and foremen stuck in the office working on administrative tasks, instead of being on the front line where they can inspect, instruct and solve problems.

Many companies simply sit back and accept the delays that come with manual shift and resource management as a fact of life, saying these issues are unavoidable and come with doing business. This is simply not the case. With automation, employers can replace manual shift-filling processes, dramatically reduce grievances and empower employees, while dealing with generational changes in the workforce. Here are three strategies to efficiently tackle daily operations and resource management.

## STRATEGY #1: AUTOMATING SHIFT MANAGEMENT

By automating portions of the shift-management process, managers can save countless hours spent making phone calls to employees, finding the right (and equitable) order of workers to disperse overtime and reporting on which employees responded to each callout and how. Automating the callout and scheduling process eliminates handmade spreadsheets and whiteboards documenting who, and with what skill set, needs to be working what job.

"We began using a shift-management system nearly 10 years ago to automate shift trades and schedule work, which had always been an administrative burden managed with pen and paper," said Brian Wemple, director of Planning and Support for Piedmont Airlines. "As we used the software, we understood its functionality could be beneficial in other ways, for other work groups."



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**"Success is about figuring out how to get one more hour of wrench time per day to become more efficient operationally," said a power company vice president who attended the ARCOS executive summit. "That becomes increasingly complicated as we switch from daily operations to major events."**

Piedmont recently began expanding the use of its system to automate shift-bidding and work schedules for its maintenance group and administrative staff in the same way that ground handling staff have filled and traded shifts, bid on vacations.

With an automated resource management system, the City of Riverside, Calif., Public Utilities (RPU) Grid Control Center staff can electronically contact and confirm the availability of workers in minutes, which reduces the time employees are paid to wait while RPU assembles a crew. According to Richard de Aragon Jr., Electric Operations manager for RPU, the utility "calculated that with its automated resource management solution each year it can save \$113,900 in paid wait time, and recover \$2,500 in customer meter revenue."

Automating callout, shift-scheduling, shift-bidding, trip coverage and more have helped Piedmont, RPU and other critical infrastructure companies boost productivity, gain situational awareness of resources, so supervisors can go from their office to the front lines.

### **STRATEGY #2: REDUCE GRIEVANCES AND OVERTIME DISPUTES**

Another hit to the bottom line happens when there are overtime disputes where specialized employees with certain skills aren't contacted in the right order, at the right time according to labor, union or shop rules. Every time an employee is called out of order or before a rest period ends, a company can face a grievance; the price adds up quickly. By automating resource management, utility supervisors, for example, can save time gathering crew data (e.g., a lineman's or substation electrician's availability and skill set). When a company automatically tracks and accounts for seniority, skills and overtime, managers can eliminate manual callouts prone to errors and grievances.

Resource management solutions learn complex business rules (or CBA's) and ensure there are no mistakes when filling shifts. This dramatically saves costs by reducing grievances and creating one record for accountability. In many cases, these solutions have improved relations with unions by empowering employees to handle portions of their scheduling and by providing managers with reporting capabilities. With the right shift-management technology, managers can automatically approve or decline up to 80-percent of shift requests just by mirroring union rules. If, for example, a day-trade policy at one facility is different than a worker's in another working group, the right system can parse the rules to meet workers at the point of need.

### **STRATEGY #3: EMPOWER YOUR EMPLOYEES THROUGH AUTONOMY**

Think of a plant supervisor being on the brink of having to shut down a line because she's shorthanded. Imagine a manager and worker running afoul of overtime requirements, simply because the employee likes to work and has a reputation for always taking overtime; a worker who's always willing means another employee may get skipped over. Instead, empower employees to trade hours, claim open shifts and see what's available as it happens. The digitization of shift acceptance, bidding and swapping means less hassles for HR and one, accurate system for payroll. A fully functional automated resource management system can even enhance the way employers create pay records to send to their payroll system for accurate, efficient payroll tracking. A resource management system with time and attendance capabilities can integrate with payroll systems, business intelligence systems, asset management systems and maintenance systems.

### **WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?**

Managing resources shouldn't be an antiquated, back-breaking process for utility managers. Restoring service is a goal, of course, but how that gets done impacts a utility's bottom line, customer satisfaction and worker safety. That said, here's a game plan for reducing your exposure and modernizing operations.

Change comes one way or another. Whether it's the tools or process used to do the job, or the workers themselves, the only constant is change. According to the Pew Research Center's analysis of population surveys from 1994 through 2017, "Millennials became the largest generation in the labor force in 2016." Employers know that younger generations of employees are looking for something different from work: work-life balance, more immediate feedback and flexibility. Attracting a new generation of workers, while still meeting stakeholder's goals, poses unique challenges to productivity. With a solution such as ARCOS Resource Management, employers in critical infrastructure industries are automating shift management, eliminating fines from grievances and empowering employees. Employees want visibility into their schedules, at arm's reach, so they can better plan their lives. By using ARCOS, a workforce knows its company is putting scheduling power in a worker's hands; and managers can take ownership of their daily work lives, so they can do more of what their company is paying them for: Spearheading productivity on the front lines.

