Efficient utilisation of a guard force by implementing workforce management

By Albert Brits
Managing Director - EasyRoster Software (Pty) Ltd

The degree of success of a guarding company is largely determined by the degree of efficiency with which the company's guard force is applied to the requirements of the company's clients. The process of ensuring the efficiency may be called workforce management.

100 percent efficiency with regard to guard force utilisation would mean that the correct numbers of guards, of the correct grades are rostered and posted for the correct number of hours to the correct sites. Furthermore, there should be no overtime, no non-productive time, and each site should deliver the required percentage of profit. Obviously it is almost impossible to achieve 100 percent efficiency because of ever changing client requirements and guard complements, as well as varying degrees of unpredictability with regard to personnel behaviour. However, the closer a company can get to achieving the 100 percent efficiency target, the happier its clients will be and the lower the wage bill will be.

In order to achieve maximum efficiency with regard to guard force utilisation, it is necessary to consider the following points:

- Contract management,
- Legislation with regard to wage determination,
- Number of guards needed to meet client requirements,
- Complement of excess or spare guards,
- Tendering,
- The rostering cycle,
- Operational control,
- Payroll,
- Invoicing.

1. Contract management

It is essential that client contracts are initiated and maintained with the utmost care and accuracy. The current state of contracts determines the number of guards that are required at the current point in time. If contracts are not maintained, then either rosters or invoices, or both, could be incorrect.

It is equally important to ensure that all applicable staff members are notified of any contract changes.

2. Legislation with regard to wage determination

Wages are by far the biggest cost driver in the guarding industry and should therefore be given the most attention when it comes to controls.

The current legislation should be used to determine the most efficient shift pattern that should be used to roster and post guards. The most efficient shift pattern is the one according to which no overtime as well as no non-productive time is accumulated. Taking the current wage determination in South Africa into account, the most efficient shift pattern that can be used is one where a guard works 4 shifts on and is then off for 2 shifts. Some companies do however have a collective agreement whereby guards work 6 shifts on followed by 3 off shifts.

If the 4-on-2-off shift pattern is being used it is usually better to do the calculation of overtime on a weekly basis (after 48 hours) rather than on a monthly basis (after 208 hours). The reason for this is that a week is always 7 days in duration, while some months are longer than others. If you are currently calculating overtime on a monthly basis, you will find that the overtime bill is a lot higher for a 31 day month than for a 30 day month. This problem goes away if you calculate overtime on a weekly basis. If, however, the 6-on-3-off shift pattern is being used, then it is obviously preferable to calculate overtime on a monthly basis.

There are situations where the most efficient shift pattern cannot be used because of client requirements or other operational reasons. An example of this is when a client requires a guard to work from Monday to Friday, in other words, 5-on-2-off. This will mean that the guard will qualify for overtime during each week or month. This is obviously unavoidable, but should be taken into account when preparing a quotation for the client.

3. Number of guards needed to meet client requirements

It is very important to determine the correct number of guards (by grade and skill level) needed to meet the requirements of all client sites. The reasons for this are twofold.

Firstly, if there are too few guards then it would mean that some of the existing guards would have to work overtime in order to meet client requirements. This obviously has a negative effect on wage costs.

Secondly, if there are too many guards then the company carries unnecessary costs with regard to basic wages, uniforms, provident funds, etc.

Naturally, the shift pattern used to roster guards determines the number of guards that are needed to cover all sites.

The HR department should use these details to ensure that the correct numbers of the correct grades of guard should be employed, where possible, and that the correct grades of guard are employed when new guards are needed.

4. Complement of excess or spare guards

It is desirable to have a complement of excess or spare guards (usually by area, depending on the level of operational control). These excess guards should also be rostered according to the most efficient shift pattern. The reasons for the excess complement are threefold.

    i.   Firstly, to be used as relievers when guards go on leave.
    ii.   Secondly, to take the places of guards that are AWOL or sick during a specific shift.
    iii.   Thirdly, to be used to cover ad hoc or temporary requirements that occur from time to time.

It is important that the company decide on an acceptable percentage of guards that should fulfil this role.

5. Tendering

When preparing a tender or quotation for a specific client, it is obviously necessary to consider the following:

    i.   what exactly the client requires in terms of numbers of posts, grade requirements and shift patterns to be used,
    ii.   what the actual cost to company would be to meet these requirements as efficiently as possible,
    iii.   what the required wage-to-revenue percentage should be on the site,

6. The rostering cycle

Historically, rostering has been carried out as a manual process without taking all the components of efficiency into account. It is suggested that rostering should really be carried out in a cycle with each iteration of the cycle being used to increase the efficiency of the roster.

In this way a company can ensure maximum efficiency with regard to the utilisation of the guard force by rostering the correct number of guards of the correct grades for the correct number of hours at the correct sites. Furthermore, the roster should ensure that overtime and non-productive time is limited as much as possible and that rostered wage-to-revenue percentages will provide the desired profits.

7. Operational control

All the above-mentioned steps which should be followed to plan for maximum efficiency in the utilisation of a guard force would be worthless if a company did not have effective operational control. Rostering or planning is only one step in the operational process.

Once an efficient roster has been compiled, it is imperative that operational managers at all levels ensure that the roster is followed by guards as much as is possible. This includes ensuring that sites are neither over-posted nor under-posted. Otherwise, the effect of all the efficiency planning would be negligible.

Wherever guards do not work according to the roster, rostered excess guards should be used as relief in order to minimise the cost of exceptions.

Making use of biometric devices, either mobile in supervisory vehicles, or static at sites, makes the registration of attendance far more accurate than relying on manual reporting procedures. Other than that, this technology enables real-time reporting which obviously enables operational management to rectify any attendance issues immediately.

8. Payroll

Ideally, the payroll should be generated from the attendance details that have been captured and checked for accuracy by operational managers who have also ensured that there are no over- or under-postings at sites.

In this way, the correctness and minimisation of the payroll can be ensured.

9. Invoicing

Ideally, invoicing should be generated from the attendance details that have been captured and checked for accuracy by operational managers who have also ensured that there are no over- or under-postings at sites.

In this way, the correctness and completeness of invoices can be ensured.

Summary

As can be determined from the discussion above, there are quite a number of issues that should be taken into account when managing a workforce in a guarding company.

Some guarding companies seem to be of the opinion that a simple time-and-attendance system would solve their wage problem. This is definitely not the case. The main contributors to a minimised wage bill are efficient planning and operational control (which obviously includes time and attendance).

It is almost impossible to make the correct management decisions with regard to the above-mentioned issues without the use of a management tool which provides the necessary information to help in the decision-making process. **EasyRoster** is used by a large number of guarding companies to ensure that guarding operations are planned and controlled efficiently. **EasyRoster Deployment Manager** (ERDM) may be used as the interface between biometric devices and EasyRoster. **ProSync** may be used for static or mobile biometric and RFID deployment and has full EasyRoster synchronization, eliminating duplicate data capture.

The staff of EasyRoster Software (Pty) Ltd, the suppliers of EasyRoster and ERDM would also gladly provide a consultancy service to help with any of the above-mentioned issues no matter what your company's wage calculation rules are. Contact on +27 (0)12 809-4270 or info@easyroster.net.

The staff of NeaMetrics (Pty) Ltd, the suppliers of ProSync as well as Suprema biometric devices would also gladly provide a consultancy service to help with any biometric issues. Contact on +27 (0)11 781-9964 or enquiry@suprema.co.za.