

Scheduling & Capacity Planning: Labor Hours vs. Promised Turnaround

Treating labor hours as a trackable, finite resource so turnaround promises are verified, not guessed.



1. Why "we'll fit it in" breaks turnaround promises

A shop that quotes turnaround without checking actual capacity is making a promise it can't verify. Reliable turnaround comes from treating labor hours as a finite, trackable resource — the same discipline a contractor applies to crew scheduling — rather than accepting every job and hoping it works out.

2. Build a capacity baseline

- Estimate realistic working hours per upholsterer per day that actually go toward customer projects — not total hours on the clock, since setup, cleanup, material handling, and interruptions all eat into available production time.
- Multiply by the number of upholsterers (and account for specialization — if some staff only do automotive or only do furniture, don't pool their hours as interchangeable capacity across job types).

- That gives a daily/weekly labor-hour capacity figure the shop can actually schedule against.

3. Scheduling against estimated labor hours, not job count

Track committed jobs by estimated labor hours (from the formula in *Estimating & Bidding, UU-OPS-101*), not by number of jobs — two jobs with very different labor hours take up very different amounts of shop capacity even though they count the same on a simple job list. A visible board or schedule showing committed hours against available capacity for the coming weeks is what lets a shop give a customer an honest "we can start your job on X date" instead of a guess.

SCHEDULING SIGNAL	WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT
Committed labor hours approaching full capacity for the promised window	Push new intake turnaround quotes further out rather than overcommitting — a later honest date beats a missed promised date
A specialist (e.g. the only person who does tufting or a particular technique) is the bottleneck	Schedule around that person's availability specifically, not around generic shop capacity
Actual labor hours on recent jobs consistently exceeding estimates	Revisit the estimating formula — a persistent gap between estimated and actual hours means the formula (not the schedule) needs correcting

4. Keeping the promise visible to the whole shop

A shared, visible schedule (whiteboard, wall display, or shop management software) that shows every committed job's promised date and estimated hours keeps the whole crew — not just whoever took the order — aware of what's been promised. This matters most when the person answering the phone and the person doing the work aren't the same person.

Shop practice

Review actual vs. estimated labor hours at the same cadence you review the estimating formula itself (see UU-OPS-101) — scheduling accuracy and estimating accuracy are the same underlying data, viewed from two different angles.

Sources

General shop operating framework. Calibrate capacity assumptions to your own crew size, specialization, and historical job data.

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