A New Measurement of Agent Burnout

An AnswerOn Research Report

www.answeron.com

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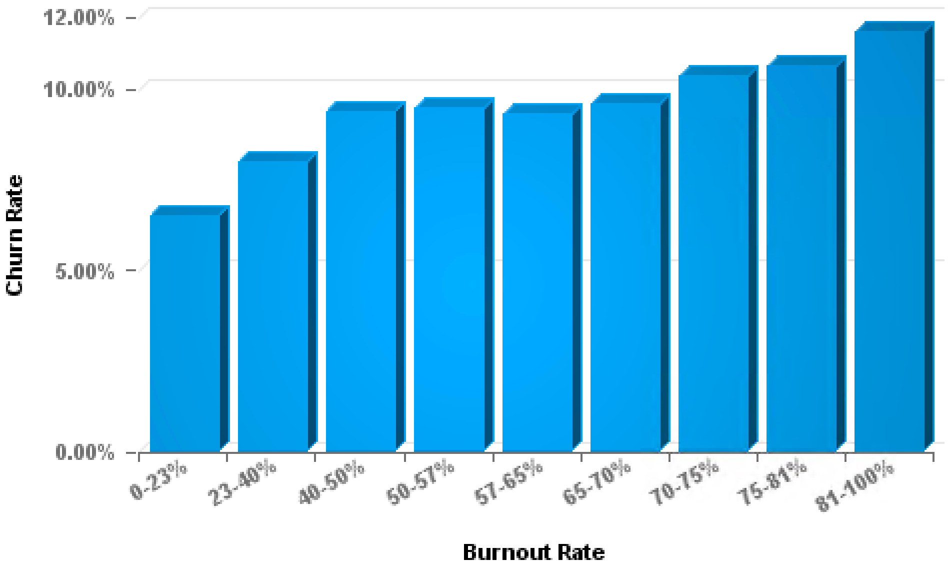
Summary

The primary responsibility of a call center agent revolves around connecting and servicing customers during calls/text/email, etc. However, as an agent becomes disengaged or burned out their ability to complete their primary responsibility diminishes. AnswerOn has developed a quantitative measure of burnout and studied its impact in regards to occupancy, tenure, region, call type, average handle time (AHT) and deviation behavior. We also found this newly defined burnout factor is tied closely to attrition and disengagement.

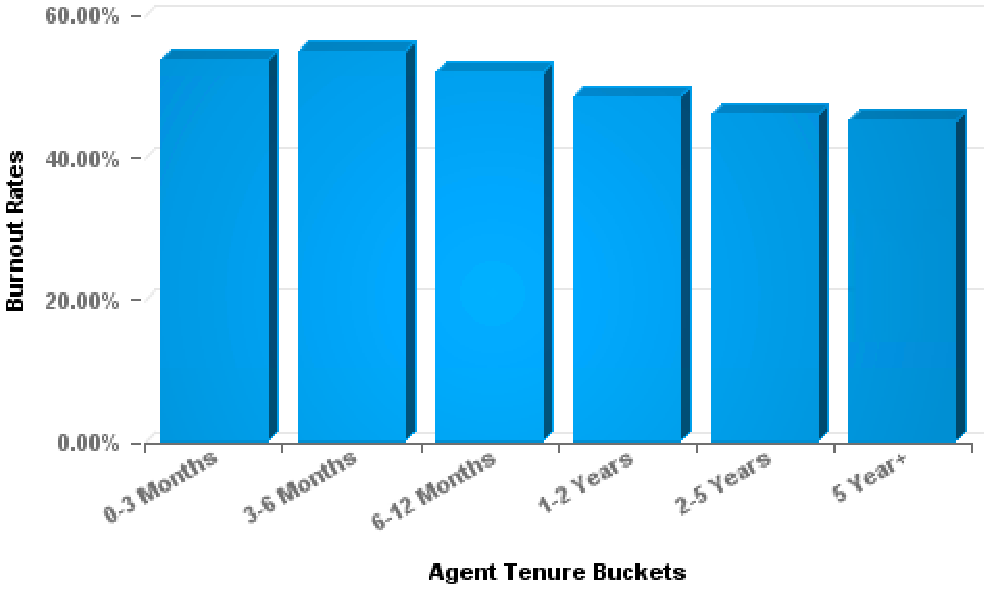
Occupancy

AnswerOn's burnout factor has found a strong correlation between the ratio of hours spent logged in (total time) to the amount of time actually on calls. AnswerOn recently studied 1.5 million agent records from 6 different call center companies. We found agents who spend a significantly larger amount of time on calls in comparison to their total time logged into their workstations can become "burned out." These agents are at a much greater risk of subsequently leaving their job — the side effects of a thus defined "burned out" agent have not previously been quantified at an industry-wide level.

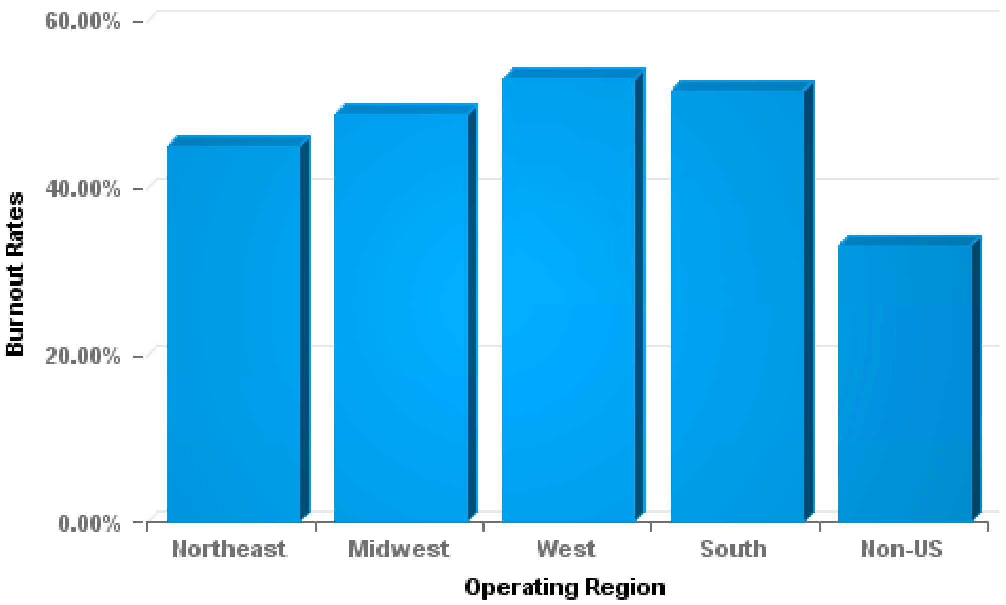
To quantify the effect of "burnout," we first calculate a burnout score by taking the amount of time an agent spends talking on the phone in each month and dividing it by the amount of time the agent spends logged in to their workstation during the same month. Our initial finding on burnout was explicit: The higher the burnout score, the more likely the agent is to leave or quit in the next 30 days.



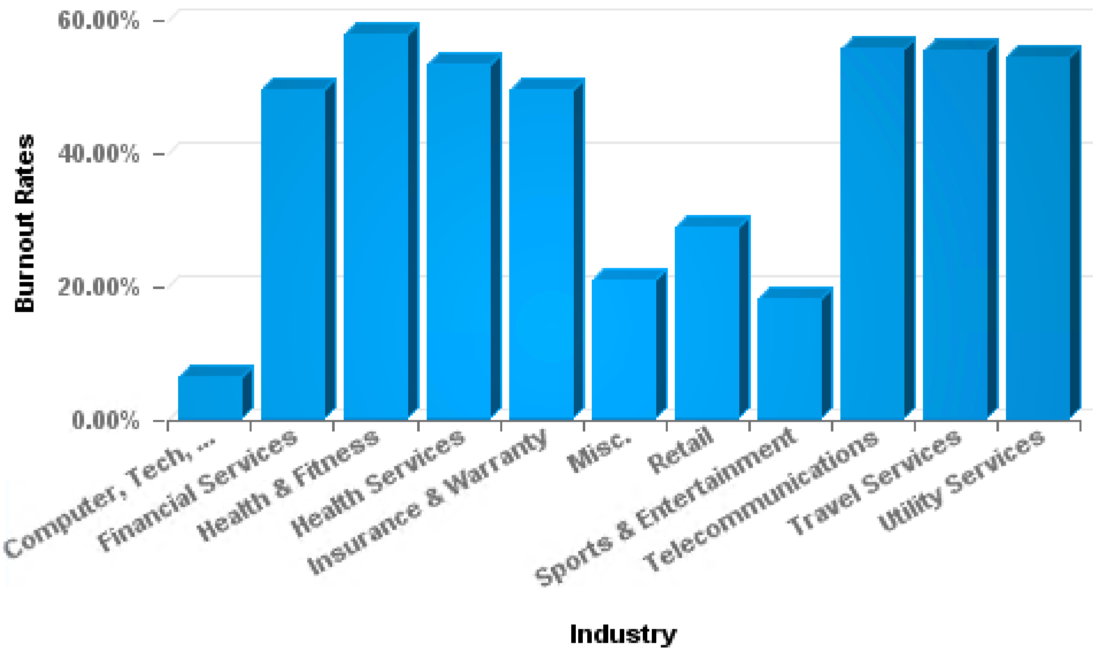
In addition to the initial finding, AnswerOn's research found that burnout could have an even higher impact on churn depending on the location, call type, and tenure of the agent.



Agents in the West and South regions of the US, those with less than six months of tenure, and those in the Health & Fitness or Telecommunications industries are most sensitive to the burnout ratio and subsequently churn, as seen below.



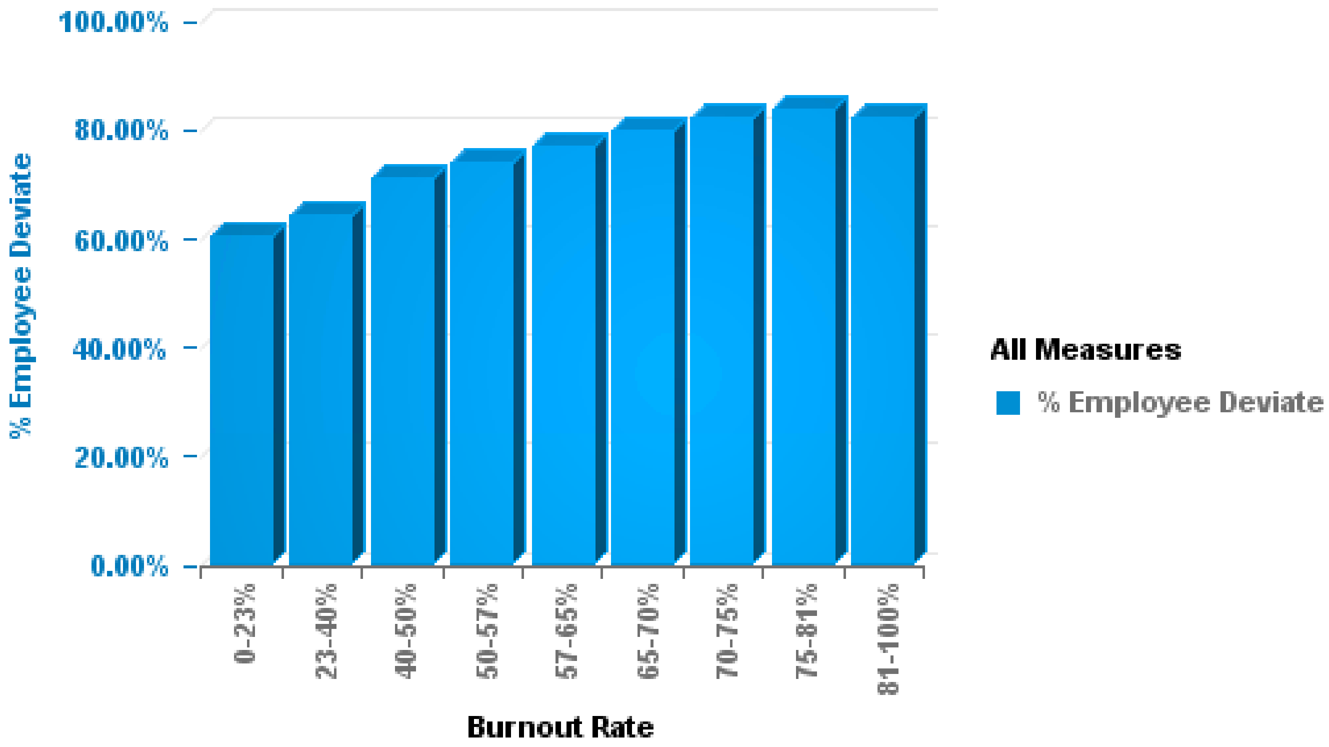
60.00%
40.00%
20.00%
0.00%
Burnout Rates
Northeast
Midwest
West
South
Non-US
Operating Region



60.00%
40.00%
20.00%
0.00%
Burnout Rates
Computer, Tech, ...
Financial Services
Health & Fitness
Health Services
Insurance & Warranty
Misc.
Retail
Sports & Entertainment
Telecommunications
Travel Services
Utility Services
Industry

Impact on Agent Behavior

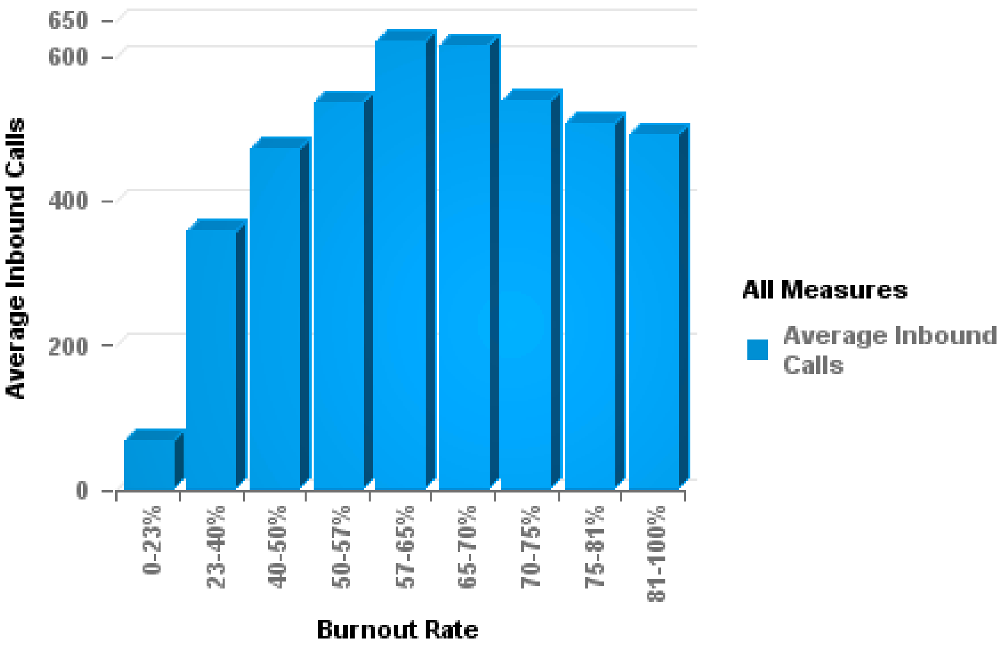
During AnswerOn's study, we discovered our burnout score provided valuable insight into subsequent churn and could serve as an early warning sign an agent is at increased risk of leaving the company. For example, the graph below shows there is a strong correlation between agents who deviate from their schedule more frequently and those who have a higher burnout score.



It is likely that a behavioral change, such as for the deviations seen above, will occur well in advance of the agent choosing to leave. Call centers who are running at high occupancies are at more risk than those more reasonably staffed based on the occupancy rate and its correlation to churn. An operator should be wary of even small changes in agent behavior during high occupancy or burnout as the added stress leads to an amplification of the agent's negative perception. AnswerOn tracks this vital calculation in conjunction with others to provide an early warning system to our customers.

AHT

Another factor as part of burnout is shown by Average Handle Time (AHT). Studying data on agents' average handle time, AnswerOn also found that burned out agents are not necessarily taking the highest gross number of calls. Rather, AnswerOn data suggests that agents who take longer calls are more likely to burn out than agents who simply take a high volume of calls; this means specific industries and call types are more likely to burn an agent out. These industries that are more sensitive to longer call length are: Electronics, Financial Services, Health Services, Retail, and Travel Services. This effect of burnout does not appear to be as severe in the sectors of Health & Fitness, Insurance & Warranty, Sports & Entertainment, Telecommunications, or Utility Services. In general, the more complicated and involved the agent/customer transaction the more it leads to burnout.



Suggested Solutions

Within the call center industry, it is understood that certain calls and certain times of year are more likely to drive agent attrition. It is unavoidable at times that a site will have to run at high occupancy based on staffing or projected call volumes and thus drive certain agents to be "burned out" on the job. Understanding the impact and warning signs of a burned-out agent, such as uncommon deviations from their schedule or abnormally long AHT, can serve as basic indicators that an agent's risk level is rising and the cause is likely burnout.

AnswerOn quantifies burnout's impact on agent risk using our neural network modeling technology to project which agents are likely to leave due to recent call volumes and site factors that have increased their risk. When we identify a high-risk "burned out" agent, we prescribe a specifically targeted interaction which we have shown has been 33.7% effective in turning around a burned-out agent. During this brief intervention, we gauge the agent's mindset and apply prescribed analytics, so they can overcome the feeling of being burned out on the job.

Conclusion

AnswerOn has developed specific variables which can be used to measure burnout leading to attrition. Burnout may be an unavoidable hazard, however there is always an opportunity to mitigate the risk of attrition if context specific, prescriptive, proactive interventions can be had with the agent exhibiting burnout characteristics.