

# The Aftereffects of COVID-19 on the Call Center Industry

## **Agent Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting Impact**

(What Can Be Done About It)

Published March 3, 2023



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# The Aftereffects of COVID-19 on the Call Center Industry – How Much Damage is the Agent Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting Having on Costs, FCR, and Csat?

## What Can Be Done About It?

Published March 3, 2023

### The Aftereffects of COVID-19 on the Call Center Industry

It's time to reflect on the aftereffects of COVID-19 in call centers. According to the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), in January 2020, the first signs of COVID-19 started to appear. However, we are still seeing the economic impacts three years after the beginning of COVID-19. For example, the 12-month percentage change for the U.S. [consumer price inflation \(CPI\)](#) rate continues to be high at 6.5% for December 2022, the [gross domestic product \(GDP\)](#) growth year-over-year in 2022 is only 2.1%, and the Federal Reserve continues to increase interest rates. As a result, most financial analysts would describe the economy in a downturn. Therefore, it's not surprising that many call center leaders are being asked to lessen the impact of an economic downturn by proving their value in reducing costs, increasing [first call resolution](#) (FCR), and helping drive up [customer satisfaction](#) (Csat).

Economic downturn creates uncertainty for customers and companies. Unfortunately, when there is economic uncertainty, many companies treat the call center as a cost center. As a result, they focus on reducing headcount, having higher wait times to reach an agent, lowering the number of agent coaching and training sessions, implementing wage freezes, and stopping being proactive in fixing customer service issues. But, as most leaders know, treating the call center as a cost center hinders their ability to deliver great customer service. But the question that needs to be asked is whether treating the call center as a cost center is the right way for a call center to show value for reducing operating costs.

[COVID-19](#) taught us that customer expectations increase in tough economic times. Therefore, SQM believes that economic downturns require call centers to re-evaluate their priorities for reducing costs while waiting for the economy to improve.

Many enlightened call center leaders believe that delivering a great customer experience (CX) can be a successful strategy for waiting out an economic storm.

Here are two reasons why CX deserves your call center's focus and investment during economic downturns.

## 1. Improving First Call Resolution Reduces Operating Costs

A common area for CX to be on the chopping block within the call center is customer service investments, such as [post-call surveying](#), agent hiring, recognition, coaching, and training. Historically in an economic downturn, many company leaders treat the call center as a cost center for doing business rather than an opportunity to invest in improving customer service to reduce costs.

**Did you know for every 1% improvement in First Call Resolution (FCR), you reduce your operating costs by 1%?** Furthermore, for the average midsize call center (100 to 250 seats), a 1% improvement in their FCR performance equals \$225,000 in annual operational savings.



## 2. Great Customer Satisfaction Drives Brand Reputation, Referrals, and Retention

[Great Csat](#) helps provide recurring revenue, high brand reputation, customer referrals, and retention. Potential customers are significantly more likely to trust recommendations from people they know who have done business with a company than from salespeople and marketing efforts.

**Did you know that for every 1% improvement in FCR, there is a 1% improvement in customer satisfaction?** Furthermore, 95% of customers will continue doing business with a company when a call center resolves an inquiry or problem on the first call.



## Review of 2022 Call Center Industry FCR

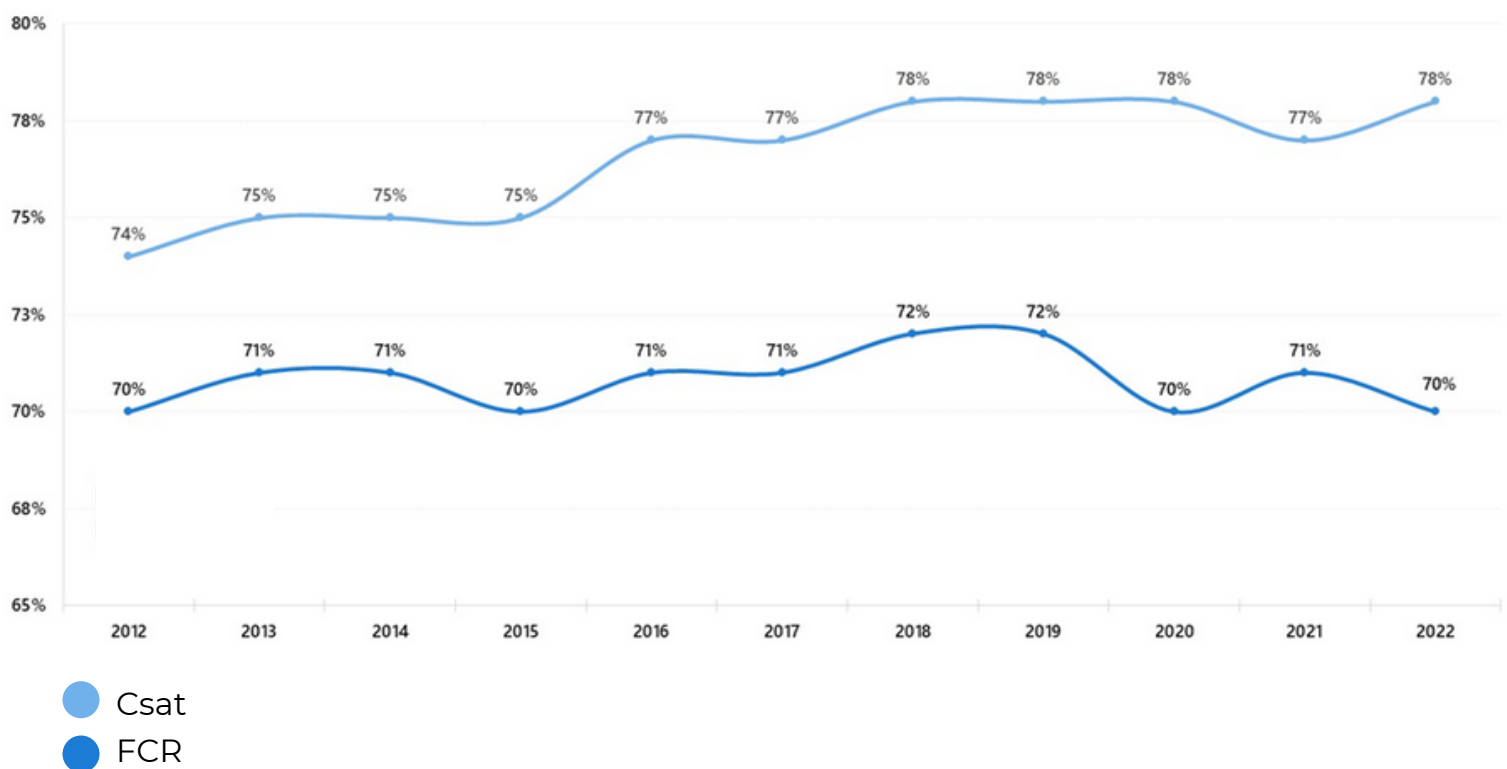
### Average FCR & Csat Trending

As benchmarked by SQM, the call center industry FCR was 70% for 2022, down 2% since COVID-19. Interestingly, FCR for 2020 was also 70%, the first year of COVID-19, when most employees started to work from home (WFH).

The correlation of FCR to Csat remains high. Since 2012, when FCR goes up or down, so does Csat. However, a trend in recent years is that the gap between FCR and Csat has started to widen. For example, in 2012, the FCR and Csat gap was 4%. Conversely, the FCR and Csat gap was 8% in 2022.

SQM's view for why the FCR and Csat gap has been widening in recent years are higher call complexity and COVID-19 impacts. As a result, customers do not punish call centers with lower Csat as much as they used to when not experiencing FCR. Many customers recognize their call is complex, or the COVID-19 situation has made it more challenging for a call center to deliver FCR.

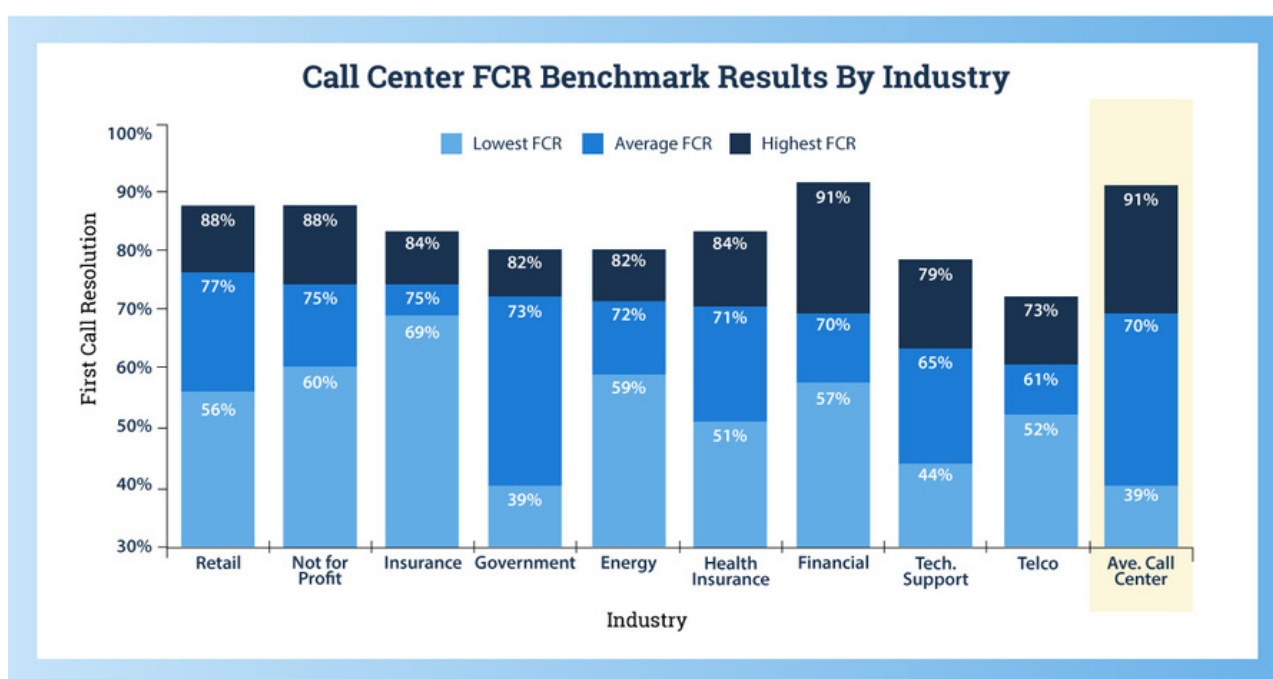
The Average for Csat & FCR for Over 10 Years



## Call Center FCR Benchmark Results By Industry

In this report, we share high-level [FCR benchmark results](#) by industry. A best practice is to benchmark your call center's FCR rate against the industry peer's average, highest peer call center, call center industry average, and world-class call center versus just the industry peer's call center average.

It is essential to mention that customers using your call center are not only comparing you to your direct competitors. But instead, in many cases, they compare you to the best customer service they have had with their favorite companies from any industry. With that in mind, let's review the call center FCR benchmark results by industry.



The aggregated FCR average across all industries for 2022 was 70%. The FCR rate ranges from 40% to 91%. The average FCR has been 2% lower since COVID-19, with each industry showing a lower FCR in 2022 (1% to 3%) since Pre-COVID-19. The lower FCR in most cases can be attributed to the all-time high agent turnover and burnout challenges.

Retail, Not for Profit, and Insurance industries' call centers lead the pack with a good FCR rate average of 75%. Interestingly, all industries have a company's call center performing at the world-class FCR standard of 80% or higher FCR rate except for the Telco industry. Given that almost all industries have a world-class FCR-performing call center, it would support the argument that complex call-handling call centers can achieve [world-class FCR performance](#).

Moreover, it is unsurprising that retail call centers are the highest-performing industry for the FCR rate, given lower call complexity.



However, it is pretty impressive for the insurance industry call centers to perform at a high FCR rate, given that they have moderate to high call complexity.

The government, energy, health insurance, and financial industries' call center's FCR rate can be defined as moderate or lower-level good FCR rate. These industries' call center FCR rate has seen very little change in the last five years. Furthermore, these industries are considered bellwether industries for new people, processes, and technology advancements that positively impact all call centers.

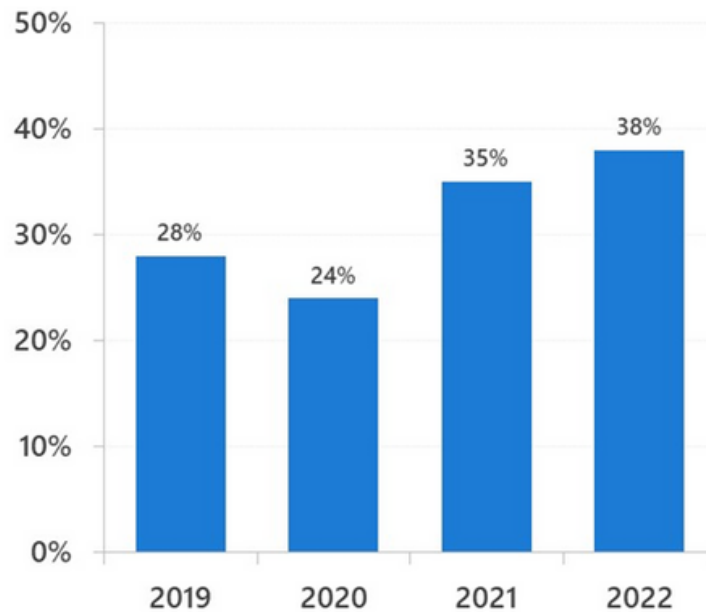
Tech support and telecommunication industries' call center's FCR rate continues to perform at the needs improvement for the FCR rate. However, in our over [25 years of measuring](#) the FCR rate for the telecommunication industry, we have never had a world-class performing telco. Therefore, this represents an excellent opportunity for a telco call center to improve FCR to assist them in delivering great enterprise-wide customer experiences.

## Agent Turnover Impact

The [U.S. unemployment rate](#) for 2022 was 3.7%, a 1.8 percentage point decline from the 2021 unemployment rate of 5.5%. The unemployment rate for 2021 had a 2.6 percentage point decline from the 2020 unemployment rate of 8.1%, which had increased by 4.4 percentage points from 2019.

With such low unemployment, it is no surprise that call center agent turnover is high. The average call center agent turnover was 35% in 2021 and 38% in 2022, which is the highest rate we have ever seen. In addition, the 2022 agent turnover is an astonishing 58% higher than in 2020, the year most agents transitioned to the WFH model.

### The Average Agent Turnover for the Last 4 Years



It is very likely that in 2023, agent turnover will remain high. There are several reasons why agents have low job satisfaction, reduced engagement, or quit. First, it is essential to mention that most call center managers know low agent job satisfaction and engagement can lead to agents reducing their effort. In addition, agents can get psychologically detached from their jobs (i.e., quiet quitting) or quit to work elsewhere.

Our recent poll with call center practitioners showed that **76% agree that agents are burnt out working in the call center, which is much higher in 2022 than in past years.** Therefore, it is no surprise that agent turnover in the call center industry is at an all-time high. Listed below are the root cause themes why agents quit:

- Low unemployment rate and the WFH model provide more options to job hop
- Government financial assistance is available for individuals not working
- Undesirable work schedule, repetitive work, and being confined to a desk
- Poor career opportunities, skills underutilized, and limited skills development
- Not appreciated or valued and not enough motivation, recognition, and rewards
- Personality conflicts with supervisors, poor supervisor coaching skills, and lack of autonomy
- Dealing with dissatisfied customers, the pace of work is too fast, and low pay for job responsibilities



It is widely believed that the decreasing FCR trend in the call center industry over the last three years is mainly attributed to the agent's great resignation and quiet quitting. In addition, a declining unemployment rate and a favorable job market have made it challenging to find, engage, and retain agents.

SQM's FCR research shows that high agent turnover has historically been the number one driver for decreasing FCR. In fact, agent turnover is the most significant problem for the call center industry.

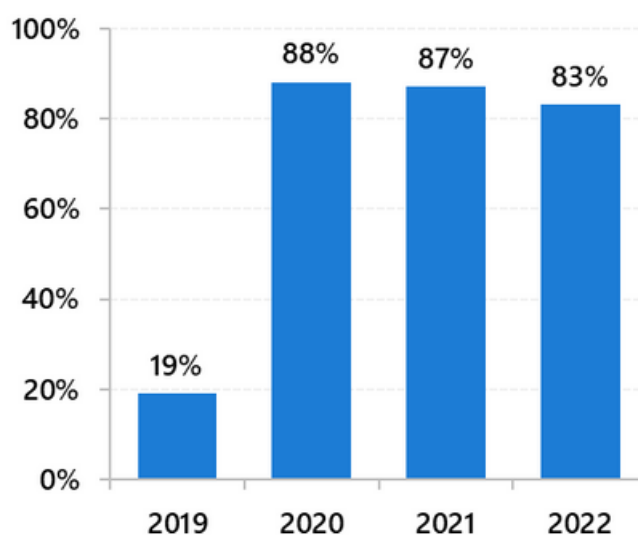
The real cost associated with hiring and onboarding call center agents is more than just money spent on training which is substantial at \$5k to \$15K per agent. Instead, the real cost is associated with lower FCR, and Csat impacts a company's cost-per-call resolution, brand reputation, and customer retention costs.

## Agents Working From Home Impact

In SQM's view, call centers have successfully transitioned to the WFH model to handle calls in 2020. But existing infrastructure (e.g., people, processes, policies, and technology) was not designed for the long-term WFH model, which has built up pressures on agents overtime working from home. Moreover, FCR has declined since 2019, from 72% to 70% in 2022.

In 2019, only 19% of call center agents worked from home. However, in 2022 the average number of call center agents working from home was 83%, an astonishing 437% increase from 2019, the year before agents transitioned to the WFH model. However, the agent's WFH percentage has declined, with 2022 showing a 5% reduction from 2020. Although, with such a WFH proliferation and few signs of significant slowing, the WFH model will likely stay here.

### Agents Working From Home Impact for the Last 4 Years



SQM predicts that in 2024 the call center industry's post-COVID-19 workforce model will be 60%-80% agents WFH with 20%-40% of agents working in a call center facility-based model.

Our agent workforce allocation forecast is based on the over 70% of agents prefer the WFH model, and a high percentage of agents are already WFH. As a result of the WFH model being the agent's preference and with many WFH call center jobs available, organizations will be forced to have a WFH model to attract new agents, especially considering the current competitive labor market. However, many call center leaders believe the WFH model is one of the main reasons for high agent turnover.

The high agent turnover will unlikely change unless the unemployment rate increases and FCR and Csats continue declining. In that case, organizations may return to the pre-COVID-19 workforce model of having most agents working in the call center or substantially reducing agents' WFH.

In addition, it can be argued that the WFH infrastructure to create an engaged and motivated agent workforce is a work in progress. Especially considering call centers are experiencing the highest agent turnover rate since tracking this metric over the last 15 years.

Since most agents prefer the WFH model and the model is likely here to stay, there is a considerable opportunity for call centers to advance their people, processes, policies, and technology in a WFH model. Otherwise, the agent working experience will likely continue to have a high impact on agent turnover and a negative impact on FCR, Csats, and cost. The common problems with agents working from home are:

1. **Lost Personal Connections** – Agents value informal conversations with others. However, for agents working from home, casual conversations disappear.
2. **Lack of Real-time Support** – In a call center work site, agents can get help quicker, and more resources are available than when they WFH.
3. **Problems with IT** – There are more technical issues for remote agents, which take longer to fix and cost more.
4. **Insufficient Feedback** – It is easier to give agents feedback and recognition when they work at a call center site rather than on a video conference call.

## Average Cost for Lower FCR

Since 2019, the average call center FCR has decreased by 2%. However, it is worth noting that for every 1% decrease in FCR, the average call center cost is \$225,000. This means the FCR decline since COVID-19 translates to approximately \$450,000 in additional operating costs for the average call center.

Additionally, each 1% change in FCR is equivalent to the call volume handled by three full-time equivalent (FTE) agents for the average call center, based on fully-loaded agent costs of \$75,000 per agent. Therefore, in addition to the agent turnover challenges faced by call centers, the declining FCR means the average call center required six additional FTE agents to manage the extra call volume caused by declining FCR.

Furthermore, in 2022, the data reveals that 30% of customers have to call back because their issue is not resolved on the first call. The number of repeat calls made to resolve customer interactions for the average call center is approximately 466,000. The repeat calls represent 28% of the annual call volume, costing the average call center about \$4.0 million (i.e., repeat call volume of 466,000 x cost per call of \$8.60 = \$4.0 million) per year.

### The Costs of Non-FCR

**2%** Decrease in FCR for the average call center over the past 3 years translates to approximately \$450,000 in operational costs. A 1% decrease in FCR cost the average call center almost \$225,000.

Additionally, each 1% change in FCR is equivalent to 3 FTE agents for the average plan, based on fully-loaded agent costs of \$75,000 per agent



This means the average call center required 6 extra FTE agents to manage the increase in non-FCR calls



## Call Length Impact on FCR

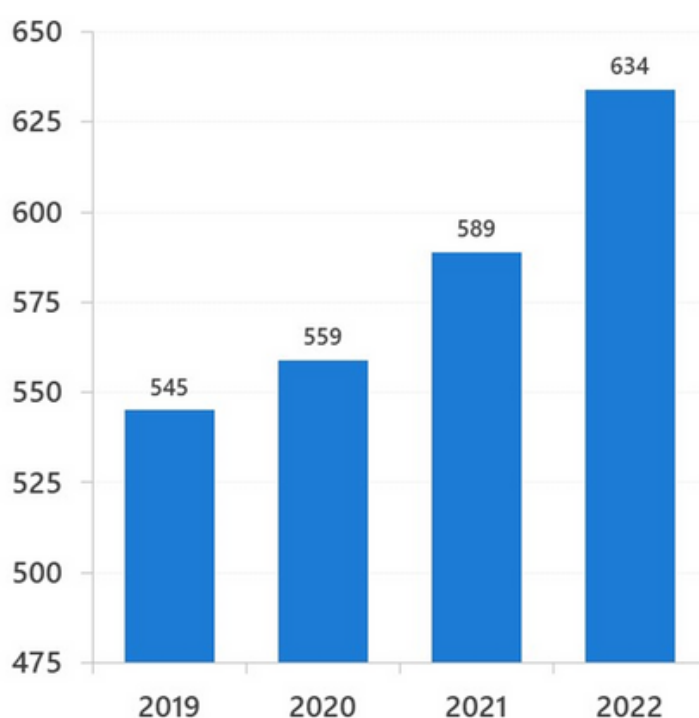
For 2022, the average handle time (talk + hold + wrap-up time) for the average call center's call length was approximately 11 minutes. The average handle time (AHT) for call centers in 2022 increased by 16% from 2019. SQM's view is that the higher AHT is primarily due to high agent turnover and lower complexity calls handled by self-service touchpoints (e.g., website, IVR, mobile app, and virtual chat). In most cases, agent turnover has had a more significant negative impact on FCR than easier calls handled on self-service touchpoints frequency increase.

Given the increase in call complexity measured by higher AHT and handling more dissatisfied customers, it could be argued that many agents lack the knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide a positive customer experience.

In addition, it could be argued that the WFH environment has less support for agents than the traditional call center model in most cases, making it more difficult for agents to provide consistent high CX.

SQM's call center industry research shows that the FCR rate is impacted by call length, with the FCR rate decreasing the longer the call. For example, the FCR rate for calls between 3 and 8 minutes in length is 73%. However, most calls are between 9 and 12 minutes. For those call lengths, the FCR rate is 69%. When the call length is 13 minutes or longer, the FCR rate is 62%.

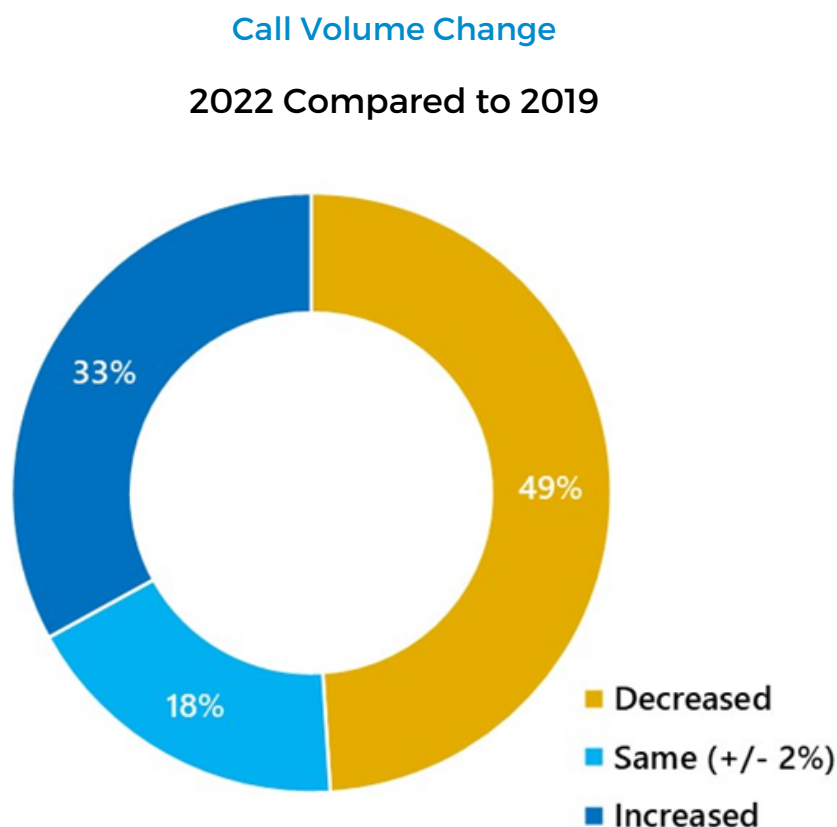
Average Handle Time (Seconds)



## Call Volume Change

In 2022, the number of call centers that experienced a decrease or the same (+/- 2%) call volume from 2019 was 67%. On the other hand, 33% of call centers experienced an increase in call volume compared to 2019. In many cases, for call centers that experience an increase, there was less effort to get customers to use self-service touchpoints. However, the lower FCR in 2022 has increased the call volume compared to 2019 in most call centers.

Moreover, in many cases, the call centers that experienced the lower call volume can be attributed to improvement in self-service functionality touchpoints. Furthermore, changes in customer demographics and the willingness of these customers to use self-service touchpoints also played a role in the decrease in call volume.



However, due to higher self-service touchpoint usage, the call centers are handling more complex (i.e., higher AHT, lower Csat) calls, making it more challenging to improve CX.

Therefore, it can be argued that the increase in call complexity has contributed to higher agent turnover, AHT, and cost-per-call resolution and has lowered FCR and Csat.

## What to do to Reduce Agent Turnover to Improve FCR & Csat: 5 Strategies That Work

The great resignation and quiet quitting in 2022 have brought us a seemingly endless onslaught of call center issues, such as poor customer service and the outlook of higher operating costs. Furthermore, recent SQM research shows that **47% of managers feel their biggest problem operating a call center effectively and efficiently is high agent turnover, burnout, and absenteeism.** Below are five strategies to reduce agent turnover to improve FCR, cost, and Csat:

### #1: Address the Undesirable Work Schedule

SQM agent research shows the number one reason why agents quit is an undesirable work schedule. **67% of agents want their company to improve their work schedule.** Most agents prefer to work from home and have more flexibility with their work schedule. The undesirable work schedules for agents tend to be limited flexibility, working evenings and weekends, and not having a set schedule. The following are four tips for addressing the undesirable work schedule:

**1. Hire New Agents Based on Your Scheduling Needs and Ensure that it Matches the Candidate's Availability.** Hiring managers must understand the call center's agent scheduling needs and be upfront with the candidate about the hours available. Furthermore, hiring managers need to use candidate schedule availability as part of the main criteria for agent selection. Finally, it is essential to emphasize that the highest agent turnover occurs in the first 90 days.

**2. Cross-Train and Coach Agents to Handle Different Call Types.** Call volume spikes and unexpected agent shortages are going to happen. Therefore, it helps to have multi-skilled agents handling different call types. If possible, for call volume spikes or agent shortages, it's helpful to use outsourcers to handle less complex calls and in-house agents to handle the more complex calls.

Agent cross-training and using an outsourcer provide you with a backup option to continue delivering good FCR and Csat. Furthermore, many agents prefer handling complex calls because it utilizes their skills and allows them to provide increased value.

**3. Analyze Customer Service Metrics for Improving Scheduling.** To improve customer service, you must regularly evaluate and compare the call volume, service level, average speed of answer, abandon rate, and agent occupancy to CX metrics (e.g., FCR, Csat). For example, are FCR and Csat higher or lower based on patterns in scheduling practices? Understanding how current agent scheduling impacts FCR and Csat can help improve schedule forecasting to provide better customer service.

**4. Provide Agents with Scheduling Options that Meet Their Needs.** If possible, allow agents to change their schedule with qualified agents. In this scenario, agents do not need to ask for permission to change their schedule; they just have to find a qualified agent to handle the same type of calls they can.

Furthermore, the agents changing schedules must meet the minimum hours required for the work week. Providing flexibility in agent scheduling options can go a long way to improving undesirable work schedules and giving agents a sense of freedom.



## #2: Provide a Clear Career Path for Agents

SQM agent research shows that the number two reason agents quit is poor or lack of career opportunities. In fact, **61% of agents want their company to improve their career opportunity practices.** In many cases, these tend to be agents with college or university degrees. However, dissatisfaction with career opportunities is not limited to agents with a degree. Many agents, especially those with a degree, feel their skills are underutilized while working in the call center.

Furthermore, higher-performing agents can seek employment with other organizations despite low unemployment. The following are three tips for providing a clear career path for agents:

**1. The essence of an effective agent career development program is to have a formalized plan to achieve alignment between an agent's career aspirations and the call center's workforce needs.** Career advancement opportunities are an essential motivating practice for agents to improve their FCR and Csat performance. However, career development is a two-way street between the organization and agents. Therefore, career advancement policies and practices must be communicated to all agents through frequent career counseling sessions. For example, when agent career counseling sessions are conducted semi-annually, the supervisor communicates the FCR and Csat performance expectations an agent needs to achieve to be eligible for a promotion, and the agent shares their aspirations.

**2. Hire mostly for the call center and not for the departments outside the call center.** It is essential not to overhire agents with a university degree (in most cases, a good rule of thumb is less than 25% of the agent workforce). It is common for agents with university degrees to use the call center as a springboard to work in the organization outside the call center. It is worth noting that 33% of the agents in the call center industry have a university degree.

However, SQM research shows that FCR and Csat performance are at the same level for agents who do not have a university degree compared to agents with a university degree. Typically, agents with a university degree leave within one year if they sense limited or no career advancement opportunities. Historically, a non-university degree agent's tenure has been over three years.

**3. Provide a clear career path for agents.** Working in a call center can offer many career opportunities with the call center or other departments outside the call center. But without a clear agent career path in place, agents won't be able to see the opportunities and, as a result, will seek opportunities elsewhere. New and existing agents should be explained career path opportunities and what it takes to obtain them. Agent career path opportunities should be discussed every year with their supervisor. If applicable, an agent should receive a career development plan that they use as a guide for a clear career path to advance. They should also understand what it takes regarding FCR and Csat performance and the skills required for each level position. For example:

**Entry level (1-3 years experience)**

- Agent
- Escalation Agent
- QA Evaluator
- Helpdesk Agent

**Mid-level (4-8 years experience)**

- Team Leader
- Manager
- Quality Assurance Manager
- Trainer

**Senior level (8 or more years experience)**

- Manager
- Director

### #3: Dealing with Dissatisfied Customers

SQM agent research shows the number three reason why agents quit is dealing with dissatisfied or complaint callers. Additionally, **50% of agents quit because they dislike dealing with dissatisfied customers.** All call center agents have experience dealing with complaint calls or dissatisfied customers. In fact, on average, call center agents are subject to 3 to 5 dissatisfied customers daily.

Dealing with dissatisfied customers is part of an agent's role, but it's never easy. Here are some tips for [agents dealing with dissatisfied customers](#):

- Remain calm on the call the entire time
- View a complaint or dissatisfied customer as a gift to provide service recovery
- Listen actively to what the customer is saying
- Be empathic, caring and apologetic
- Take ownership in finding a solution
- When possible, review CX post-call surveys

If an agent knows what to say and, more importantly, how to say it, an agent may be able to provide great Csats or service recovery. SQM research shows that **13% of customers using a call center describe their call as a complaint.** Complaint callers' Csats (top box rating response) is 41%, while non-complaint callers' Csats (top box rating response) is 76%.

The high percentage of complaint callers and Csats ratings for those calls suggest a substantial opportunity to improve customer service for complaint calls.

Below is a word map illustrating the top 25 CX words for agents dealing with dissatisfied customers, complaint callers, and delivering great customer service.



In a call center environment, the agent's language positively impacts their ability to deal with dissatisfied customers and deliver great Csats. When Csats improve for an agent or service recovery takes place, the agent's language in handling calls is the primary source of customer service improvement.

A high-performing agent for dealing with dissatisfied callers and delivering great Csats will utilize the right tone, pace, words, and phrases for the entire call to provide a great CX.

As most call center leaders and agents know, positive language helps improve a customer journey experience. However, it takes more than positive words; it takes the right word choices and phrases that go beyond improving CX to delivering great Csats consistently that positively impacts customer retention, brand reputation, and referrals.

Based on SQM Group conducting over 5 million surveys with customers who used an inbound customer service call center and our customer sentiment analysis, we have determined the [top 25 call-handling words and phrases](#). Agents need to use the top 25 call-handling words and phrases to deal with dissatisfied customers and deliver great Csats.

The top 25 call-handling words and phrases are ranked for positive impact to assist agents in delivering great customer service. It is essential to emphasize that all 25 words and phrases are important, and each one of the words and phrases can, by themselves, help an agent deliver great Csats. However, it's vital to stress that call resolution words and phrases are essential for agents to provide great Csats.

Three takeaways from this section are:

- Incorporate word phrases into agent scripts, coaching, and training.
- Agents need to choose their word phrases carefully with customers.
- Agents should use a script if they need to.

## #4: Not Feeling Appreciated or Valued

Many non-SQM studies show that the number one reason why agents leave a company is because of a lack of recognition at work or being paid enough for the quality of work they do and handling tough calls. In addition, SQM research shows that **31% of agents feel unappreciated or valued**. Therefore, one of call centers' most significant challenges is effectively recognizing their agents in a remote environment.

Most call centers struggling with agent turnover do not have a recognition program that recognizes agents virtually or in a timely manner, leading to agent disengagement. In addition, the recognition program must provide timely incentives, so agents are not waiting until the end of a year or a quarter to receive recognition and rewards.

In addition, call centers have struggled to incorporate recognition programs providing timely recognition that works effectively for WFH agents. In the call center, an agent's recognition needs can be met by customers, peers, and management, showing appreciation and recognition for customer service. [Agent recognition](#) should be carried out by senior management, their peers, and, most importantly, the customers they serve. The following are three tips for making an agent feel appreciated and valued:

1. [The Csat certification](#) program has been one of the most effective recognition practices for helping call center leaders motivate agents and supervisors to improve their FCR and Csat. Most top-performing call centers use a customer service certification program for recognizing agents and supervisors. The basic premise of such programs is to let the [customer judge the customer service](#) received and determine if they experienced a great Csat call. A Csat certification program based on customers who have used your call center is considered the fairest, most accurate, and most meaningful way to certify agents and supervisors as world-class customer service performers. In most cases, agents and supervisors have more pride in being recognized by customers than by managers using traditional operational metrics.

2. [An excellent way to motivate agents to deliver consistently outstanding customer service is to provide agents and supervisors with \\$10 to \\$35 for each high-performance customer service survey \(e.g., top box Csat rating and call resolved\)](#). This reward can be cash or gift certificates (e.g., gas, retail, grocery store, food, or SQM debit card) and should be paid daily, weekly, or monthly. SQM's research shows cash and/or gift certificates are preferred methods for showing agents you recognize and appreciate their performance.

So again, connecting cash or gift certificates to a world-class survey is a best practice for motivating and recognizing agents and supervisors for consistently providing world-class customer service. The supervisor must give out cash or certificates (e.g., extrinsic recognition) to the agents frequently, such as every day, week, or month. Moreover, when handing out the money or certificates to agents, the supervisor must acknowledge their Csats performance (e.g., intrinsic recognition). The combination of extrinsic and intrinsic recognition has a proven track record for timely recognition and motivating agents to deliver excellent customer service.

**3. An agent recognition program that award points based on post-call surveys, quality assurance, and internal data performance** is one of the best practices for motivating agents to improve Csats and provide great customer service. Agent-awarded points must be captured and viewed on the [agent's performance dashboard](#). Award points earned are converted to dollars like on a reloadable debit card.

**Agent award points recognition has three key components:**

#### **Earn Award Points**

Based on customer survey feedback and other contributions, agents earn award points. These incentive points are earned as customer surveys are collected, meaning the recognition is timely in connecting the agent reward to a transaction that typically happened within one business day.

#### **Gamification**

Leverage the behavioral science benefits of gamification to increase engagement in a fun way that motivates agents to increase their award points and improve FCR and great CX.

#### **Redeem Award Points**

Award points are converted to dollars and can be redeemed using a debit card or gift card to purchase what agents want most at retailers.

**Other Top Agent Recognition Motivators:**

- 1. Advancement** career opportunities based on agent Csats and call resolution performance.
- 2. Additional Training and Development** provide agents with more advancement opportunities.
- 3. Special Assignments** are closely aligned with the number 1 motivator (advancement) because it helps agents to advance within the call center or the organization based on their Csats performance.

4. **Time Off** provides a balanced lifestyle.

5. **Recognition** is where agents' Csats and call resolution performance is recognized in either a group or private setting.

6. **Cash/Gift Cards** provide agents with money for their Csats and call resolution accomplishments, many of whom use those gift cards or debit cards for their day-to-day living expenses (e.g., gas, food, and merchandise).

7. **Reward Points** can be converted to a dollar value for agents to redeem using a debit card and provide instant gratification for delivering excellent customer service.

8. **Increased Autonomy** is for agents who want less supervision because they have a high-performance Csats and call resolution track record.

9. **Party and Fun Activities** allow agents to celebrate their Csats and call resolution performance with other agents.

10. **Special Notes** acknowledges agent Csats and call resolution performance with a congratulatory note. When the note comes from their supervisor, agents like to receive it through an email or note card; however, when it comes from senior management, agents want to obtain it typed on signed letterhead or a signed notecard.

11. **Performance Updates** are for self-motivated agents who need to be informed of or have access to their performance using the SQM agent performance dashboard.

12. **Prizes and Merchandise** are for agents who like to receive company-branded items for improving or achieving high Csats and call resolution performance.



## #5: Personality Conflict with Supervisor

SQM agent research shows the number five reason agents quit is a personality conflict with their supervisor. Moreover, **24% of agents quit because of a personality conflict with their supervisor.** If confrontation is necessary between an agent and their supervisor, the supervisor should not make it personal and should not let their emotions get the best of them. They should instead use specific examples of situations they have experienced and talk about the particular issues an agent has experienced. An agent's problem with their supervisor's personality should not come into the conversation. During the discussion, an agent needs to stay as positive as possible. Different communication styles, disagreements, or not agreeing with a solution often cause an agent to resign or quiet quit. The following are three tips for agents avoiding conflicts with their supervisors:

**1. An agent needs to understand their and the supervisor's communication style.** If an agent's communication style differs from their supervisor, it can be difficult for them to get along. Both agents and supervisors use one of four [communication styles](#) (i.e., supporter, influencer, analyzer, driver) as their primary communication style when interacting with others. Identifying agent and supervisor communication styles and applying adaptability style strategies help agents and supervisors determine the best way to successfully interact with each other's communication styles.

**2. It is difficult for an agent and supervisor to find a solution without knowing why there is a disagreement.** So, an agent should try to find the cause of the disagreement. Causes for disagreement in the call center often include poor supervisor coaching skills, not agreeing with performance assessment, and poor communication. First, an agent needs to ask some questions to determine the cause of the disagreement. For example, were the agent's performance goals not appropriately explained? Was there poor agent coaching? Has good customer service been going unnoticed? These are questions that agents can ask themselves before trying to raise the issue.

Next, an agent should write down possible reasons for the disagreement and consider how it escalated. Not only will this let the agent know the potential cause of the disagreement, but it will also help the agent prevent it from occurring again.

**3. An agent and supervisor need to communicate to reach a solution.** It's not always easy to get a solution, especially when the agent and supervisor think they are both right. An agent should try not to be overly emotional and take some time to think about the situation and a solution. An agent needs to be open-minded and have a positive attitude. Sometimes the words an agent needs will come later on. Opinions and solutions can change with time and after a bit of thought. Some agents prefer to discuss issues openly with a clear goal. When requesting an audience with the supervisor, an agent should ask the supervisor if they can discuss things:

- In a neutral setting, away from other agents
- Without any raised voices
- With no interruptions
- To find a solution

Communication should be done in a way that aims to de-escalate the situation and find a solution. An agent could also try bringing their solutions to the discussion. It is common for the supervisor to take the lead to reach a solution, but it can also be helpful for the agent to be proactive in finding a solution.

## Research Methodology

### Customer Experience Data:

The call center's customer experience research data was based on post-call surveys conducted for over 500 leading North American organizations participating in SQM's FCR and Csat benchmarking and tracking studies from 2012 to 2022. All call center studies used post-call surveys, which SQM's in-house telephone interviewers conducted.

Phone surveys were primarily conducted within one business day of the customer's call. The customer survey is approximately five minutes long and consists of 12 to 15 rating and two open-ended questions. Each call center must conduct a minimum of 400 surveys.

### Operational Data:

The call center's operational research data for 2022 was collected in the last week of December 2022 and in January 2023. In addition, operational data from 2019 to 2021 was collected in March 2022. Operational research data comprised the percentage of agents working from home, annual turnover, average handle time (AHT), and cost. Overall, over 100 call centers participated in the operational research studies.

### Call Volume Data:

The call center's call volume research data was collected using call list data from the customers who phoned the call center. Call volume data from 2019 to 2022 was collected daily for each call center. Call volume research data comprised the annual average and change percentage for call volume. Overall, over 500 call centers provided call list data to determine call volume data.

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