



Employee Engagement Translations

Project started in 2013 with Lorraine Solomon, Ruth Warner, Adina Luca, Caroline Ward, Gemma Griffith and Lauren Robinson.

Initial purpose: to include the translations on the group website and invite comments / contributions to the understanding of differences through language and choice of words to translate the concept.

Translation process and issues

- **Translation process:**

1. Ask for definitions of employee engagement from consultants/practitioners in the respective cultures in order to get an idea of the likely terms to use – e.g.: ‘what is the term that is used for employee engagement in China?’
2. Back translation / checks: send the translation to practitioners in the respective country (different from the first ones) to ‘back translate’ and confirm the meaning and the etymology identified

Questions asked to practitioners for clarification:

- How would you translate this to an English-speaking person?
- Are there differences in dialects?
- Are there other possible ways of saying this?
- What does each word mean?
- What is the root of the words used / meaning? What other contexts would you use those words in?

- **Issues identified:**

- Need for a clearer / better definition of Employee Engagement in Anglo-cultures in order to identify the equivalent meaning (UK, US, Australia, Canada)
- Need a definition for “what is” but also for “what is not” in order to eliminate alternatives
- Need a panel of practitioners (HRs in respective cultures) and academics (management professors) to do a final check of the translations



Spain

"compromiso de los empleados" or "compromiso con la organización"

- "compromiso" - from Latin "cum" (with) and "promittere" (to promise) = "with promise"; the word is also used for entering into an agreement that is financially binding and it means very much a "commitment" (this is actually how it literally translates to English, rather than "engagement")
- As Spain is a country with higher Power Distance, the use of *commitment* for engagement may signal an exchange of loyalty between employer and employee: the employer is offering the source of livelihood and the employee is responding with personal commitment.



Netherlands

“betrokkenheid van medewerkers”

“Betrokkenheid” = involvement

Synonyms: participation (inspraak), commitment (geëngageerdheid)

Usually, the Dutch use the Anglo word "engagement"



Germany

“Mitarbeiterengagement” or “Mitarbeiterbindung”

“Mitarbeiterengagement” : employee engagement; a visible/observable sign for high or low employee satisfaction. Engagement = will to take over additional and challenging workload; involving, motivating, coaching employees, allowing employees to contribute to make sure they give their best at work and they are willing to go the extra mile. “Mitarbeiter” = employee; Mitarbeiter = mit + Arbeiter --- „with worker” or „worker together with others (workers)” – a worker that supports. The word “Arbeit” comes from the old Germanic language - it meant in former versions of German “effort, arduousness, suffering” – only with new high German (1700 onwards) it became a word which means “a task with value” and also employment/ profession. The verb “engagieren” is often used for people who on a volunteering basis work for non-profit organizations, sports clubs, etc.

“Mitarbeiterbindung”: to retain employees; a real good relationship from employees to the company and other way round. A good connection which avoids that employees leave. They feel well accepted and like to be employed in this company. Employees are committed and motivated. Employee retention – making sure we find a way to “link” our people to the company, so that it is less likely that they decide to leave. It makes me think about loyalty. The term was used by Gallup in translating engagement. “Bindung” means binding – to bind someone to something --- Gallup saw it in a positive sense being bound to someone/ something means feeling an obligation to support it. It could have a negative touch - being bound to something also means it is hard/ impossible to leave though you might want to.

Employee Satisfaction has an established translation: “Mitarbeiterzufriedenheit”.

Germany is very low in Power Distance (employees do not need to be supervised to do their job) and medium Uncertainty Avoidance, which creates a higher need for order – in other words, everybody should do their job well individually to avoid further complications. Germany is also Collectivist, and hence “the voice” is given to unions.

“Engagement” = put effort into something to make it work/ make it better. Engagement concept in Germany is closer to “do something extra” and “work as it should be done” because of high responsibility for their own task and work. It also has an effect on the lack of positive feedback if you are engaged (as this is what is expected of you anyway.)



Brazil

"Engajamento dos empregados" or "Engajamento dos funcionários"

"Engajamento dos funcionários"

Brazil has made a direct adaptation from English. It means exactly the same as European Portuguese: "O ato de se comprometer com uma causa ou objetivo usualmente próprio de um grupo." = the act of committing to a cause or purpose usually own by a group

"The act of committing to a cause or purpose of their own (individual, personal) or of a group" - "O ato de comprometimento com uma causa ou um propósito próprio (individual, pessoal) ou de um grupo"

"Engajamento dos empregados"

This means the same as above. Empregados is just a synonym for funcionários, just another word for employees. The preferred terminology changes from time to time.

Confirmed from Brazil: use the word "empregados" to translate "employees"

- From a cultural perspective, Brasil is closer to Spain in higher Power Distance but it is also Collectivist – so engagement may be interpreted as adherence to the group's cause, which usually makes for better team management



Poland

“zaangażowanie pracownika”

“Zaangażowka” = to be willing and passionate

“Pracownik” = to work (any type of work)

- From a cultural perspective, the use of “passion” and “willingness” denotes an Individualist approach to engagement and intrinsic motivation (rather than commitment to a higher entity such as an organisation ...)
- Use of “passion” in Polish may be to denote romantic / idealised passion as in “getting pleasure out of working” like a love affair



China (Mandarin)

There is no direct translation for employee engagement.

员工参与度=employee engagement, Latin Spelling = **Yuan Gong Can Yu Du**

The first two words below are 'employees'. The last three words refer to participative, loyalty.

员工= Yuan Gong, 参与度= Can Yu Du

Alternative:

员工积极度, Latin spelling = **Yuan Gong Ji Ji Du**

employee (员工)scale of being proactive(积极度)

The term of employee engagement has been used quite often in recent years in foreign companies or joint ventures in China, but not state-owned companies. Some companies use Employee Satisfaction survey to kick off the activities in relation to employee engagement so it is well known as employee satisfaction. Alternatively, professionals are quite familiar with the term of **employee retention plan which is also sometimes linked to employee engagement** in China.

There is no problem using the term of employee engagement in foreign companies while a bit more explanations would need to be given in Joint venture companies if they have not been in China for long.

- Mandarin, Cantonese, other dialects differences - It doesn't really matter as the writing is more or less the same, the only difference is how people pronounce the word.
- Difference when working with mainland China or HongKong - There is some cultural differences in terms of the perspective of career development and organisational change. People in Mainland China are more comfortable in giving answers to close questions as they are afraid of being disciplined if too much information is given.
- Meaning: to get out some opinions from employees how they view about the situation of the company and themselves e.g. value at work, enough trainings or commitment etc...

Source: Tracy Xing Tracy.Xing@gkn.com



United States

How would you translate 'engagement'?

A partnership between two entities working together to meet a common goal.

Who is responsible for employees engagement in the United States cultural context?

In the U.S., employee engagement is predominately believed to be the responsibility of the manager and the leadership teams. In our organization, while there is personal ownership and responsibility of the employees to be engaged as well, it's not widely referred to as being "engaged" – it would be more referred to as being committed or hard working.

What does it mean that an American employee is engaged/disengaged?

A disengaged employees may or may not meet standards. They may arrive late to work, miss deadlines, have toxic conversations with co-workers, or they could just be apathetic and mediocre – doing only the bare minimum that's requirement.

An engaged employee is willing to take on new challenges, feels trusted and valued in the organization, is courageous in conversations and problem solving. Will work as much as it takes to complete a task to the best of their ability. They're energy is infectious and they are huge motivators for others in the organization with whom they partner.

Where else would the term apply – how would you use it in a different context?

In the U.S., the term engaged also refers to a romantic relationship in which two people are committed to a long-term relationship as a married couple. An engagement can also have a meaning of an event – a local engagement may mean a party, soirée, meeting, etc.

The U.S. dictionary defines engagement as:

- the act of [engaging](#) or the state of being [engaged](#).
- an appointment or arrangement: *a business engagement.*
- betrothal: *They announced their engagement.*
- a pledge; an obligation or agreement: *All his time seems to be taken up with social engagements.*
- Employment, or a period or post of employment, especially in the performing arts: *Her engagement at the nightclub [will](#) last five weeks.*

Source: Melissa Boatwright melissa.boatwright@thompsonreuters.com



India (Hindi)

“naukri lagav”

- “naukar” as the term used for employee (plural: “naukri”) – the historical meaning of the term is: “person working in the household (family helper/servant)”
- Naukri नौकरी: Job / Service; it is a word in Hindi, meaning a job that earns the doer an income , as not all jobs bring money ...
- ‘lagav’ means attachment/ affection
- Meaning for “lagav”: लगाव
 - Attachment e.g. attachment to a formal agenda
 - Affection e.g. he had trouble expressing the affection he felt



Russia

"вовлечение персонала" [*vovlecenie personala*]

- 'Вовлечение' [*vovlecenie*] is the direct translation of involvement ('readiness to engage with work') meaning how far management involves the staff
- 'персонала' [*personala*] means 'of the staff' (Genitive case)



Romania

‘Implicarea Angajatilor’

‘a implica’ = vb. to involve (to be involved by someone, assumed that an external party involves the employees i.e. the manager); also means ‘to cause to happen’ from: fr. **impliquer**, lat. **implicare**.
Secondary meaning: ‘a fi implicat’ = vb. to be committed

‘angajatilor’ = employees (Genitive case ‘ of the employees’)

‘angajat’ (sg) = someone employed at workplace, in the army, or voluntarily into a cause; it implies the meaning of ‘obligation’ from: fr. **engager**.



Japan

Don't have the concept "engagement" in local culture; Don't give kanji to those terms but put letters (katakana) to pick up the pronunciation:

“エンゲージメント” = “sei sha in en geh ji mento”

“Sei sha in” means properly employed workers. They are normally given salary monthly. Opposite word of “Sei sha in” is “Keiyaku sha in”, which means contract workers.

On the other hand, “employee” can be translated as “従業員” in most cases.

従業員エンゲージメント = “juu gyo in en geh ji mento”

When we say “Jyu gyo in”, we think of “workers” or “employees” in general meaning.

“Engagement” could be often understood and used as “blindly loyal to organizations” even by executives of big name companies, just because it is considered a traditional value and even virtue to be “blindly loyal” no matter what people honestly feel with them. So my advice is that the term, 従業員エンゲージメント, alone could be misunderstood by Japanese readers without explanation of comprehensive ideas of the term “employee engagement”

Regarding an employee engagement survey topic - no survey suppliers could get the honest opinions of Japanese employees as long as they are providing "yes-no" type questions such as "do you like working for this company? - agree, med, disagree," because then they can't do anything but just mark "medium." We have been educated "not to think of yes or no" but rather trained "to be in the middle of any opinions." So people would feel uncomfortable to answer clearly "agree" or "disagree." Then my alternative advice would be to let them give a score to each statement; "I am proud of working for this company. - score 70", which could allow people even show a bit of negative perceptions for a "balance", which is more comfortably than "yes-no" type questions. Otherwise, what you could get from Japanese employees would always be "so-so about everything."

Alternative view (Keigo Takada, consultant): The meaning of “engagement” for Japanese - I believe we are using this word as the same as you do. I don't think there are people who think of “blindly loyal” to the company s/he belongs when s/he hears engagement. (We must have thought in that way but that view has gone by now.) I feel many people are using this word instead of “work motivation”. I guess you know the fact about Japan that over 30,000 people commit suicide every year. A certain portion of 30,000 people comes from problems deriving from work. So, HR people are eager to find ways to make employees like their works. We are living in a stressful world...



Portugal

"compromisso dos colaboradores"

- literal translation: 'employees commitment'
- "colaboradores" = employees – the term has become the politically correct way to address employees in HR/Leadership speak as a way to minimise the hierarchical differences between the bosses and the staff (replacing 'empregados')
- "compromisso" = commitment – the term means going beyond the line of duty; almost a blood pact, where your word and corresponding behaviours are paramount to keep face. It's something deep and important, especially in the Portuguese culture. If you "commit" to something or someone, who keep up to it! Risking your good faith or credibility if you don't.



France

"l'engagement et la participation des employés" best conveys the notion of "Employee engagement"

Alternatives:

"la motivation des employés" (with the caveat that the latter tends to allude to "self motivation" rather than "group motivation").

"la mobilisation des employés" or "l'implication des employés"

- "l'engagement..." = employees taking part voluntarily and willingly, feeling committed
- "la participation..." = employees actively speaking up and expressing one's voice
- "la mobilisation..." means: employees taking their future into their own hands, ready to change things. This term would be relevant mainly in cases of crisis management or special situations, say after a big redundancy plan where employees are showing signs of demotivation ("la mobilisation des employés n'est pas au rendez vous"). I prefer "la motivation des employés" (best translation is "employee motivation")
- "l'implication..." means: employees caring about (their company) and wishing to be involved (best translation is "Involvement")