



Business

IN CONJUNCTION WITH



THE LANGUAGE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

By Sara Davila, *Chief Learning Officer* magazine

Global enterprises, international and national firms, and local businesses have at least one thing in common — each is working to improve return on investments while maintaining an engaged, qualified workforce. The reality is that workers today are the least engaged they have ever been, with independent research showing current levels of disengagement hovering around 70 percent worldwide¹. For most employers, 30 percent or less of their employees are engaged day-to-day. What are the consequences of the disengaged workforce? Reduced profitability, decreased productivity, and increased stress, turnover, and workplace accidents². Organizations are utilizing a variety of solutions to try to improve employee engagement. A recent survey may point to a surprising option for employers that improves engagement, increases satisfaction with work, and boosts productivity—while making organizations more attractive to top talent and potentially more competitive globally.



The potent new weapon for employers? Language acquisition in the form of on-the-job language training. In the 2014 Employee Use Insight survey, the Rosetta Stone Enterprise and Education division examined a cross-section of employees at multinational companies utilizing Rosetta Stone® enterprise language-training products to improve language competency. Results show that employees who are taking advantage of access to enterprise-based language products are doing more than learning language, describing benefits that point to measurable ROI for organizations ready to invest in employee language training.

Top Findings

1. Language training increases confidence: 79 percent of respondents feel more confidence when doing work that requires interaction with speakers of other languages, including customers.
2. Comprehension improves production: 8 out of 10 respondents feel more productive working with teams, partners, and vendors who speak the language they are learning.
3. Language engages: 8 out of 10 respondents feel more engaged on the job because of employer-provided language training.
4. Language demonstrates employer support: 8 out of 10 felt that access to language training tools was a representation of the company's interest in personal development.
5. Language training translates to employee retention: Employees learning a language on the job reported they were 71 percent more likely to remain with their employer.

Defining Engagement

According to the 2014 Talent Management Employee Engagement survey, the majority (85 percent) of organizations define engagement as "the extent to which employees are motivated to contribute to organizational success and are willing to apply discretionary effort to accomplish tasks important to the achievement of organizational goals."³ The most common offerings made by employers to improve engagement are numerous and include:

- Employee recognition programs (61 percent)
- Work-life balance programs (55percent)
- Wellness programs (50 percent)
- Stretch assignments (45 percent)
- Incentive programs (42 percent)

Additionally, roughly a quarter of companies offer benefit programs (29 percent), compensation programs (23 percent), or matching charity donation programs (21 percent) to engage the workforce.⁴

Organizations are already investing in a wide variety of tools, indicating that there is no single solution to solving the engagement problem. Language development tools should be considered as a valuable addition in the fight against disengagement.

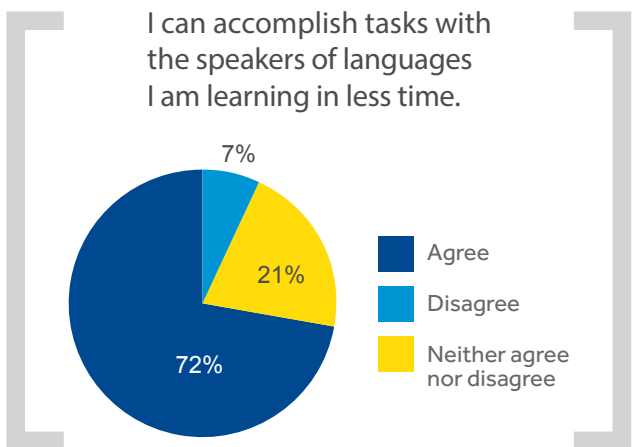
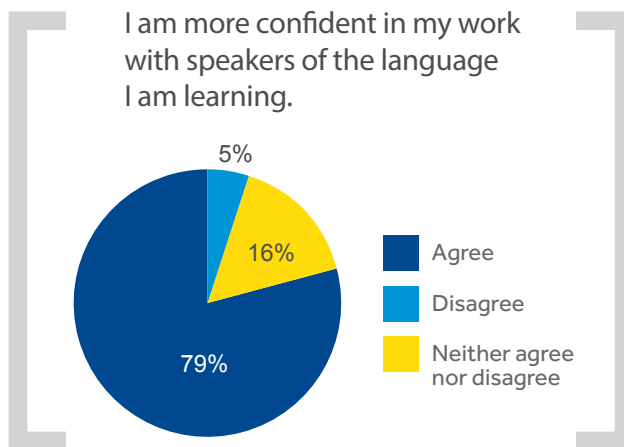


L1: Language One. The native language of communication.

L2: Language Two. A second language being studied.

Employers who offer access to second language (L2) training tools improve employee confidence and productivity, especially when engaging in interactions with L1 speakers (native speakers of the language being studied). Employees with access to language development tools confirm the benefits of learning the language of co-workers and customers. Of respondents, 79 percent feel they are more productive working with L1 teams, partners, and

Language acquisition also influences time to completion, with roughly three-quarters (72 percent) of respondents acknowledging that their language training reduces the time it takes to accomplish tasks requiring interaction with L1 speakers. Employees engaging in language study similarly describe that they have decreased the amount of time it takes to complete tasks that involve communication with L1 speakers by an average of 47 percent.



vendors. In addition, more than three-quarters of respondents (79 percent) state that they feel more confidence in work that requires interaction with L1 speakers, including customers. Of the respondents surveyed, two-thirds (66 percent) reported that they are capable of serving a larger range of customers because of language training provided by their employer. This is especially important, as the ability to engage with customers has been confirmed to improve employee engagement in the enterprise⁵.

For employers, improved communication means increased ability to interact through the four communicative skills — speaking, reading, listening and writing — when working with L2 speakers. For business, this means faster meetings, quicker assimilation of company-wide information broadcasts, increased comprehension of reading materials like posters, training items, newsletters, e-mails, and project frameworks, along with more fluent interaction with L2 natives⁶.

Driving Efficiency

"Due to my projects, I'm in continuous [contact] with [the] Brazil team (monthly meetings, emails, country visits) and being able to [speak] in the local language makes things much easier and faster. ... I just came from my second visit to Brazil in four months and I was able to have a two-day meeting in Portuguese, capturing 90 percent of it without translation."

— From employee comments on the Rosetta Stone Enterprise-User Satisfaction survey 2014.

Language Training and Employee Performance

On-the-job language acquisition is not only beneficial for work that requires direct interaction with L1 speakers — respondents also feel that learning a second language improves their ability to perform in their role overall, as reported by nearly 9 out of 10 (86 percent) respondents. Further, these employees feel positive impacts from language training on life outside the workplace.



As reported by 8 out of 10 respondents (81 percent), learning a new language has expanded their world outside of work. This latter finding indicates that employees learning a second language may have developed a stronger language identity in the L2, which can boost confidence and the speed of integration in both work and personal life⁷. This is especially important for employees who are working outside of their L1 countries, where lack of the L2 can dramatically affect the quality of life by placing a barrier between basic necessities created by an inability to communicate.

However, when employers provide language training, the result is more engagement with their environment inside and outside of work, and more confidence in speaking the L2 with native speakers. Respondents using employer-provided language training say they are, on average, 56 percent more confident when engaging with L1 speakers. The ability to improve engagement outside of work has an additional benefit for employers, especially for workers who are living in an immersion environment: increased willingness to communicate speeds the acquisition of the L2 being studied on the job⁸.

Provision of learning tools plays an important role in L2 development, and employer-sponsored tools are among the most effective for enabling employee learning. Independent research confirms that, for employees — when learning a skill on the job — access to relevant learning tools at point of need that provide appropriate learning experiences deliver the best improvements in retention of information and individual skill development⁹.

Access to language training produced impact on performance and engagement regardless of the amount of time devoted to language study, though employees who devoted more time to language study perceived the value differently¹⁰. Higher-usage respondents reported being more productive (83 percent), an improvement in perception that represented a 14 percent increase over lower-usage learners. Similarly, 92 percent of employees with higher usage reported that the provision of language training shows that their company has a vested interest in their personal development. This represents an 11 percent increase over lower-usage learners. When asked whether learning a new language has expanded their world outside of work, 86 percent of higher-usage learners agreed — an 18 percent increase over lower-usage learners. Finally, when asked how language training affects their confidence in communicating with L2 stakeholders, more than two-thirds of employees with higher usage reported a 50 percent boost; that's a 40 percent increase over the lower-usage learners.

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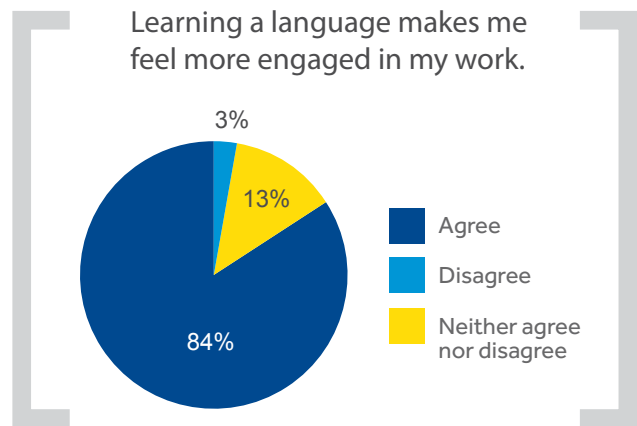
Language Training and Employee Engagement

Much of the slump in workplace engagement can be tied to a lack of cognitive, emotional, and physical activities that address the needs of workers¹¹.

As discussed earlier, strategies to motivate and engage employees can include utilizing health and wellness programs, incentivizing work, and providing employee recognition. This investment is important, as health and wellness directly influences performance across the organization¹². For employees in an organization who do not speak the dominant language, wellness needs go beyond access to services¹³. Speakers of other languages may not be able to utilize organizational programs designed to improve wellness — and through wellness increase engagement — because of language deficiencies. Interestingly, many health and wellness programs are directly funded and supported with organizational grants and incentive packages presented as part of the Affordable Care Act¹⁴.

For a business, providing access to high-quality language-training solutions may be just as vital as wellness offerings to improve workplace engagement. This is because language training directly addresses the three key areas of employee need: social, cognitive, and physical. First, learning a new language can immediately improve the ability to engage socially with access to new avenues of communication. Furthermore, language development increases cognitive ability in learners, specifically developing executive control of thinking processes, which translates to increased brain function and clarity of thinking¹⁵. Acquiring a new language has an added benefit of helping to prevent dementia and decline in cognitive function¹⁶. Another benefit of language training is better emotional processing as learners in many cases experience development of a dual language identity that can create a buffer zone for processing emotional experience¹⁷. This, in turn, can lead to improved reasoning and conflict resolution for learners who become proficient in multiple languages¹⁸.

Employees confirm these cognitive and emotional benefits of second language acquisition through their reports of feeling more confident and engaged in their work. In fact, of the employees surveyed, 8 out of 10 (84 percent) indicated that learning a language



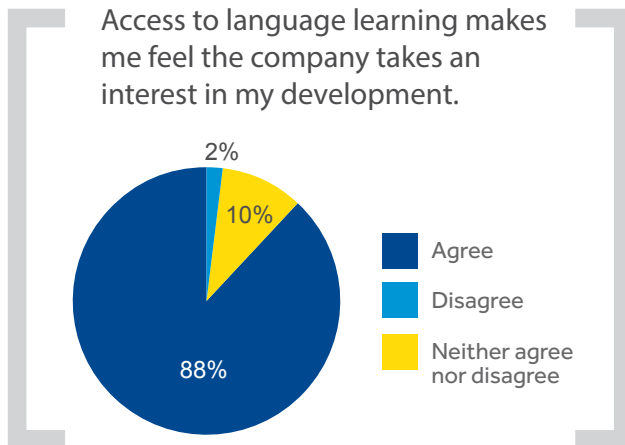
improved their feeling of engagement on the job. The effect of increased engagement in work was even more profound in learners who spent more time on language development, with roughly three-quarters (74 percent) stating that they were at least 50 percent more engaged as a direct result of access to employer-sponsored language training tools. This creates a distinct connection between language acquisition and increased work engagement.

Of the employees surveyed, more than 8 out of 10 (88 percent) felt that access to language training tools was a representation of the company's interest in their personal development. This feeling of value plays a role in supporting employees' emotional well-being, which impacts the perception of value employees place on employers¹⁹.

Indeed, access to language training influenced employee perception of their employers, with 89 percent of employees reporting that language training increased their positive feelings toward the company. Increased engagement and feelings of satisfaction in work and with employers provokes a long-term benefit of improving retention at the organization²⁰ — making the cost of language training one that may yield considerable return on investment in terms of reduced turnover of top talent. This is yet another strong indicator that on-the-job language training could well be the perfect tool to combat the engagement crisis in the workplace.

Language Training and Employee Retention

Responses from employees in this survey already show that providing language training plays an important role in shaping attitudes toward employers. Providing language training tools goes further by proving to employees that their growth — through acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities valuable to the organization — will translate into career potential.



Nearly 3 out of 4 respondents (71 percent) reported that access to enterprise language tools would have an impact on their prospects for career advancement. This points directly to how language tools may do more than just improve employee communication; language tools directly support talent development and may encourage employees to take part in leadership training and other professional development training offered — interest that can improve the internal talent pipeline and reduce costs of recruitment.

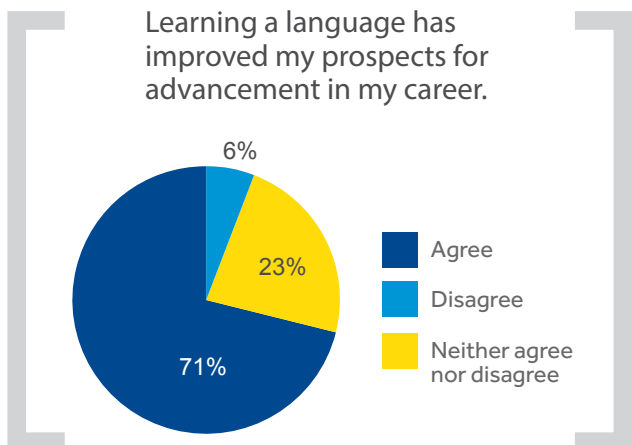
Employees confirmed that loyalty to the company over time was significantly improved by the organization's willingness to invest in language training. Of respondents surveyed, those using language training tools said they were on average 71 percent more likely to remain with an employer as a direct result of the organization's commitment to providing language training. Again, for learners who spent more time on learning, 81 percent reported they were more likely to stay with their company because of language-learning access. In most instances, time employees invest in language development is directly correlated to increased feelings of engagement, confidence, productivity, and loyalty to the organization.

Developing the Workforce

"[Learning a new language] is important to me for ... personal and professional [growth]. I need to improve my English because I want to be considered for ... higher positions."

— From employee comments on the Rosetta Stone Enterprise-User Satisfaction survey 2014.

Those organizations that choose to employ enterprise language-training solutions as opposed to off-the-shelf boxes of software will be in the best position to measure ROI because the best of these solutions offer visibility onto key metrics such as time on task, progress, and proficiency. Recent research had shown that improved capabilities of dashboards to render learning analytics with visual support can help to improve the results of learning programs²¹ by allowing those responsible for L&D to see learner success and areas for improved development. In organizations positioned to launch language development programs at scale, this indicates advantages to using enterprise solutions that allow for easy access and interpretation of employee usage statistics. Access to this information will enable those in L&D, HR, as well as managers at the line level, to determine exactly how investments in language training have improved engagement, efficiency, productivity, and time to completion across the organization.



Developing the Workforce

"Although not required for my current role, I believe these skills will be very beneficial for future roles that I will apply for down the road."

— From employee comments on the Rosetta Stone Enterprise-User Satisfaction survey 2014.

Conclusions

While there is no single solution to combating employee disengagement, results from this survey indicate that the practice of engaging employees continues to be a complex tapestry of effective tools. With a need to improve productivity and keep the workforce motivated, it is impossible to ignore the impact of language study on the workforce. The implications for increased productivity and employee satisfaction alone make a strong case for the value of an investment in enterprise language-training solutions. Clearly, the benefits of language acquisition have influence on the lives of employees with far-reaching consequences: improving confidence, comfort, and happiness in both work and life as tools for increased communication are acquired. For employees, access to language-training tools demonstrates that they are not just cogs in a machine, but instead are valued members of the organization, which is perhaps the most important benefit of providing access to language study.

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About Sara Davila

Sara Davila is a freelance writer for *Chief Learning Officer*, and has been working in the field of language and language development for over 10 years. She has worked in both the United States and abroad as a language teacher and learning expert in the field of language acquisition. Sara has done extensive research on performance assessment and communicatively based instructional strategies, with presentations, training development and journal articles around each topic. She is currently working as an independent curriculum developer and research manager in Chicago.

About Rosetta Stone

Rosetta Stone is a global leader in technology-driven language and learning solutions for individuals, classrooms, and entire organizations.

Our scalable, interactive solutions have been used by over 12,000 businesses, 9,000 public sector organizations, and 22,000 education institutions worldwide, and by millions of learners in over 150 countries.



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