

# Shared Language in the Workplace



Every workplace has its own unique language, a set of shared words, expressions, behaviors, and unwritten norms that guide how people connect, collaborate, and communicate. These “shared languages” can include everything from industry jargon and company values to cultural references and emotional cues. When employees understand and speak the same shared language, they're more likely to trust each other, solve problems together, and create a healthy culture of respect and inclusion.

But when these shared languages are unclear, exclusionary, or misunderstood, they can create barriers. New employees may feel like outsiders. Team members may misinterpret intent. Collaboration can break down. That’s why cultivating shared languages is essential for workplace culture and employee engagement.

This resource outlines different types of shared language found in the workplace and how they impact communication, relationships, and organizational health.

## Examples of Shared Languages in the Workplace

TYPE OF SHARED LANGUAGE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES	BENEFITS
Cultural Language	Expressions or behaviors rooted in social, generational, or regional culture	Slang, idioms, humor, generational phrases	Builds belonging; requires awareness to avoid exclusion
Organizational Language	Terms unique to your company or industry	Acronyms, internal project names, workflow lingo	Enhances efficiency; needs onboarding support
Emotional Language	Nonverbal cues or behaviors expressing respect, empathy, or psychological safety	Giving space in meetings, acknowledging feelings, tone of written messages	Promotes well-being and trust
Value-Based Language	Words or phrases rooted in company values or mission	“Integrity matters,” “People first,” “Speak up culture”	Reinforces culture and behavioral expectations
Inclusive Language	Terminology that respects diverse identities and experiences	Gender-neutral terms, identity-first or person-first language, avoiding ableist or biased words	Fosters respect and belonging
Digital Communication Norms	Shared understanding of tone and format in digital spaces	Slack etiquette, emoji use, email sign-offs, when to Zoom vs. message	Prevents miscommunication and digital tone policing

## The Language of Culture and Color

Shared languages are more than just words, they reflect the invisible currents of culture that drive behavior and connection. At Emtrain, we use the Workplace Color Spectrum to help organizations measure and understand those currents. The Spectrum offers color-coded terminology (Green, Yellow, Orange, and Red) to describe actions and their impact. It doesn’t label people. It labels behavior.

This shared vocabulary allows employees to say things like:

- ✓ “That comment felt Yellow to me. Maybe not intentional, but it landed poorly.”
- ✓ “We’re veering into Orange territory here. Let’s pause and rethink.”
- ✓ “That was solidly Green. Thank you for creating a respectful space.”

By framing feedback in a neutral, non-personal way, the Workplace Color Spectrum helps reduce defensiveness and promote greater accountability when raising concerns.

This resource is your first step in identifying and building the kinds of communication that support a culture of respect, inclusion, and collaboration. Let’s keep the conversation going in a language everyone understands.

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