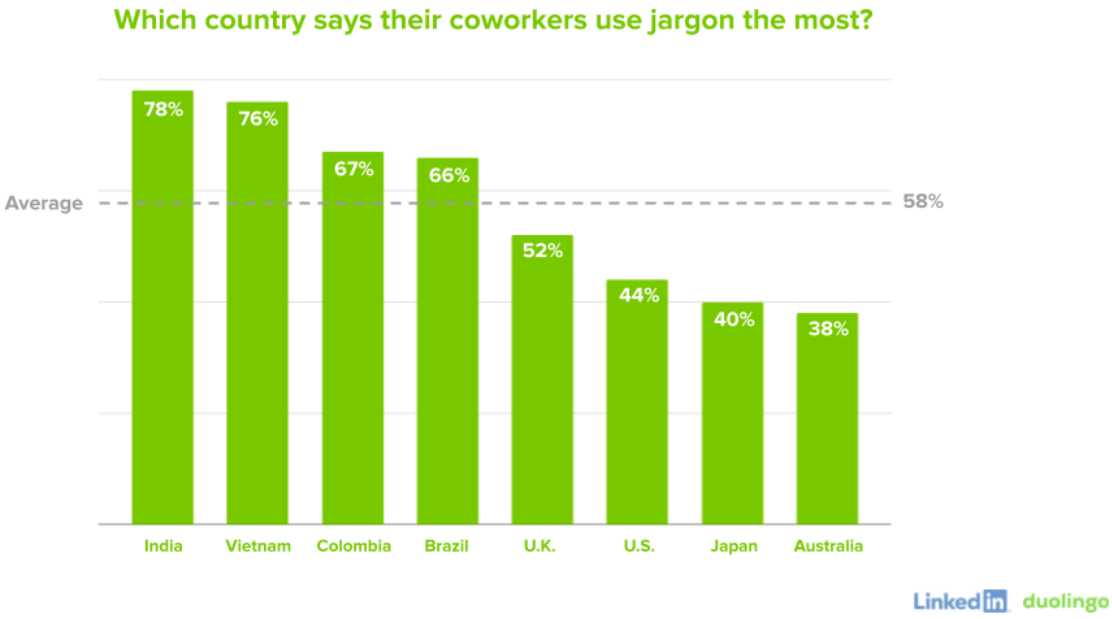
The State of Workplace Jargon Report

Every community has its own language--including the workplace. For some, workplace jargon is a fun way to feel "in" at a new job, but for others it's a barrier to learning the ropes. LinkedIn, the world's largest professional network and Duolingo, the most downloaded education app worldwide, teamed up to better understand the language of work and how we can create better communication and inclusivity in our workplaces.

LinkedIn and Duolingo partnered to conduct a global survey to look specifically at jargon in the workplace and how it impacts professionals around the world. After all, corporate-speak is almost like a language unto itself! We surveyed more than 8,000 working professionals across eight countries to examine the most misunderstood and overused jargon, understand how workers feel about the task of understanding new jargon phrases, and how different generations and countries perceive the impact of jargon on their work. Here are the key takeaways:

Jargon use around the world



Most workers agree: Jargon is overused in offices around the world – but over a quarter of workers barely notice they're using it. Millennials admit to using workplace jargon the most, while Gen Z feels the strongest that there's just too much jargon at work. (But maybe that's because it doesn't have enough rizz...)

- Globally, 58% of working professionals say the people they work with use too much jargon at work.
- Of the countries surveyed, which one says their coworkers use jargon the most?
  - India (78%)
  - Vietnam (76%)
  - Colombia 67%)
  - Brazil (66%)
  - UK (52%)
  - US (44%)
  - Japan (40%)
  - Australia (38%)

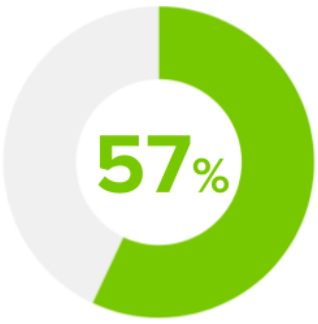
If they could, nearly half (46%) the workers polled want to eliminate or reduce the use of jargon in their workplace.

- In the U.S., exactly half of workers want to eliminate or reduce jargon.
- The youngest generations of Americans feel this the most (60% Gen Z, 65% Millennials, 50% Gen X, 23% Boomers).
- Of the countries surveyed, India (70%), Vietnam (58%) and U.S. (50%) responded most strongly, agreeing that they wanted to eliminate or reduce the use of workplace jargon in their workplace.

And there's no easy way to learn it! Nearly two-thirds (60%) of workers globally say they had to figure out workplace jargon on their own. This causes stress, slows down productivity, and leaves some feeling excluded from conversations.

- Notably, Vietnam (86%), India (78%), and the U.S. (56%) ranked highest in agreeing that working professionals had to figure out workplace jargon on their own, at their most recent job.
- Workplace jargon shows up in every industry of the workers polled. However, we saw the highest percentage of technology, information, and media workers (72%) report they had to figure out the jargon in their office on their own... and are trapped in an endless loop of "circling back."

Jargon's impact on productivity



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of workers around the world say misunderstanding of jargon wastes time several times a week

Too much jargon at work overcomplicates communication and leads to mistakes or wasted time from extra meetings, emails, or revisions.

- Over half (57%) of workers around the world say misunderstanding of jargon wastes time multiple times a month. Roughly a third (32%) say it happens several times a week.
- 40% of professionals say they've had a misunderstanding or made a mistake at work because they didn't know the meaning of workplace jargon.
    - Even though most jargon is from English business buzzwords, these misunderstandings and mistakes happen more in the US (41%) than Japan (23%), Colombia (35%) or Brazil (28%)!

Jargon's impact on creating inclusivity

49%

of workers around the world say that, at least once a week, jargon used in a work meeting makes them feel like colleagues are speaking a language they don't understand

LinkedIn duolingo

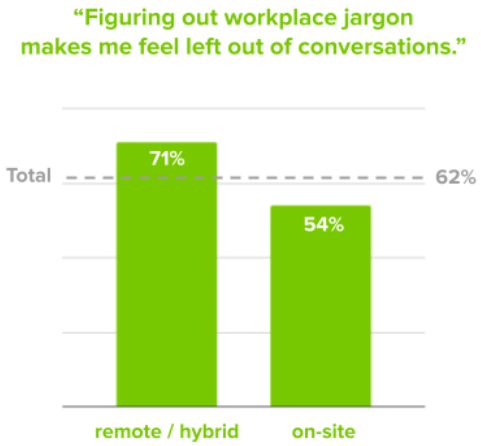
In addition to wasted time and increased complexity, overuse of workplace jargon can create exclusionary environments at work.

- Nearly half (49%) of workers globally say at least once a week, someone using jargon in a work meeting makes them feel like their colleagues are speaking a language they don't understand.

Overuse of jargon at work can also create unequal opportunities for advancement.

- 64% of global professionals report that their colleagues with an understanding of workplace jargon are able to get ahead at work (promotions, raises, etc.) more than those without a grasp on corporate language.
- 19% of working professionals say that when people they work with use a lot of jargon, it does not create an environment of inclusion and belonging.

Jargon's impact on hybrid and remote workers



Hybrid and remote workers report dealing with these negative implications of workplace jargon more so than their on-site colleagues.

- Hybrid and remote workers also report higher rates of feeling left out due to an overuse of jargon (71%) , compared to their onsite counterparts (54%).
- 70% of hybrid and remote workers say employees with an understanding of workplace jargon are able to get ahead at work (promotions, raises, etc.). Meanwhile, just over half of onsite employees (56%) say the same.
- Over a quarter of global hybrid and remote workers consistently report that figuring out workplace jargon was stressful, slowed down their productivity, or delayed their onboarding, while on-site employees report the same problems but at lower rates.

Workers who speak English as a second language feel the implications of workplace jargon more than their native English-speaking colleagues. It can be harder for speakers of English as a second language to comprehend jargon in an English-language medium, like business conversations.

- Over half (55%) of professionally proficient English speakers for whom English is their second language agree that the people they work with use too much jargon at work (compared to 41% of those with English as their first language).
- Roughly half (49%) of the workers who are professionally proficient in English as a second language say that jargon is the cause of a mistake or misunderstanding at work, compared to 40% who speak English as their first language.

Thanks to the globalization of business, English language buzzwords and jargon have become more common even in countries where English is not an official language.

When examining the most confusing and most common jargon across eight markets, English language buzzwords appear even in non-native English speaking countries. This could be due to both the globalization of business and younger generations of workers bringing those buzzwords to their workplaces, even if there is no direct translation of an English jargon phrase into their country's language. So even if you're in an office in Tokyo or São Paulo, you might hear similar English phrases!

Let's take a closer look. Here are the most confusing and most common terms in each country surveyed:

Country	**Most Confusing Jargon**	**Most Common Jargon**
US	1. Boiling the ocean 2. Herding cats 3. Ducks in a row 4. Move the needle 5. Run it up the flagpole	1. Ducks in a row 2. Out of pocket 3. Too many cooks in the kitchen 4. Drinking the Kool-Aid 5. Circle back
UK	1. Blue sky thinking 2. COP/ EOP/ EOD 3. Low hanging fruit 4. Move the needle 5. Ducks in a row	1. Moving forwards 2. Touch base 3. Noted 4. Singing from the same hymn sheet 5. Blank canvas
Australia	1. Boiling the ocean 2. Noodling 3. Low-hanging fruit 4. Juice worth the squeeze 5. Wheelhouse	1. Good to go 2. Touching base 3. Arvo 4. Slammed 5. Bludger
India	1. Keep me in the loop 2. Take offline 3. Win-win situation 4. Core competency 5. Value-add	1. B2C (business to customer) 2. B2B (business to business) 3. EOD (end of day) 4. MoM (minutes of the meeting) 5. ROI (return on investment)
Brazil	1. Feedback 2. Networking 3. ASAP 4. Briefing 5. Brainstorm	1. Feedback 2. Networking 3. Call 4. Job 5. Insight
Colombia	1. By EOD 2. ASAP 3. KPI 4. Out of the box 5. FYI	1. ASAP 2. Brainstorm 3. Engagement 4. Double Check 5. FYI
Japan *It's worth noting, the Japanese characters here make the sounds of the English word.	1. バジェット(budget) 2. ASAP 3. アジェンダ(Agenda) 4. アサイン(Assign) 5. リスケ(reschedule)	1. エビデンス(Evidence) 2. リスケ(reschedule) 3. アジェンダ(Agenda) 4. コミット(commit) 5. コンセンサス(Consensus)
Vietnam	1. FYI 2. KPI 3. Low-hanging fruit 4. SOW 5. By EOD	1. FYI 2. KPI 3. Low-hanging fruit 4. SOW 5. By EOD

About the data: In May 2023, Duolingo and LinkedIn conducted a CensusWide survey of 8,227 global working professionals across the U.S., U.K., Australia, India, Colombia, Brazil, Vietnam, Japan, ages 18-76, with a minimum of 1,000 participants in each country.

About LinkedIn

LinkedIn connects the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful and transforms the way companies hire, learn, market, and sell. Our vision is to create economic opportunity for every member of the global workforce through the ongoing development of the world's first Economic Graph. LinkedIn has over 930 million members and has offices around the globe. www.linkedin.com / mobile.linkedin.com

About Duolingo

Duolingo is the leading mobile learning platform globally. Its flagship app has organically become the world's most popular way to learn languages and the top-grossing app in the Education category on both Google Play and the Apple App Store. With technology at the core of everything it does, Duolingo has consistently invested to provide learners a fun, engaging, and effective learning experience while remaining committed to its mission to develop the best education in the world and make it universally available. www.duolingo.com