

INDIE MAJOR PODCAST

3/11/25 Kevin Ly

Individualized Major: International Human Resources

Ken:

This is Indie Major, a show devoted to the wide-ranging stories and visions of individualized majors at the University of Connecticut. I'm your host, Ken Cormier.

I'm here with Kevin Ly. Hi, Kevin.

Kevin:

Hello.

Ken:

Great to see you. So, you are an individualized major. Can you tell us what your major is and what it entails?

Kevin:

Alright, my individualized major is International Human Resources. The main real focus is to try to bridge the gap between the different nationalities and cultures that can appear within a multinational company and overall, try to find ways to synergize and basically make one big, happy family and a family across oceans and boundaries and state and nation lines.

Ken:

Alright, so human resources. So you're talking about the way businesses operate in terms of their personnel?

Kevin:

Yes.

Ken:

And so have you taken courses that are specifically about that?

Kevin:

I have, indeed. When I went abroad over to Paris, I took a European management course. This was special because I got to learn more so about how human resources in a different country, but not only that, in a continent where there's so many smaller countries right next to each other with such different cultures and languages and everything and how you would even go about to, like, even try to start business in that one country. A great example was Groupon.

Ken:

Groupon?

Kevin:

Yes, Groupon.

Ken:

What's that?

Kevin:

It's like a coupon app if you go to restaurants or like, attractions. For example, I think I did one a little while back with, like, 20% off a massage. Like places where you wouldn't really think about having a coupon, but they provide coupons and discounts in order to drive interest to get repeat customers to come back.

Ken:

Right. Yeah. Is that an app that's originating in Europe?

Kevin:

It was an app originating in the US.

Ken:

Okay.

Kevin:

Yeah. So one of my professors was actually kind of made, like, a copycat of it in Europe. But then he was approached by Groupon in the US because they wanted to expand into Europe. And so they had the foresight of thinking like, Oh, it'd be just cheaper to outright purchase the European version and then just go from there instead of needing to start from the ground up.

Ken:

So this was a professor that you had while you were studying abroad in France?

Kevin:

Yes.

Ken:

Alright. So you were able to kind of have those conversations about that. Now, that sounds a little bit more like business development. How does human resources come up for you?

Kevin:

So one of the big issues that he had or that Groupon was having was the fact of just European labor laws and all of that and just hiring personnel that they would actually be able to speak with, like, speak the same language. But then also at the same time of understanding Groupon's work culture and how they wanted to operate within Europe. Because you can have, for example, like, Ikea. Ikea operates in a way that's so novel to the US that it can't really be replicated. But that's again, due to a bunch of whole different factors, which is why the international part comes in. I just wanted to mainly focus on human resources or, like, the management of all of that.

Ken:

Now, when we think about human resources, and maybe we should even step back and say, I guess we all have some understanding when we hear the term human resources. If we've worked somewhere, we understand there's a human resources office and they take care of personnel issues or whatever. But how would you define human resources? What is human resources to you?

Kevin:

Human resources, to me, is people are, like, the main backbone of a company. You wouldn't really even have a company if it weren't for

the people. Even if you are a startup company and your only employee is yourself, you are your own human resource. Something can't come out of nothing. And so therefore, everybody needs some form of manager in the sense of how you get the work done. But then also at the same time, if you're getting enough hours or too much hours, you need to slow down, take a break. My approach to this was thinking more so along the lines of psychological and sociological, just because I feel like a lot of those topics have a lot of intersectionality with human resources in, like, a very modern sense.

Ken:

So right off the bat, it sounds like you had some courses that touched on human resources that were in the area of business or management courses. But now you're saying, did you have some sociology courses in your major?

Kevin:

Yes.

Ken:

And what kind of courses there? Do you have any examples?

Kevin:

Um, one course that I had was social well being. That course was very interesting because it really showed, like, the objectivity of what makes a person healthy. Not in, like, a physical sense of, like, Oh, just eat healthier, Oh, just exercise. But the sense of, like, it's healthy to have aspirations. It's healthy to have social connections

with other people. It's healthy to live a fulfilled life and pursue what you would like to do.

Ken:

Interesting. And then you said psychology too. What did you do in the area of psychology?

Kevin:

In regards to social psychology, I did social psych, kind of straightforward in that sense. But again, just, like, really tapping into why somebody really wants to work and what, like, sense of fulfillment it gives them. And then going into the dabbling a bit in industrial organizational psychology, just knowing, like, how a person works under specific conditions and seeing like how that can be improved overall.

Ken:

Okay, okay. So that business type courses, sociology, psych, any other disciplines that were included in your major?

Kevin:

I'm taking one course right now in Poli sci actually discussing globalization and its effects on the political landscape, just because, again, globalization itself is a very contentious topic. However, it touches on the international aspect of my major in the sense of it affects everybody, whether you like it or not. And so it's always good to see I feel both the positives and the negatives of what you're doing, so you can at least try to mitigate the negatives.

Ken:

Now, speaking of international, I know that you are working on a Capstone project, which is essentially a paper that looks specifically at the work culture of Japan. Would you want to say a couple of things about, you know, what that project is all about?

Kevin:

Alright, so my capstone project, aptly named Japanagement, with the subtitle of a brief case study on the history of management in Japan and its effects on modern day society. In this capstone, I'm looking to utilize a kind of, like, a mix of literature review, historical analysis, data interpretation, so on so forth, just really getting into the nitty gritty seeing what shaped the modern view of management in Japan and its effects on how again society is today, because if we look at Japan nowadays, it's kind of you hear a lot of different things, tourism is booming. Lately, everybody's been wanting to go there because of the weakening yen. However, they've been having so many social issues. There's a declining birth rate. Their GDP is very stagnant. Again, inflation is at an all time high. There's just a very large amount of issues that are like invisible, in a sense, but not many people really pay attention to it from a business standpoint.

Ken:

Right, so this really reminds us that work culture, you know, it's not just one thing, right? It also depends on the culture and the climate of the region that you're in, the country that you're in, the continent that you're on, right? So that's what kind of you're looking specifically at something to do with the way work culture has developed over time in Japan and then what that means moving forward?

Kevin:

Yeah, exactly. Um, and also, we should say, now, I believe you're thinking about post graduation. Actually, like Japan might figure into your plans in the future here, right?

Ken:

Yeah. So I was upon graduating, thinking about going to Japan to teach English there as part of the JET program, meaning the Japanese exchange and teaching program. Afterwards, I was planning on considering going to graduate school there as well through the mixed scholarship.

Ken:

Hmm. Very nice. Now, have you been to Japan before?

Kevin:

I have not. No. I've only been there on layovers on plane, but again, that's kind of okay. Doesn't really count.

Ken:

Right. So have you been studying Japanese language as well?

Kevin:

Yes, I have been.

Ken:

Okay. Alright, so that's gonna be, I guess, you know, the next step in learning to speak Japanese fluently being there.

Kevin:

Uh, yeah. I definitely is. I already speak Vietnamese as well at home. That's my second language.

Ken:

Okay.

Kevin:

However, going back to Vietnam, I always feel like I learn more when I'm there. Again, just in the sense of, like, urgency and immersion, needing to be able to speak the language, obviously, kind of like a baby. If nobody understands you, you're forced to communicate so others understand you.

Ken:

Right. So yeah. So that's exciting. And then potentially grad school there as well. So you may end up being in Japan for a few years after you graduate here.

Kevin:

Yes.

Ken:

So let me just ask you this. Now, human resources, International Human Resources, you know, it's one of these concepts that I really hadn't thought about as an academic major, obviously, until you came along and designed it. Now, where does this come from? Have you had an interest in this area for a while?

Kevin:

So, it's honestly, it's really interesting in coming about it. Coming into UConn because I was a transfer student, I was originally a psychology major. And I was always interested in just seeing what made people, like, tick in the sense of why even bother? Why do we immerse ourselves in the nine to five when we can all just, like, lounge around and just do nothing? Obviously, it's for the money, but again, it's for the self of, like, fulfillment, sense of the sense of self.

Ken:

Right. Yes.

Kevin:

So obviously, everybody wants to work, but why do something you hate? Why not do something you love. But at the same time, you can't really do what you love if there's a person on top of you that just makes your life absolute hell. And I've had my fair share of bad bosses. I'm pretty sure you have, as well. Like, it's management quite literally, can be a make or break thing in some jobs. And I really, really wish, as part of this to just find things in different countries that work and bring them here and vice versa, and maybe in the long run, just completely find ways to just negate bad management.

Ken:

So now, your grad program, again, would be in what? What would you be pursuing in grad school?

Kevin:

Probably generically, I could just pursue an MBA, but I also feel like I could just pursue HR from the get go just flat out. There's quite a few, like, avenues I can take. I haven't looked into it too specifically, but I can start.

Ken:

Right. So in the future, what do you see yourself doing five, ten years down the road?

Kevin:

Five, ten years down the road, probably still just getting my feet wet because, again, I feel like this is something I need to dedicate my life to. But I'll probably either A, working for a multinational company that has, like, again, Japan is kind of like a focus of mine. So probably, like, headquartered in Japan, but still, like, have branches everywhere because I'd still love to travel or B working as, like, a third party consultant for companies that are looking to establish themselves in Japan and specifically with, like, again, management, in my focus.

Ken:

Yeah. Well, they're very good. So this sounds so exciting, and it sounds like you've got great things ahead. You have one more semester here at UConn. You graduate next spring.

Kevin:

Mm hmm.

Ken:

So a lot of exciting things to come, it sounds like.

Kevin:

Yeah, I'm very excited. Last semester is mainly all gen eds, so

Ken:

Yeah. Okay, good. Well, and we're glad you found us so that you were able to actually build this really unique major.

Kevin:

Yeah, no, I honestly came across the IMJR department, like, completely out of the blue because through my learning community. Through Global House. They did a presentation. I was like, This is exactly what I've wanted. Like, completely, I do what I want. I do the courses and everything, and it was just I worked out perfectly.

Ken:

Wow. Excellent. Well, thank you so much for coming in and sharing all these ideas and all these experiences. It's been great.

Kevin:

Having me.

Ken:

Thanks for listening to *Indie Major*. If you'd like more information about individualized and interdisciplinary studies at the University of Connecticut, please visit our website at iisp.uconn.edu. That's iisp.uconn.edu. We'd also like to thank UConn Enrichment Programs and WHUS UConn Radio for their support of this show.