

individualism

power to the person

What is the **individualism** megatrend?

Globalization 2.0 will boost the wealth of consumers in emerging markets, and consequently their freedom to choose.

This will transform our motives as consumers and employees. Money will no longer be the main influence on life and career decisions. Other priorities will come into play, such as fulfilment, meaning, self-development, recognition and work-life balance.

These factors are deeply personal, and unique to each of us. But they matter. People will demand that their employers take note of their individual needs and preferences.

“Our smart and flexible ways of working means we can attract highly talented people who have something else in their life more important than work.”

Amanda Revis

Group Executive, Suncorp Human Resources

What does it mean for engagement?

A single message to the workforce will no longer cut it. People will demand to be treated as individuals.

Engagement will need to be more personal, tapping into each employee's needs, drivers, outlook and expectations. Job descriptions, appraisals, development plans, career paths and reward systems will need to be more tailored. Tom Plug, Lead Engagement Expert at KPN, told us: “One-to-one dialogue is critical: it's conversations between managers and their employees which allow us to start acting in a more personal way that's appealing to them.”

The individualism megatrend will create huge complexity for engagement professionals. But it may also offer a solution. Organizations can harness its power, by encouraging people to manage their *own* development and career progression.

In an individualistic world, employees will want – even expect – this sort of accountability. But making it happen will require a change of thinking and behaviour at all levels. Performance management will no longer be the ‘manager's job’; it must become a combined effort between managers and their team members.

Managers will therefore need to move beyond acting purely as an ‘authorizer’, approving promotions, pay rises and holidays. Instead, they must play the role of coach, mentor, developer and most importantly, people engager. To do this, they'll need to spend time understanding each team member as an individual, and be able to adapt their leadership style to suit the needs of each one.

Line managers will need training and education to make the transition – and this will need to come from the top. After all, it's easier to coach if you've been coached yourself in the past. But it will be worth the investment: our World's Most Admired Companies research shows that the best leaders spend as much as 30% of their time understanding others' needs, and coaching and developing team members.

Coaching and mentoring should also be part of managers' job descriptions, development programs and performance targets and feedback – to make them accountable for their ‘new’ role.

Finally, managing diverse team members with individualistic attitudes will call for ‘bounded autonomy’. This means giving staff the freedom to do what's needed to achieve their objectives – but within defined boundaries and a clear overall direction.

What can I do about it?

1 Give ownership

Give people the tools to manage their own development. Software applications like our TalentQ suite allow people to assess their own strengths, behaviors, character traits and learning needs.

This sends a positive message that you trust your staff to take responsibility for their progression. What's more, managers can use the results to help adapt their management style for each team member.

2 Set boundaries

It's important to ensure that individuals don't put their personal objectives above those of the team and the business. Performance management and reward still need to encourage the right skills and behaviors to help achieve the organization's objectives.

3 Diversify training

Examine individuals' learning and development needs and consider how to tailor learning and development accordingly. Assess whether your current training practices help teach leaders and managers how to adapt their management styles for different employees.

Let employees know where they should expect development to happen (for example, in their day-to-day job roles or through formal initiatives). Then clarify the roles and responsibilities of employees, managers, and the organization.

4 Promote individual recognition

Peer recognition can be a powerful motivator. Create platforms for staff to praise each other's good work – for example, a dedicated intranet page.

British electrical retailer Dixons has an intranet platform called 'You're Electric', where employees can thank each other for their efforts. Crucially for a technology firm, the scheme was designed – by Dixons staff themselves – to be available anytime, anywhere, over any device. Less than a year after launch, 15,700 employees had posted more than 47,000 'thank yous', and engagement scores were up by 5-10% in 'pulse' surveys.

5 Encourage continuous feedback

Introduce forums for staff to flag any issues they encounter, or barriers in the way of them doing their job. Allow colleagues to comment in response. This generates a real-time feed of important engagement information.

6 Enable knowledge-sharing

Create processes that allow the entire organization to draw on individual skills and attributes. Establish a 'skills exchange', where employees can find out about and tap into each other's abilities – e.g. languages spoken or IT knowledge.

“ A favorite quote of mine is 'Don't forget to bring yourself to work'. At KPN, we encourage employees to make full use of their unique intangible assets, their talents, skills, knowledge and network. It's a case of saying: 'show us what makes you successful in your job and as a person.' ”

Tom Plug

Lead Engagement Expert, KPN