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Murray Duke, PMP,  
Datacraft,  
Tokyo, Japan

# THE GREAT TALENT ODDUS

As the economy perks up,  
star performers may be  
tempted to move on.

BY SANDRA A. SWANSON :: PHOTOS BY MAKOTO ISHIDA

Companies didn't have much of a choice. They needed to cut costs, even if it came at the expense of their employees. But as the economic stranglehold starts to loosen its grip, some of those decisions could come back to haunt them.

"I've seen some employers who seem to think, 'Well, you can't find a job anywhere else, so I'm going to treat you badly.' Those people are really going to be hurting when the economy opens up again," says Allan Mills, PMP, Ocean Pines, Maryland, USA-based regional director of True Solutions Inc., a project management training, consulting and staffing firm. "Their best knowledge and intellectual capital they've developed would just be walking out the door."

The United States may still be lagging a bit, but Mr. Mills expects the job market for project managers to open up later this year. And as the economic picture brightens, top talent may soon be lured away by better prospects.

The job landscape is already starting to improve in Asia and other regions leading the recovery, says Murray Duke, PMP, a project manager at Datacraft, a global IT services integrator and consultancy in Tokyo, Japan.

"I'm really getting a lot of buzz right now about the need to put project management in the budget," he says.

As budgets rise, so does the competition for the best and brightest. A couple of years ago in India, for example, many executives enacted salary freezes. Those days are long gone, with some large employers announcing salary hikes of up to 17 percent. Mr. Duke says in Japan, recruiters are actively seeking out project managers and team leaders, especially those who are bilingual and have strong business skills.

"If employers don't take steps right now, employees who have been on the



## > TIP Unemployed project managers can capitalize on the talent migration. Start

by crafting a personal mission statement, says **Allan Mills, PMP**, True Solutions Inc., Ocean Pines, Maryland, USA.

Perform an inventory of your strengths and consider how you'd like to apply them in the workplace. "Then promote it," Mr. Mills says. "It's a self-marketing approach. You are putting together a plan for employers that says, 'This is my area where I can really help on a bottom-line basis.'"

# REVERSE MIGRATION

For decades, the flow of project management talent has moved in a distinct direction: from emerging markets to developed ones. The United States has proven particularly adept at attracting top-tier project professionals from less-established areas where opportunities haven't been as strong.

But that dynamic has shifted in the wake of a still-sputtering economy. Now, some project managers are returning to their homelands, including up-and-comers such as Brazil, South Africa, Hungary, Serbia, Russia and India.

Within the past couple of years, Wendy Franklin Muhammad has seen several expatriates heading back home. "They each expressed that the market there was more accepting of project management practitioners and have felt that there were more opportunities," says Ms. Franklin Muhammad, project manager and coach at leadership training and business consultancy The Authentic You LLC, Chicago, Illinois, USA.

Ms. Franklin Muhammad recently spoke with one healthcare IT professional who was much more optimistic about job growth potential in her native country of India: "There are more businesses to be built and the need for project management is greater there."

Some project professionals, especially in IT and telecom, are also discovering that once they've picked up some international experience, they're worth more at home, says Sylvia MacArthur, president of IRC Global Executive Search Partners, a staffing and recruiting network in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

"We have seen a pick-up in people who have worked in North America for several years and subsequently moved back to their home country," she says. "People considering a move back have commented that, with much of the talent from their home country having emigrated elsewhere, those returning are extremely well-positioned to get key jobs when they return. This typically affords them the opportunity to out-earn their local peers and a perceived better lifestyle."

receiving end of salary freezes, through no fault of their own, will be more than happy to look for greener pastures," he says.

## A LOT TO LOSE

With all the resource cuts, teams have been expected to do more with less. And that means losing even one person to the competition could have a serious impact.

"I'm currently running a few projects where one key team member is absolutely pivotal to each project's success," Mr. Duke says. "I fear daily that these people will leave and jeopardize the project if

the company doesn't recognize their contributions."

There may be even larger risks—like the defection of entire project teams lured by new upstart companies entering the market as the economy picks up.

To prevent talent mutinies, companies need to get back to the basics, Mr. Duke says. "The first step is to remember that people are people, and not 'resources.'"

An obvious place to start is with a generous salary and benefits package, says John Mingione, CEO of Omni-build LLC, a construction management

# PAY DAY

Last year wasn't exactly a great time to ask for a raise—unless you were a project manager, according to a PMI survey of 34,800 project management practitioners from 19 countries.

Fifty-one percent of respondents reported an increase in total pay (including salary, bonuses and other compensation) over 2008, according to the *PMI Project Management Salary Survey—Sixth Edition*, released in April. Seventeen percent reported an increase of at least 5 percent.

The median annual salary was US\$90,260, although individual numbers vary significantly due to a number of factors, including country, experience, role and project size. Not surprisingly, the more years spent in project management, the higher the salary. Likewise, those managing larger projects tend to get paid more.

Earning a Project Management Professional (PMP)<sup>®</sup> credential can boost a salary, too. In the United States, Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, France, Australia and the United Arab Emirates, PMP<sup>®</sup> credential holders took home an average of US\$10,000 more per year than their counterparts without one.

As far as countries go, Australia leads the pack, with a median salary of US\$116,625. Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Canada followed. In contrast, the median project management salary was only US\$27,072 in India and US\$21,975 in China.

But don't pack up those bags and move to Australia expecting to land a lucrative dream job.

"We have a highly competitive labor market due to a continuing—and rather unrelenting—skilled migration policy," says William Forrester, PMP, an independent IT project manager in Melbourne, Australia. "I have recent anecdotes from a number of sources citing hundreds of applications being received for advertised project management positions, and many of those applicants are highly qualified and unemployed."

## US\$90,260

The median annual salary of project management practitioners

## US\$10,000

The average annual amount in some countries that Project Management Professional (PMP)<sup>®</sup> credential holders earned over those without

Source: PMI Project Management Salary Survey—Sixth Edition

and contracting firm in New York, New York, USA. His company, for example, provides 100 percent healthcare coverage.

But holding on to your prize players doesn't always come down to cold, hard cash. One way to make sure top performers stick around is to let them work on the projects that interest them most.

The benefit is twofold: "The employee will say, 'Hey, this organization cares about me,' and 'I can see myself doing this job two or three years from now,'" Mr. Mills says.

To keep your star players, focus on a strategic triad, advises Manoj K. Gupta,

PMP, partner and co-founder of Pariyojana Consulting Services, a program and project management, IT and telecom consultancy in New Delhi, India. "Promise career, benefits and money—in that order," says Mr. Gupta, who is also secretary and CFO of the PMI North India Chapter.

"Project managers are a passionate bunch, and money is not a prime motivator for most," Mr. Duke says. "Establishing a career path and recognition of one's accomplishments will often go much further than a pay raise."

Companies may also want to offer their employees some good, old-fash-



## AS A PMI

**MEMBER,** you can access a self-directed online *Salary Survey* query. This service lets you compare salary data by position, Project Management Professional (PMP)<sup>®</sup> status (for certain countries) and geographic location.

Because of sampling constraints, salary information is not available for all positions in every geographic location.

ioned independence, Mr. Mingione suggests.

“Let them be their own boss and don’t micromanage,” he says. “Let them solve problems on their own.”

To groom that autonomy, executives need to take a back seat and let project managers develop their own relationships.

“If I make myself readily available to every client, then they will always leapfrog my project manager,” Mr. Mingione says.

And that makes the project manager feel less valued.

## INDIVIDUAL APPEAL

Rewarding a job well done can go a long way in encouraging people to stick around. Some companies pay for education or treat top players to a year-end overseas vacation with their family.

Instead of implementing a blanket plan, though, companies should zero in on individual needs. For some project managers, it might be something as



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simple as a training program, while others may want flexible hours or more challenging projects.

In some cases, offering equal rewards and recognition across the entire organization can backfire. In Japan, for example, individuals generally don’t like to be singled out in public for recognition, Mr. Duke says.

Group bonuses are common, but that approach is only effective if all team members actually performed well.

“If a low performer is rewarded equally, good people will only be further tempted to look for recognition and growth potential outside,” he says, citing a recent example at his company.

“Everyone received the same lump-sum payment. There was no difference between high and low performers,” he says. Because people felt their individual efforts weren’t recognized, morale suffered.

“In a tight economy, the people issues are often overshadowed by a ‘suck it up and be happy you have a job’ attitude,” Mr. Duke says. “But now is the perfect time for companies to reevaluate their project management function and start a program to keep quality project managers and prepare to attract more quality talent for when the economy starts to rise.”

With so much at stake, employers who delay risk losing the *crème de la crème*.

“If the talent is not happy now, as soon as the market picks up they are going to jump ship,” Mr. Mingione says. The tried-and-true adage that companies should keep marketing in a down economy also holds true for talent retention.

“You have to let your employees know that they are important and that they are an integral part of the team,” he says. “If that means that less money hits the bottom of my pocket to keep my team happy, inspired and dedicated, then that is what has to be done.” PM