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Fight to find skills

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The largely negative perceptions that exist towards the country's security environment are a major problem, writes ALF JAMES

SKILLS development and retention remains one of the major challenges in the **project management** sector, says De Buys Scott, director of infrastructure, government and healthcare at KPMG.

& Promising people are still leaving the country and we, as a company, look at bringing people in on secondment through our international network, but are struggling to achieve success.

& It is a major challenge. Although both the government and the private sector have taken steps to develop and retain **project management** skills in SA they have not been sufficient to win the battle, which is part of a bigger problem - the profile of the country as a stable and safe environment.& Scott does not believe the problem has eased over the past few years.

& We are in a real growth business in infrastructure development in SA, yet we struggle to attract experienced staff simply because of the negative perceptions that exist towards the country's security environment.

& While those that do come to the country express more positive perceptions compared to what they expected, it does not help to overcome the general perception towards the country internationally.& Scott says when potential **project management** staff weigh up SA compared to other countries we fall short, exacerbated by strong competition internationally for experienced project managers.

A recent survey of a global panel of consultants and senior executives, run by ESI International, showed that a major trend this year will be a war for **project management** talent and visionary retention strategies, and that skills development will play a bigger role in curbing poaching.

& SA has a shortage of experienced project managers and project managers who are skilled in strategic know-how with the ability to focus on both **project management** and business strategy and not only on methodologies and standards,& says Scott. & This will require business and government to increase their efforts to deliver results and retain **project management** skills.& ESI International's top 10 global **project management** trends for 2011 include building the project manager's influence, accelerating new leadership and communication skills, and increased use of informal learning approaches, such as social media and experiential training.

& **Project management** continues to play a critical role in driving operational efficiencies,& says J LeRoy Ward, of ESI.

& Alongside technical savvy, other skills such as negotiation, communication, critical thinking, change management and leadership are taking on new importance for project managers. Influence and organisational agility will be key factors for performance improvement going forward.& ESI says that in this year's **project management** landscape featuring more complex **projects** and greater use of virtual teams and being on time and on budget will require a laser-like focus on the triple constraints and on the requisite leadership skills necessary for an individual **project** manager's success. The challenge for organisations will be to define clearly what leadership means in the **project** and **programme management** context.

The company believes intelligent talent management and retention strategies will be essential to ward off poaching this year. Although economic recovery has been uneven worldwide, **project** managers with the greatest mobility and experience will have the best opportunities for career growth through overseas assignments.

ESI says as **project management** gains greater acceptance as a discipline the hiring, assignment, promotion and professional development of **project** managers will be based on comprehensive competency models. For these models to be effective they must be company-specific. Competency models illuminate the behaviour required for a project manager to be successful and take on bigger and more complex projects.

The senior human resource executive, business unit heads and the enterprise **project management** office need to work shoulder-to-shoulder to identify and codify organisation-specific competencies, thereby building a framework for talent management success.

ESI says the professional development of project managers will focus increasingly on reality-based learning and on-the-job training, an approach certain organisations in Asia have taken for many years.

Learning providers will be required to send project managers back to the job from such sessions with the ability to apply what they learned immediately to their current projects.

Even the many universities that offer **project management** degrees will face the challenge of making their courses and programmes relevant, practical and pragmatic based on participants' real projects.

ESI says the lecture mode is dead and any training provider or university that ignores it does so at its peril. Organisations will continue to develop and exploit informal learning approaches, such as communities of practice, various forms of social media, as well as coaching and mentoring.

De Buys Scott ... promising people are still leaving the country and this is a major challenge.

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