

The Great Resignation in the USA and Big Reveals for PM Professionals from PMI's 2021 Survey

Interview with Mike DePrisco¹

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Introduction to the interviewee

Michael (Mike) DePrisco is the Interim President & CEO and Chief Operating Officer (COO) for the Project Management Institute (PMI). In his role, Mike provides executive leadership to the Global Operations Group, supporting more than 1.3M active certification holders, 680,000 members and 300+ chapters in over 200 countries. He is responsible for the Product Portfolio, Lean Portfolio & Product Integration, Customer Care, and Digital Groups. His team's focus is on digital product delivery and management, and the successful execution of all major initiatives.

Mike joined PMI in 2013 and has held several roles within the organization, including Vice President, Global Membership & Chapters, and Vice President, Academic and

¹ How to cite this interview: Ozguler, I.S. (2022). The Great Resignation in the USA and Big Reveals for PM Professionals from PMI's 2021 Survey: Interview with Mike DePrisco, PMI; *PM World Journal*, Vol. XI, Issue II, February.

Educational Programs.

Prior to PMI, Mike served in executive positions in higher education. There, he executed university strategic plans to ensure integration and alignment of key initiatives and priorities. He provided executive oversight to campus development and growth, including student acquisition and retention, program development, financial management, and stakeholder relationships.

Mike holds Bachelor and Master of Science degrees from West Chester University of Pennsylvania and holds a Certificate in Company Direction (International) from the Institute of Directors. He is active in youth and educational programs in his community.

Interview

Ipek Sahra Ozguler (Ozguler): First of all, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ about “the Great Resignation,” which shows no signs of slowing down. What’s behind this trend?

Mike DePrisco (DePrisco): Thank you for having me. This collective decision of millions of people to leave their jobs in search of new opportunities has been propelled by the pandemic, as workers across the U.S. and the world are reconsidering and reprioritizing how their professional lives fit within their personal lives. There are other considerations, as well, including salary, leadership opportunities, benefits, flexibility, and more, with the trend continuing because these workers see immense value in ensuring their employers’ missions and values align with their own.

Ozguler: Project Management Institute conducted a survey last year to better understand the motivators of job seekers and what they’re looking for in a new position. Please share the details of the survey.

DePrisco: PMI set out to explore this phenomenon in the United States — to probe the motivations of job seekers and to understand what they’re looking for in a new position. What we found has important implications for both employers and job seekers alike. Both, in fact, can “win” in this highly competitive job market if they focus on the real motivating factors behind the Great Resignation — including how employers can retain top talent and how job seekers can differentiate themselves from their competition.

Ozguler: How was the survey conducted?

DePrisco: In October 2021, PMI surveyed 1,000 U.S. office workers and 250 service industry workers who searched for an office job within the prior six months. From there,

we analyzed the data to see where the commonalities were and which themes unfolded, revealing the true motivating factors behind this trend.

Ozguler: What are the highlights of the survey?

DePrisco: It's no surprise that a big motivator behind looking for a new job is the pursuit of a higher salary, but just as frequently, job seekers are seeking to strike a better balance between their personal and professional lives, which has surely been exacerbated by the pandemic. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of total respondents and 63% of office workers said workplace flexibility is more important today than it was pre-pandemic. And with this balance comes the desire to have the option to choose if they work from home or the office: 75% of office workers surveyed would like to choose where they work, rather than be required one way or another.

When we look at the data more closely, we see an emerging story that employers and organizational leaders can't ignore: it is critical for leaders to ensure they are normalizing flexible work, offering opportunities for skill development, providing resources for employees to enrich their careers, living up to their stated values, and leading with empathy every step of the way.

An interesting highlight for leaders in the project management space is that job seekers want to learn more about project management — and across age brackets. We found that Millennials and Gen Z office workers are especially interested in pursuing project management roles — 51% and 45% respectively — highlighting that younger generations are ready and willing to embark on this exciting and fulfilling career path.

Ozguler: What are the top motivators of respondents?

DePrisco: As mentioned, it's not just about money. After a higher salary, the full- or part-time employed office workers we surveyed cited better benefits (32%), job stability (24%), and the opportunity to learn new skills (22%) as the top three reasons for seeking a new job. When leaders think about how to retain and recruit top talent, decision-making should be centered on these motivating factors. Those taking part in the Great Resignation are looking for opportunities for development and growth – especially senior-level employees, who said that upskilling opportunities are more important than salary.

We also learned which skills job seekers are highlighting on the resumes and which they hope to master in their next role. Problem-solving (59%), communication (54%), and flexibility (50%) are among top personal skills office workers highlight on their resumes when searching for a job. These “power skills,” as we call them at PMI, are imperative at all levels of the org chart. Teams simply can't function without team members who are

dedicated to effective problem solving, communicating with their colleagues, and offering flexible solutions when needed. This data helps leaders understand not only what prospective employees can bring to the table, but also how they can upskill their current workforce.

Ozguler: You emphasized the importance of upskilling. Could you please explain it a bit more? Why is upskilling so important?

DePrisco: Upskilling is critical because it's how organizations and industries evolve, and all of this is centered on people and how they grow and develop so this evolution can occur. And clearly, based on our data, job seekers and workers crave the opportunity to expand their skillset.

For every organization today, regardless of industry, keeping up with a rapid rate of change is of paramount importance, which is causing an uptick in the demand for project management skills. In addition to technical skills, job seekers recognize the importance of developing interpersonal skills like problem-solving, communication, empathy, and collaboration to advance in their careers. These power skills are valuable traits because they help the organization run more efficiently and successfully and improve work culture.

PMI has numerous offerings that can help organizations and individuals learn these valuable skills, including our free, 45-minute Kickoff course and toolkit, as well as the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM)® certification, and the Project Management Professional (PMP)® certification, the world's leading project management certification. We also encourage those interested in building skills to explore our Resources for the New Work Ecosystem webpage, a hub of several free online resources, as well as virtual events, and a sneak peek of new digital offerings to help professionals learn, grow, and network. And to see all the latest solutions PMI has developed for professionals, our What's New from PMI webpage is a helpful resource.

Ozguler: One of the highlights is that staying competitive requires investing in yourself. How?

DePrisco: According to our research, more than half (55%) of office workers invested in their personal skills through education opportunities before looking for a new job, with one in five respondents stating the opportunity to learn new skills was a motivator in their job search. This can be achieved by investing in training, making continuous education a lifelong habit, and seeking out companies that align with your personal values. Prioritizing all of this, whether you are looking for a new job or not, will help you grow and flourish in your professional career, resulting in more meaningful and impactful work in the long run.

Ozguler: Thank you for giving such good detailed information.

About the Interviewer



Ipek Sahra Ozguler

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Ipek Sahra Ozguler graduated from the Istanbul University, Turkey with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering and from Middle East Technical University, Turkey with an MSc degree in Software Management. As a project manager, she has more than 13 years of experience in various areas such as portfolio management, program management, project management, software management, business analysis. She became a certified PMP in 2012 and a certified SCRUM Master in 2014.

She has gained broader insights in a variety of projects across manufacturing, defence, FMCG (Cola Cola), insurance (Euler Hermes), audit (Deloitte), telecommunication, aviation and finance sectors. In addition, she has been working as an international correspondent for the PM World Journal since 2014.

Ipek is the creator and editor of the highly acclaimed book, [The Perspective of Women Project Management Professionals](#), interviews with leading female PM experts and professionals around the world. The book was published in March 2020 and is available [here](#).

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