

# DancingDinosaur

Mainframe computing in the 21st century

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## Are System z jobs really available?

By [dancingdinosaur](#)

"Some large firms have reopened their college hiring" reports Alexei Miller, EVP at [DataArt](#), a software outsourcing firm. "They're actually talking about shortages of human capital."

That apparently is the view from Canada too: "Demand for mainframe specialists is at an all-time high," according to IBM Canada in a [report published by The Industry Standard](#) in Sept.

And openings for System z people are appearing almost daily on various listservs and forums aimed at mainframe professionals, particularly the mainframe and System z groups on [LinkedIn](#)

It is ironic that the big financial firms, for example, slashed IT staffing and, now that the markets appear to be rebounding somewhat, suddenly have projects they need to complete fast. And when they try to call those people back, Miller reports, many already have been picked up by others and aren't available.

These projects, he notes, typically involve complex, non-standard work and massive data sets. The routine mainframe project work has long been shipped to India and elsewhere offsite. (DataArt also ships work offshore.) Rather, these are the kinds of projects that deal with pricing, risk, and compliance.

Yet unemployment has hit records highs and is predicted to go higher still. In October, the unemployment rate rose to 10.2 percent, the highest since April 1983, according to the [US Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). There seems to be an information mismatch here.

One underemployed System z professional searching for a full time position while frantically scrambling to complete System z contract work sent me the following lament:

Periodically, I am reminded that at this frantic time in my life there are four ways to catch up with one's tasks at work.

I: Make a to-do list of tasks for the day, and during the day other tasks arise. At the end of the day, I find I have done most of the tasks for the day but some remain.

II: At the end of some days I have completed only some of the tasks and, naturally, some of my to-do list remains.

III: Other days as other tasks demand attention I find that I will do some tasks that day but none of the tasks on my to-do list.

IV: Then there are the days I end up NOT completing any of the tasks on my to-do list and NOT completing any of the tasks that came up during the day either.

An interesting aspect of this is that when I describe these stages to others, some find them hard to understand - especially how I could get to IV. Others will immediately recognize this from their own experience. The dividing line seems to be around just how much open-ended multi-tasking the job calls for. Knowledge workers who set their own goals understand; administrators who go from clearly-defined task to clearly-defined task don't. Sales people understand; line workers don't. First-level managers understand; plumbers don't.

The problem is that many IT jobs are set up so that we all must fail at something. So, I try to pick what I will succeed at and hope.

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