

Interim management: The flexible resourcing tool

Interim management is, increasingly, a part of the standard resourcing tool kit, and the interim market is growing in kind, giving clients far more choice when it comes to employing consultants or interims. But, what distinguishes interims from management consultants, and what is the attraction for clients and candidates alike?

Interim management is the provision of an experienced, senior executive for a defined period to carry out a specific task within an organisation, often during a period of change. Interim managers are being used more often as the effective solution to change management issues and bridging temporary skills shortages.

The Interim Management Association defines interim management by three interlocking characteristics:

- The seniority of the temporary role being filled
- The quality of the briefing, selection and screening processes used to find suitable candidates
- The support service provided from placement to completion of the assignment.

A professional interim for over 10 years, Peter Charles was first attracted by the control that working in such a capacity could give him. He recognised that his personal style and ability to bring about change differed to the typical corporate style – he also realised that he could leverage these differences to good effect for the benefit of both his clients and himself: "I am confident of my own abilities and know I am good at effecting change. I didn't want to get involved in corporate politics; interim management gave me the opportunity to use the former skills and experience, and avoid the pitfalls of the latter," he said.

Satisfaction

"A further appeal was that of running my own business, and doing well for myself," added Charles, who previously worked for Guinness, BT and HMV, holds Chartered Institute of Management Accountants qualifications and is an associate member of the Society of Turnaround Professionals. "I had come to the stage where I knew I was good at making change happen, and I recognised that I could make a career out of it. I was looking for bigger problems and more challenges in a more flexible and scaleable environment, and with less caution, than a more conventional job might provide. Interim management was the answer – organisations recruiting interims tend to be more receptive to change, and keen to make immediate moves forward. The commitment and fast pace of change really appealed to me."

According to Charles, many interims cite politics as being a major reason for becoming an interim in the first place, but these individuals also tend to be astute political players and

to use this skill well.

Theresa Hobson-Frohock, a generalist human resources director for several years who most recently has been working as an interim, agreed that this freedom from operational issues was a major positive: "There are no day-to-day political distractions to get in the way of the task in hand."

Hobson-Frohock also identified flexibility as key to achieving work / life balance. "Once your credibility as an interim is established, you can pick and choose projects on which you're good at and enjoy, do it for several months and then move on to another – you don't have that flexibility and variety working on a permanent basis within a corporate," she said.

For Leon Labovitch, who has been working as an interim for a year, job satisfaction and independence are also among the main attractions: "I love running my own business, doing projects that interest me. I also appreciate the flexitime between projects that allows me to explore and deepen my expertise through training, and to pursue my own activities."

Hitachi's Geoff Smith, who is responsible for generalist HR issues across Europe, extends this to argue that satisfaction for interims can be higher than usual: "The interim is working on a clearly defined project, with a real need, and therefore doing something that is very relevant to the organisation. Such roles can be more satisfying than those on the permanent side, which may have ups and downs in terms of interest."

According to Labovitch, who is a broad change expert with experience of working in-house for corporates such as Shell, as well as on the consultancy side for names including KPMG, a further attraction for the interim comes from establishing their own business: "You will learn all about setting up and running a business, an experience in itself that will stand you in good stead," he said.

Benefits for client and interim alike

Cost-effectiveness is one of the main benefits for clients. Using top-level consultancy resources for a major change programme could cost as much as three times more than using an interim. Smith, who has extensive consultancy as well as corporate experience having worked on both sides, claimed: "The heady days for large consultancies of the mid to late 1990s will never return, as clients are much savvier these days about what

According to the IMA, the attributes of an interim manager differ from consultants as follows:

Interim management

- The interim mostly undertakes the assignment in person, drawing on first-hand experience to offer a fast-track solution
- Practical experience of tried and tested solutions; ownership of projects and change
- An interim becomes part of the senior management team or board for a defined period
- The interim will offer advice and mentor less experienced client teams
- The specialist provider will select from an extensive pool of professional interims with specific sector knowledge, matched by a suitable level of experience
- Professionally qualified, experienced line managers, 20-plus years' business experience
- Senior interims will typically command day rates in the range of £500 to £1,500

Management consultancy

- Senior consultants win business; juniors deliver consultancy methodology with management support
- Advice on strategy, process and action – client implements change
- Consultants are managed by their consulting firm
- Senior consultants will develop their team on the assignment
- Sector specific consultants are selected from an available pool
- Professional consultants, graduates or MBAs with varying years of experience
- Day rates for consultants range from a junior of £1,000 through to a partner at £3,000 plus

they are getting. With the growth of the interim market, there is now a viable alternative; a real choice of skilled, experienced and knowledgeable hands-on support from someone who comes in to specifically get the job done." Smith also pointed out that interims were far easier to integrate into existing teams. "Add to this the cost-effectiveness, and you are on to a clear winner," he added.

Having used consultants extensively in the past, Hobson-Frohock believed she could have saved herself thousands of pounds by using interims instead. "Only about 20% of the work required the operational expertise of a consultant. The majority of the work could have been done by an interim far more effectively at a fraction of the cost," she stated. "Not only can an interim conduct the high level and strategic work, but they will also carry out the implementation."

According to Labovitch, in addition to proving to be a more cost-effective solution than using consultancies, interims also deliver good value because they tend to be intensely focused on areas in which they already have an interest, and – by association – at which they excel.

Clearly, for the good interim who knows his or her market, the career choice can prove to be a sound business proposition both in terms of the financial rewards, as well as the more qualitative work / life balance.

For clients, Charles pointed to speed and results as further benefits:

"Typically, an interim can move faster than a larger consultancy, so can get the same job done twice as quickly for a fraction of the outlay. Being well experienced, interims also tend to require less supervision and to focus more on action – doing the work themselves – rather than following a pre-set process."

Hobson-Frohock agreed, adding: "As a consultant, you come in completely from the outside, whereas an interim comes in as part of the organisation and is therefore far more aware of the implications of their work. The former only skims the surface, and often doesn't see the project through to the finish – also, their eye is always on securing the next piece of business, distracting them from the task in hand. An interim, by contrast, can use agencies such as Archer Mathieson to secure their next opportunities."

The last inspirational words were from Labovitch: "It's good fun, important work and wonderful to be your own boss."

•Details: For a free copy of 'Interim management – how can it work for you?', contact:

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