

Project enhancement

Clever deployment of a skilled interim manager can bring concentrated focus to a task and job satisfaction to the worker

Those with skills and experience in marketing, business development or market research looking for a new challenge could consider interim management as an alternative to full-time employment.

Appealing advantages for the prospective interim include improved work/life balance with greater control over when and how much to work and the chance to focus on the task in hand rather than get involved in administration or office politics. Outsourcing is currently enjoying huge growth across Europe, particularly in these challenging economic times when the global financial crisis, increasing cost pressures and the constant need to reduce overheads mean that many companies have found it necessary to harness the benefits of using external expertise.

Steps to take

So what steps should the prospective interim take?

• Re-write the CV

Potential clients must be able to see and understand quickly how the interim could add value to their businesses. The CV is the candidate's most powerful marketing tool and should focus on recent projects, any specialist knowledge, therapeutic expertise and technical involvement. It may be worth taking professional advice on the current way to present a CV for an interim portfolio.

• Build a sound relationship with an established interim provider

Candidates should work closely with people they trust to help them to take a long-term view and make interim a long-term career. These organisations will be motivated to market the interim who in turn keeps control of



the amount of work offered. Good providers will also offer a support structure, networking opportunities and advice on current market forces.

• Manage oneself as a fee-based business

Earnings as an interim may be greater than in salaried employment but it must be remembered that there is no guaranteed income. Candidates should consider whether they can cope with the uncertainty and ensure they can balance the demands of a business (marketing, invoicing, credit control and so on) as well as carry out the projects. In addition, they should think about cash flow and try to negotiate a suitable payment cycle.

• Enjoy the independence

There will be the chance to balance work and home life, but interims must learn to say no if they want to. They must be clear with their interim provider about their commitment and availability and adhere to these parameters.

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• Decide where to work

Interims should consider whether they want to work on-site or from home. In some cases, there may be little choice. With advances in technology, however, remote working has become much more commonplace. The advantage of being on-site is that the interim will be an integral member of the team.

• Maintain freshness through training

It is worth investing some money in training to keep skills current, thereby avoiding becoming intellectually stale and enabling the taking on of a variety of projects from a range of clients.

• Respect client confidentiality

It is a small world and word will get round if an interim is indiscreet. It is a client's worst fear and it is the interim's duty to uphold impeccable standards.

• Do not consider interims as temporary placements

Interims are integral to the client's project team and can expect to be

viewed with great respect. Interim providers who think of interim management as placing temporary staff should be avoided.

So what are the advantages? We conducted a recent survey of our consultants, many working in marketing, market research and business development, to find out what they felt were the key benefits of working as an interim. They included: more control over the work, the freedom to focus on the project and greater intellectual stimulation.

Iain Cockburn has no regrets: "The three ways the balance of my life has improved are in managing workload and availability, planning holidays with confidence and less travel. Being an interim has given me more control of my personal life, I can choose what work I do, where and when and it has improved my skills and experience. For instance, the projects provide more diversity, with different responsibilities and an opportunity to learn about new products. It has undoubtedly broadened my experience as different clients teach different methodologies which can be transferred to other clients later on.

"There are a few downsides: job insecurity - you can never be sure you'll be employed in six months' time - and learning to advise not assert, as it's their company.

"For me, the hardest part of being an interim consultant was taking the first step and making the commitment to become one. However I can honestly say I have never looked back since making the switch. I am much more relaxed and enjoying life again."

Less commuting

The survey also highlighted the benefits of less commuting time for interims, with the chance to travel outside the rush hours. "Not only can I achieve more in a day, taking out the hour-long drive at each end of my working day, but I am much less stressed," said one respondent. "As I am largely in control of my working hours, I can also choose to travel by train outside peak commuting hours which is much more pleasant - you actually get a seat!"

For some consultants, the work/life balance also extended to greater job satisfaction. Many respondents highlighted their enjoyment in getting on with the project rather than time being deflected by internal issues, including budgeting, appraisals or general office politics.

Control over the hours worked and

availability was a common plus point, with the freedom to be firm and limit working time. "Being independent means that I can now say no and not worry about the detrimental effect on my future career or my CV," said one. "Not working in a permanent role also means I can switch off more easily," commented another. "Previously when I went on holiday I was always worrying about what was happening at work. Now I can go and relax, knowing that my part of the project is as up to date as it needs to be without having any other organisational responsibilities."

Working from home - or remotely from the office - has been revolutionised in recent years with new technology enabling consultants to work anywhere. Email, internet, telephone conference calls and video conferencing mean that not everyone has to work in the same office and it is a great deal easier to work from home. Not only does it allow people to work where they like, but also when they like.

Video conferencing

One interim was able to liaise with her team across Europe entirely through video conferencing and Skype, which meant that she did not have to undertake international travel which would have been difficult to incorporate with her home life. She said: "Only a few years ago, this would not have been possible and I would have had to make regular trips in Europe to attend project reviews. By using the facilities at the company's headquarters it not only suited my personal situation but also saved a great deal of money spent on travel and hotel accommodation."

So what do clients look for when they are considering outsourcing a project or a function?

Although there is no stereotypical interim manager, usually they are mid-career specialists with experience and a successful track record. In addition, they need special skills to ensure they are effective.

These include: authority, a specialist area of expertise coupled with experience of its application in practice, strong analytical and communication skills, the ability to assess problems quickly and act, the skill to balance long-term strategy with short-term tactics and strong task orientation.

One pro-interim HR director said: "I have seen very successful use of experienced interims, who have all of the above qualities as well as the ability to coach and mentor all levels, excellent

interpersonal and motivational skills, political awareness yet the ability to remain detached, resilience and mobility.

"Another benefit is that a team of consultants or individual interim managers can hit the ground running and deliver focused effort, concentrating on the task in hand and not spending time on staff or management issues."

"Outsourcing can also be a cost-effective solution to assessing new markets"

Outsourcing can also be a cost-effective solution to assessing new markets or carrying out market research in a different part of the world. A recent project we carried out supports this idea. A US company wanted to find out if there was a market for its new treatment in Europe. The product, which was in a highly specialised area, needed clinicians to assess its potential within their own country. In order to get a realistic picture of the markets across five different European countries, as well as the US, it was necessary to talk to medical professionals on the ground who would be able to comment authoritatively on local medical practice.

By tapping into the network of an established provider based in the UK, this project was conducted remotely and the relevant KOLs were identified and interviewed by local consultants in their own language. We co-ordinated the assessment and a comprehensive report was presented back to the US company, all without a single transatlantic flight being involved.

Job satisfaction

This experience was beneficial to the consultants too. They enjoyed working as a team, even though they never met, plus they found the project intellectually stimulating as it involved a new therapeutic area and market access. The cross-cultural element was interesting and challenging and they appreciated the freedom to deliver their findings objectively, without any compromise to a company's commercial agenda.

The Author

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