



The future of executive roles in Belgium: blending interim and permanent positions



More and more Belgian organisations are grappling with the question: should we opt for a permanent hire or an interim solution, and how can we avoid common pitfalls?

Where adaptability and agility are currency, no organisation can afford to ignore the interim advantage. More and more companies in Belgium are recognising the value of this dynamic approach to leadership, with needs that warrant the expertise of an interim executive. From navigating complex restructurings to spearheading bold transformations and smoothing transitions, interim managers inject external insight to deliver internal impact.

However, as the demand for interim hires grows, so does the potential for costly mistakes. Deciding between a permanent or interim solution, finding the right fit, ensuring effective onboarding, and balancing short-term solutions with long-term strategy is no walk in the park. As the hybrid executive model gains traction, the struggle to create the right blend of interim and permanent positions is one many organisations face alone.

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In this article, Ineke Arts, Bart Delaleeuw and Michel Grisay, three of Hoffman's Partners, share their expert insights into the interim market and hiring process, drawing from their unique dual experience in permanent and interim placements. They explain how they help clients stay mindful of potential pitfalls, see the bigger picture, and make the right choice without being constrained by a single approach.

1. Hiring interim leaders: If you still haven't, you probably will

THE "INTERIM ADVANTAGE"

It is no surprise that the interim management market has boomed in recent years. The pandemic stress-tested leadership capabilities across industries, calling for organisational shakeups, profoundly transforming the workplace and exposing skill gaps. At the same time, the deepening of digitalisation and the integration of AI into operational processes are fueling demand for specialised profiles – some so cutting-edge they are still being defined.¹ Turning to "agile human capital solutions" is a straightforward answer to the accelerating pace and complexity of changes and volatile market conditions. Leveraging external expertise, in turn, helps deliver meaningful change and restore trust during crises, as interim managers are often seen as neutral agents without political agendas.

Organisations urgently need leaders equipped to tackle the growing wave of challenges. But when those crucial skills fall short—and at some point they will—it is only a matter of time before turning to an interim solution becomes a necessity. At the end of the day, going for an interim solution is securing the right skills at the right time for the mission that matters the most.



Bart Delaleeuw

STRONG GROWTH

Demand for interim executives thus spikes when organisations need decisive and/or quick action—whether it is navigating leadership transitions, restructuring or downsizing, managing crises and optimising processes, or driving digital and cultural transformations². The upward trend is evident across Europe³ despite varying levels of market maturity, with Belgium arguably among the most advanced, alongside Germany, Switzerland, and the UK. The INIMA European Survey 2024⁴ reveals solid interim growth in General Management, Sales, Operations, IT, HR, and Finance. As expected, Change Management and Process Optimisation were the most frequently assigned missions, followed by Business Development, Project Management, and General Management.

THOSE CANDIDATES WHO STAND OUT

Experience, expertise and objectivity: that is what interim executives promise, and organisations and candidates alike should understand that not everyone is suited for the role. According to the same studies, European interim managers are typically experienced professionals, often at C-level or above, with an average assignment duration of around one year. Currently, the majority are still male, around 57 years old, with over nine years of experience in Interim Management. They come from various functional specialities such as General Management (30%), Finance (11%), Operations (10%), HR (9%) and IT (6%). Their sectoral focus spans industries like equipment/mechanical manufacturing, automotive, IT, and healthcare, showcasing their adaptability across different sectors and organisation sizes.

Despite the increasing reliance on interim leaders, maximising the value of these temporary appointments requires careful consideration and strategic alignment. While the benefits of hiring interim managers are clear—access to expertise, neutrality, and agility—organisations must also be mindful of the pitfalls that can undermine the effectiveness of the very solution these leaders are brought in to deliver.

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2. Considering the interim solution? Watch out for these mistakes

IF YOU THINK THAT CULTURAL ALIGNMENT IS LESS IMPORTANT, THINK AGAIN

Cultural fit may seem less crucial for interim managers, given that they bring specialised expertise and are only with the organisation for a limited time. However, underestimating the importance of cultural alignment can be a significant oversight. While these professionals are typically selected for their technical know-how and crisis management experience, their role as people managers, especially at the C-level, is often overlooked. Interim managers must be excellent people managers, and if they fail to align with the company's culture, they risk losing the respect and trust of their team.

STOP HANDING OFF TO HR: IT IS THE BOARD'S JOB

Selecting an interim executive is a decision that should be made by the Board or executive leadership, not handed off to HR. While HR plays a vital role, relying solely on them poses significant risks. Interim managers are often seen as highly operational, yet their effectiveness diminishes when they are not involved in Board decisions. They may be called upon to manage crises, restore order, and rebuild team trust, with these roles often requiring a blend of strategic and operational skills, particularly at the C-level. Clearly, this combination of skills is becoming essential. When candidates are not up to the task or when the Board is not directly involved in the selection, the result can be a costly mistake.



We are receiving more requests to find interim candidates who have proven successful both at the strategic and operational levels, even when the interim position at first sight requires only operational and hands-on experience.

Ineke Arts

DON'T RUSH IT: ONBOARDING MAKES OR BREAKS INTERIM SUCCESS

While effective onboarding is important for any leader, it is critical for interim executives, who are expected to deliver results quickly with minimal time for adjustment. From day one, they need a clear understanding of the situation, objectives, and company culture.

Bart Delaleeuw insists that choosing interim management is not a decision to be taken lightly "as it requires time and energy, and missions often fail due to poor integration and a lack of internal support". To ensure success, it is essential to set clear, measurable goals, define a roadmap for achieving them, and establish concrete plans for post-interim transitions and continued implementation.

FAMILY BUSINESSES: FROM DISTRUST TO MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Family-owned businesses often have a unique perception issue when it comes to hiring executives. They tend to be less inclined toward interim solutions due to their distinct culture. Loyalty is highly valued, and an interim manager's position and status can be seen as detached from long-term business outcomes (no skin in the game). They prefer someone who can integrate into the company like a true member, viewing their organisation as an extended family. It is crucial for them to recognise that the value of an interim manager lies precisely in delivering focused expertise just in time, without the expectation of a permanent role.

STRETCHING IT?

While interim assignments usually last, on average, a few months to a year, extending these contracts with multiple renewals is becoming more common. If unspoken expectations are not addressed upfront, or the evolving situation is not reflected in the approach, the partnership can quickly fall apart.

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3. Hoffman's dual focus: Partnering with us for long-term success

Hoffman's experts often work with organisations that find themselves at a crossroads, realising that a current manager is no longer the right fit, or facing the departure of a key executive. In these critical situations, they often grapple with the decision between hiring a permanent replacement or opting for an interim solution, particularly given the pressing challenges and uncertainties surrounding the company's future.

NOT FEELING BOUND TO ONE SOLUTION, OR THE OTHER

This dual focus is also especially valuable when interim leadership serves as a tool to allow more time to reach a consensus on a more permanent solution. As Michel Grisay points out, "these organisations recognise the importance of not rushing into a decision and may prefer an interim leader until they have a clearer vision of what the business will look like in a year or two. This is when the decision is made to engage a specialised firm that understands the nuances between interim and permanent roles and can also present candidates who fit each scenario." This dual focus is also especially valuable when interim leadership serves as a tool to allow more time to reach a consensus on a more permanent solution.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CULTURAL FIT AND FINDING ALIGNMENT

Hoffman has a proven track record in guiding its clients through the complexities of organisational transitions, ensuring alignment between strategy, culture, and leadership to drive success. The approach includes in-depth cultural assessments to prevent those missteps that can derail or crash interim missions.⁵

SECURING THE RIGHT FIT IS JUST THE BEGINNING

Hoffman's Partners may provide guidance and support throughout the assignment as intermediaries between the management and the interim manager. With experienced Partners serving as a sounding board at the C-suite level, Hoffman guarantees a steady presence that enhances the overall mission.



Streamlining the onboarding process, clarifying objectives, and ensuring smooth integration work together to guarantee the effectiveness and long-term impact of the interim mission.

Michel Grisay

Unsure if an interim or permanent hire is best?

Let our experts help you make the right leadership call.

Are you a candidate?

You can also count on us for guidance. With insights at both levels, our experts can advise candidates on whether they fit into the world of interim leadership.

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¹ <https://www.hoffman-associates.be/document/the-changing-face-of-talent-how-you-can-stay-ahead/>

² Jo-anne Fisher, Alexander Newman, Sen Sendjaya (2024), Interim leadership: A systematic literature review and future research agenda, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Volume 150, 103974, ISSN 0001-8791 [online] <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2024.103974>

³ Interim in Europe is making great progress, Forbes 04/01/2024 [online] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonyounger/2024/04/01/interim-management-in-europe-making-great-progress/> Also see Skyrocketing demand for interim C-suite talent fueled by requests for CFOs and VPs who know finance—and people, Fortune 09/04/2024 [online] <https://fortune.com/2024/04/09/skyrocketing-demand-interim-c-suite-talent-cfo-vps/>

⁴ Please note that the survey covers 11 countries, with Belgium not sampled. INIMA (2024), The 2024 Annual European Survey, International Network of Interim Manager Associations. [online] <https://www.inima.management/>

⁵ <https://www.hoffman-associates.be/document/strategy-culture-and-leadership-to-drive-success/>