

embrace the interim manager

Ciaran Sheehan, Managing Partner at Clarendon Executive, says organisations are missing a trick by not tapping into interims' skills and proactively harnessing their experience



The Northern Ireland business landscape is changing rapidly, bringing new and often complex challenges to local companies many of which could be met effectively through the use of a highly skilled and widely experienced interim manager.

However, according to Ciaran Sheehan, Northern Ireland risks falling further behind other successful economies and is missing a trick by not effectively resourcing significant projects, change programmes and even simple peaks in workload.

"Interim managers are used widely in all the successful economies around the world however in Northern Ireland the uptake has been slower with the most progressive, indigenous organisations and international companies leading the way.

"Most organisations these days are incredibly lean, particularly at senior management level. The challenge when driving towards significant improvements or progressing successfully with change programmes is to ensure that projects are properly resourced and led by the most effective people.

"Internally the most effective individuals are unlikely to have spare capacity to take on significant projects or may not have the exact skill set required. This is where interims come in."

Interim management is the short-term assignment of a proven heavyweight executive to manage transition, change or even crisis in an organisation, where a permanent role is not necessary or there is

insufficient time to appoint.

It is the most widely used solution to drive business initiatives in the modern business environment explains Ciaran.

"Interim managers can be used for specific projects, strategic initiatives or management cover. They bring the right calibre of skills and experience that can help businesses avoid major corporate headaches. They afford the kind of flexibility that today's complex business world demands," he says.

"As Northern Ireland's small and medium sized businesses develop and grow they are faced with new challenges and need to apply the right set of skills to ensure these challenges are met."

Implementing new IT systems or the development of a new HR strategy, relocating a production facility or preparing for an acquisition requires expertise that often doesn't exist in-house, yet Ciaran believes that as a concept interim management is still widely misunderstood and underused.

"Interims not only provide flexibility and extra resource but if selected effectively they should bring specific expertise and reduce the likelihood of issues on the project.

"It makes sense that someone will have a much clearer view of the issues that will be faced if they have been through a particular project or implementation four or five times before, albeit in different organisations.

"Good interim managers will also provide objectivity and fresh thinking and are free to concentrate on what's best for the business. The choice of interim should be driven by the nature

of the project and interim managers usually have a wealth of experience."

Contrary to popular opinion, interims should not be mistaken for experienced professionals who are 'between' jobs.

According to Ciaran, "Interim managers are highly experienced executives who have selected interim management as a flexible career choice and often have more experience than the role or project demands. In fact research has shown that interims are often more focused and productive than permanent staff taking great pride in delivery.

"They also bring great energy and drive, recognising that they are only as good as their last assignment."

One commonly cited criticism of interim managers has been the associated cost, but explains Ciaran, they are now being seen as a more productive and cost effective approach than employing consultants.

"Bearing in mind that interim managers are normally self employed you are not obliged to pay any additional benefits. You only pay for the days when they are working for you.

"In fact, interim managers are now being widely used as a practical

alternative to management consultants and research has shown that over 70 per cent of companies that use interims would use them again and overall the demand for interim managers is increasing.

"Interim managers are increasingly being used by all sizes of organisations, from large corporate to SMEs, across the UK and Ireland. Companies here need to recognise that they no longer have to try and manage every project or workload in-house.

"Utilising external resources such as interim managers can be a sign of organisation maturity and strength and it is essential that companies in Northern Ireland take advantage of all resources available to them to remain competitive and ensure long term success."

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Ciaran Sheehan is managing partner of Clarendon, a group that leads the market in executive search, selection and interim management. Ciaran or any of the team at Clarendon can be contacted on 028 90725750 www.clarendonni.com