

RUNNING HEAD: EFFECTIVE INTERIM LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

Effective Interim Leadership and Management: Development of a Cyclical Model of Interim  
Assignments

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This paper reviews literature on interim leadership and management through the lens of effective interim performance. The purpose of our review is to advance understanding of interim assignment performance and the antecedent individual psychological characteristics of effective interim leaders and managers, to improve the practice of managing interim leaders from a human resources perspective.

**Approach:** The paper reports a targeted review of the literature on interim leadership and management.

**Findings:** The main proposition from this review is that the influence of individual factors on interim performance operate within the stages and contexts of assignments. Accordingly, we propose a framework of the demands on interim assignments (*the interim assignment cycle*), comprising stages of preparation, entry, delivery and exit. The paper subsequently reviews evidence of the potential individual characteristics (focusing on individual differences in personality, leadership approach, motivation and competencies) of effective preparation and entry to an assignment, actions and performance during an assignment, and exit/disengagement.

**Practical Implications:** The findings of the review have implications for the selection and placement of interims into organizations, and their management once appointed.

**Originality/Value:** The main original contribution of the paper is to provide a framework around which interim assignments can be modelled and better understood. The paper discusses implications for future research, theory and human resource management practice, and calls for renewed research effort in this critical area of management and leadership.

**Keywords:** Interim leadership; interim management; interim executives; interim performance; temporary leadership

## **Effective Interim Leadership and Management: Development of a Cyclical Model of Interim Assignments**

In uncertain times and unpredictable economic environments, a key challenge in order to develop sustainable organizations and businesses is to ensure continuity of effective leadership. However, when an organization experiences rapid changes such as leader turnover or dismissal, business crisis, or strategic reorganization and change, the result is often a gap in leadership experience to be filled temporarily and quickly. A typical solution to these pressing and urgent organizational needs is to appoint an interim leader or manager

Interim leaders and managers therefore assume a critical role in ensuring the sustainability of a business in difficult or challenging circumstances (see e.g. Mooney, Semadeni & Kesner, 2017; Browning & McNamee, 2012; Inkson, Heising & Rousseau, 2001; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Farquhar, 1995). Yet, we know comparatively little in research about the individual characteristics of effective interim leadership relative to permanent leadership, despite evidence of their potential distinctiveness (Feltham & Hughes, 1999). To address this need, this paper provides a narrative review of the literature on interim leadership and management in order to draw out emergent themes, to set directions for future research and identify practice implications for human resource management. The purpose of our review is to advance understanding of interim assignment performance and the antecedent personal characteristics of effective interim leaders and managers. Our focus is therefore to elaborate *what interims do*, in order that the individual personal characteristics that lead to effective interim performance can be better identified. In doing so, our review has implications for the identification and selection of interims, and the modelling and measurement of their performance and impact.

Our paper makes three main contributions to the management literature in respect of interim leadership. First, we present a wide-reaching review of the literature, identifying emergent themes, focusing mainly on peer-reviewed management literature (the Appendix provides an outline of our literature review strategy). Second, based on this review, we propose a model of interim management assignments that describes the common demands that face interims across different situations: the *interim assignment cycle*. Ours is the first such model in the management literature and is designed to bring coherence to the hitherto disparate ways in which interim assignments are described. Third, we apply this model to examine the literature on the personal characteristics that may determine effective interim performance. Based on these contributions, we set out future research and practice implications.

Through these contributions, our review advances the literature beyond the two previous position articles in the mainstream management literature specifically on interim management and leadership (Farquhar, 1995; Goss & Bridson, 1998). Farquhar (1995) presented a model of short-term leadership, identifying and explicating the main functions of, and roles taken by leaders and managers on short-term assignments. Goss and Bridson (1998) focused on the place of interim management in HR strategy, and highlight still now unresolved questions about for example, the best way to evaluate interim success. We propose that these past contributions, while valuable, are limited because they focus on functional contributions of interim managers and leaders (e.g. Farquhar, 1995) or the strategic context of interim management (Goss & Bridson, 1998; see also Mooney, Semadeni & Kesner, 2017), thereby neglecting to capture in detail, the process and stages of effective interim leadership and management. We argue that a generalized model of interim assignments (i.e. the interim assignment cycle) is essential to understand the core personal elements that contribute to interim success and moreover is needed to form the basis of

effective human resource management practices (e.g. selection and performance management) of interim managers and leaders. Our article proceeds through four main sections; 1) a discussion of the main contributions of interim leadership in organizations; 2) the description and elaboration of the interim assignment cycle; 3) application of the cycle to the understanding of the personal characteristics of effective interim leaders and managers; 4) exploration of the implications for the human resource management research and practice in the area of interim leadership and management.

### **Contributions of Interim Leadership in Business and Organizations**

In the context of the current review, an interim leader or manager is defined in two ways. First, the literature has generally defined an interim as a manager who is explicitly hired on a temporary and short-term basis (Goss & Bridson, 1998; p37). However, interim managers may also be defined in terms of what they *do*; interim management is the management of transition, change, uncertainty or crisis by a suitably *overqualified* executive, commissioned at a senior level on an assignment basis.

It is assumed that interim *leader, manager, and executive*, may be referred to interchangeably in practice, yet there should be a distinction drawn based on perspectives on general leadership and management. For example, leadership is viewed as more strategic/change oriented/visionary and management as more operational/task-oriented (Kotter, 1980). Executive might refer to specifically to senior interim assignments. Through this review, the term 'interim' is used, with discussion focusing on the challenges and activities they undertake, rather than on distinguishing leader from manager. The literature identifies three emergent themes: a) gap management and critical vacancy; b) crisis management and turnaround; c) change and transition management.

### **Gap Management and Critical Vacancy**

Assistance during top executive succession is the most frequently studied contribution of interims in the literature and represents the function of filling critical gaps in management teams following departure of executives. Intintoli, Zhang and Davidson (2014) in their quantitative study using Forbes annual compensation surveys that report CEO characteristics at the largest 500 firms, found that interim successions following forced turnovers represented the majority of interim appointments. Berns and Klarner (2017) discussed that such successions are common during periods of uncertainty, such as when there is a sudden exit by an incumbent leader and there is no heir available (given that recruitment of a senior executive can take six months or more). Mooney, Semadeni and Kesner (2012) conceptualised six roles that interims adopt to contribute to organizations, which included: ‘seatwarmers’ (managing everyday operations until the board secures an external replacement); ‘groomers’ (acting as the spokesperson and managing external stakeholders while grooming the replacement); ‘marketers’ (setting the company up for an IPO or a sale, negotiating with potential future owners); and ‘fixers’ (repairing the existing companies, whether strategically or operationally). A common thread in these roles, although less so in the case of ‘fixers’, is the need to maintain business momentum and continuity.

When readying an organization for new leadership, a key contribution that interims make is to receive and integrate the incoming permanent executive into a new leadership role. This may mean offering advice, input or logistical support during the search through to providing a thorough handover. Describing the experiences of interims, Everley (1994) identified their role as the ‘bridge’ by readying the organization for new leaders. Interims also argued that most of their tasks were similar to permanent leaders in terms of the organization’s strategic plans and operations (see also American College of Healthcare Executives, 2017).

The positioning of the interim in the company is a factor in the effectiveness of this transition of leadership. For example, Ballinger and Marcel (2010) found that the interim CEO serving also as chairperson moderated the impact of this type of succession on firm performance and long-term firm survival. When afforded such position of influence, the interim can leverage their position power to reduce uncertainty and enforce appropriate behavior within the top management team. The value of the interim is apparent in the prevention of potential company performance dips. For example, Intintoli et al., (2014) found that performance following an interim appointment is the same as post-turnover permanent succession appointments.

### **Crisis Management and Turnaround**

Crisis management or turnaround is a high-profile contribution of interims, in which time is of the essence and business viability risk is critical. In such situations, immediate action is necessary to prevent businesses failing. Mouly and Sankaran (1999) found in a qualitative study that interims contribute by re-establishing a state of normalcy or calm by fostering positive working environments. Farquhar (1995) suggested that interims guide organizations and enhance learning as crises are navigated and can legitimize and transform the reactions of organization members.

Additionally, interims stabilize the organization by stemming transition-related employee turnover, sustaining operations through crisis, reassuring stakeholders and preserving the organization's reputation. From a strategic perspective, interims may help to keep focus on future goals while dealing with the present issues (Farquhar, 1995). They may also take more aggressive action to salvage a crisis-ridden or problematic situation, including operational cost-cutting measures and headcount reductions. Theus (1995) highlighted the importance of sense-making, communication, structure and organizational learning as factors that affect interims during crisis. However, these are tempered by the urgency of required

actions of managing short-term cash flow whilst building medium term plans. The role of interims in performance improvement may require drastic actions and often difficult and unpopular decisions for interims to achieve results (Jas, 2013). Fullan (2005) therefore suggested that turnaround leadership needs to be connected to comprehensive strategies that combine positive pressure and capacity building and needs to be driven by an explicit commitment to raising the bar.

### **Change and Transition Management**

The literature describes a shift in the type of assignments and requirements of interims, from mostly crisis management and gap management, to a recognised advantage of using interims in promoting and strengthening businesses (Russam, 2005). Indeed, there may be increasingly be a transformational rationale for interim management that offers competitive advantage through providing an organization access to skills, expertise and experience (Goss & Bridson, 1998). This can include planned and unplanned change management. Planned change includes for example mergers and acquisitions, shared service set-up, business sale, floatation or restructure. Unplanned change may include environment-driven strategic or structural change to adapt to market or external forces.

Thach and Nyman (2001) suggested that in the case of mergers and acquisitions, feelings of denial, betrayal, disengagement and anger can arise among employees and stakeholders. Leaders need to effectively manage these challenges before the day-to-day issues of running a business. Importing additional management skill and experience in these situations through appointing an interim can serve the organization need. Bridges and Mitchell (2000) suggest similar actions to lead companies through transitions. They reiterate the importance of facilitating open communication on the purpose of the transition, the future picture and goals, the plan, other individuals' contribution to the process. Such



communication helps form a vision to align people intellectually and emotionally to the organization (Gill, 2002).

### **Modelling the Performance of Interims**

Although there is no integrated framework of the performance indicators for interims, the literature offers several possibilities at different levels of outcome and analysis. On an organizational level, performance and interim effectiveness has been determined by organizational outcomes during or post the assignment. These include successfully implementing business strategies to deliver improved financial and operational performance and the necessary level of commitment to change to meet goals (Gill,2002; Mooney, Semadeni & Kesner, 2017; 2013; Colbert, Barrick & Bradley, 2014; Yukl, 2008).

In conceptual modes of management in temporary situations (e.g. in project management), manager performance has been conceptualised and measured as team success and project effectiveness (Tyssen, Wald & Spieth, 2013; Packendorff, 1995). These indicators could, to some degree, generalize to interim assignment performance indicators. However, there remain no team-level indicators of performance explicitly directed to interim assignments.

At the individual level, there is very limited development of performance indicators, with the literature more inclined towards describing general approaches that are required. For example, Vousden (2002) argued that an interim must be highly focused, experienced and mature enough to walk into any situation and be effective, for example by sorting out problems quickly and getting the job done.

Lack of clarity of performance criteria is compounded by poor assessment of interim performance by organizations, which may occur for different reasons. Interviewed about their experiences, interims stated that performance was sometimes downplayed (Jas, 2013). At the time of handing over to permanent managers, service delivery had not yet improved as much

of their work was focused on underlying systems. Some problems, endemic to the organization, were only identified by the interim, once in role. Therefore, the overall outcomes may potentially appear to deteriorate before improving. Furthermore, for the incoming managers to be credited with the turnaround of an organization, it may be in their interest to downplay the achievements of the interim. All these factors add to the invisibility of interims' work, which then presents a challenge to research into their contribution to business performance.

### **A Cycle of Interim Assignments**

The literature on the activities of interims in organizations describes key functions and contributions that interims undertake. This functional focus is limited because it neglects to explicate the stages or process of effective interim leadership and management, which may apply across different functional assignments. In this respect, an underlying characteristic is the temporary nature of assignments meaning that the process from entry to exit is discrete and if effectively implemented, defined in terms of demands and requirements. Furthermore, regardless of the nature of the assignment, some common themes and stages of assignments emerge. We propose that these can be modelled as an *Interim Assignment Cycle* (Figure 1).

The cycle is seen from the perspective of the interim's experience, and in shaping this cycle we draw on the literature on job transition (Nicholson, 1984), where common steps in job adjustment and socialisation are proposed. In the case of interim assignments, different challenges are presented, and the cycle is assumed to be significantly shorter than standard job transitions, particularly in the delivery stage. Nevertheless, the cyclical model is a useful framework from which to develop a model of interim assignments. In this cycle, four stages are categorised, comprising preparation, entry, delivery and exit.

**Preparation**

Preparation for an interim assignment is the stage during which interims seek to understand the assignment and its associated demands. This may involve defining the terms of reference and scope of the assignment, meeting key stakeholders, and learning about the organization and its culture, determining fit to individual capabilities of delivery. This initial determination of fit is likely to be influential in whether the selected interim is successful (Smid, Van Hout & Burger, 2006; Liang et al., 2012). This part of the cycle involves extensive fact-finding and could be supported by an interim management firm if they were engaged to manage the interim hire.

**Entry**

The entry stage refers to the first days in the assignment as the interim commences the key tasks and, albeit temporarily, joins the business. This stage comprises encounters with key stakeholders and members, during which it will be important for the interim to establish their credibility (Vousden, 2002). Depending on the nature of the assignment, it may be necessary to take urgent decisions and start action quickly. Establishing the reality of the assignment and initiating key relationships are also critical steps in this stage.

**Delivery**

The delivery stage of the interim assignment cycle involves the undertaking and completion of the main objectives of the assignment. The specific activities are dependent upon the nature of the assignment and the associated roles that are required (Mooney, Semadeni & Kesner, 2012). These may involve undertaking necessary changes, business turnaround or transition activity, managing operations and maintaining viability of the business (Jas, 2013; Farquhar, 1995).

The nature of the delivery stage will vary based on the main purpose of the assignment, and therefore the performance criteria that would indicate whether the

assignment has been effective would also vary. However, the delivery stage can be differentiated into three sub-stages: post-entry, main delivery, and pre-exit. Post-entry involves looking for early impact beyond immediate actions of the 'Entry' stage. Main delivery entails the sustained effort of driving through the objectives of the assignment including managing conflict, politics and resistance. Pre-exit includes 'legacy building' activity, frequently alluded to in the description of interim work (e.g. Everley, 1994; Mooney et al., 2013) setting the foundations for the more direct closure actions of the *Exit* stage. One final feature of this stage is the emergence of new issues, which might extend the reach of the interim into wider areas of the business. In such situations, mini-cycles might be established requiring new preparation, entry, delivery and exit, to deal with discrete issues that emerge, involving sensemaking on the part of the interim in order to adapt (Browning & McNamee, 2012).

### **Exit**

The exit stage of the assignment cycle comprises the transferring of knowledge, competence and understanding to stakeholders or replacement permanent leaders in order to facilitate effectively leaving the organization. The prospect of exit from the organization differentiates the interim assignment from permanent leadership and provides a basis for interim action. For example, they may be able to take a robust and challenging approach to change without long-term political concern for future relationships. Handover to senior management is also a key step of this stage (Farquhar, 1995). An effective interim makes certain that their departure is well-managed and timed to ensure durability and sustainability of their work.

The exit of the interim from the organization is unlike the departure of permanent leaders. For example, upon commencing an assignment, interims necessarily have a limited tenure in mind, and therefore need the ability to see a clear final outcome (Vousden, 2002).

This vision will play into the timing of the exit, and potentially act as a frame-of-reference for the interim to evaluate their progress and performance along the way, working towards an exit strategy. While interims may wish ideally to ensure that good relationships are maintained, it is also the case that the knowledge of their eventual exit permits a challenging approach where needed because there are not long-term future relationships with others in the organization (Jas, 2013). The interim can therefore ensure that tough decisions are taken in earlier stages of the cycle, allowing any resultant conflict to settle down. However, it may not be necessary to resolve all relationships between the interim and others, provided that the organisation outcome of the assignment is positive.

In sum, the exit stage assures the legacy of the interim and that the impact of the assignment is made long-standing. Exit is also a foundation for the interim's next career step, potentially enabling them to take on more senior and challenging future assignments (Browning & McNamee, 2012).

### **The Interim Assignment Cycle: Summary**

The cyclical nature of this model reflects the perspective of the interim, not the client. From the client organization's point of view, successful completion of the assignment is reflected in the creation of a sustainable and effective business state, where further interim intervention is not needed in the short- and medium-term. From the interim's perspective, successful exit marks the prospect of beginning the next assignment and preparing accordingly.

Our interim assignment model represents a dynamic model of the performance demands of interims, consistent with literature on the nature of performance at different job stages (e.g. Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese & Thoresen,., 2004; Woods, Lievens, De Fruyt & Wille, 2013). These stages are evident in the literature on interim management. For example, in the senior executive succession literature, interims are selected and prepare for the

assignment. They enter the organization and deliver its requirements by gap filling; and ready the organization for their departure by priming their replacement. (Mooney, Semadeni & Kesner, 2012). However, it is important to reinforce that none make direct reference to our novel proposed stages, which we have positioned as a summary of emergent core stages of interim assignments as described in the literature. In particular, this model is instrumental in considering a key objective of this review: to understand individual antecedents of effective interim performance. The cyclical model enables these antecedents to be examined with reference to the proposed common assignment stages (i.e. during *Preparation, Entry, Delivery and Exit*).

### **Individual Characteristics of Effective Interim Leadership: Fulfilling the Assignment Cycle**

This section of our review focuses on the distinctive characteristics and individual differences of interims, especially those aspects that act as potential antecedents of effectiveness in the interim role. We consider the role of such antecedents in promoting styles that fit with the challenges arising from the interim assignment cycle. Reflecting the emergent approaches in our review of the literature, we group these factors into four categories, namely personality traits, leadership approaches and styles, motivation and competencies. While we review these different factors in separate sections in the review below, it should also be recognized that there are linkages between them. For example, personality traits might give rise to leadership styles (Judge, Bono, Illies & Gerhardt, 2002) and competency development (Bartram, 2005). This is a point we return to in the Discussion section of our review. In the present section, we outline the evidence base in each of the four categories of individual antecedent factors.

### **Personality Traits**

The Big Five model of personality (comprising Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness; Goldberg, 1990) is a largely agreed upon taxonomy of personality and has framed the evidence base on traits and work performance (see e.g. Barrick & Mount, 1991). Consistent with findings on criterion effects of traits in other forms of work, the literature points to a role of the personality trait Conscientiousness for interim performance. Conscientiousness involves being dependable, careful, thorough, responsible, organised, planful, hardworking, achievement-orientated and persevering (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Feltham and Hughes' (1999) quantitative cross-sectional study found that interims had higher scores on the traits *need to finish a task* and *integrative planning* (both facets of Conscientiousness; Woods & Anderson, 2016), and are typically more conscientious than permanent managers. Müller and Turner's (2007) mixed-methods analysis found that Conscientiousness was one of three significant contributors (along with sensitivity and communication skills) to project success across all projects explored and was important throughout the project life-cycle. Such findings are somewhat consistent with the impact of traits in top management generally. For example, Colbert, Barrick and Bradley's (2014) found that Conscientiousness among members of board-level management teams was related to long-term organizational performance, as were CEO Conscientiousness and transformational leadership.

Interims are also found to be significantly higher on Openness to Experience (i.e. open to new ideas, curious, and intellectual) and Extraversion compared to permanent managers (Feltham & Hughes, 1999). This may reflect the nature of interims' assignments, whereby interims are placed into a variety of situations and experiences with different people and are expected to be immediately proactive once assigned. Higher levels of Extraversion and Openness collectively represent bold leadership or adventurousness (Woods & Anderson,

2016), which may clarify the interpersonal styles that are most effective for interims. Overall then, Conscientiousness is an important trait of interims, and Extraversion and Openness to Experience may also be valuable (see Table 1).

### **Leadership Approaches and Styles**

While there is a rich academic literature on leadership style and effectiveness of permanent leaders (e.g. see DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman & Humphrey, 2011; Judge, Piccolo & Ilies, 2004), there are no established theoretically-driven models of the approaches and styles required for effective interim leadership. This is reflective of criticisms of leadership research more broadly that it neglects the importance of *time* as a contextual factor determinant of the outcomes of leadership styles (Shamir, 2011). While it cannot be empirically argued that particular styles of leadership would be more or less effective for interims, some leadership styles that are evidenced as effective for permanent leader may, however, be argued to be relevant for interims from a conceptual perspective. These may refer to generalized leadership styles enabling effective change and transition management for example. Although there has been little specific research with interims, these generalized styles are viewed as relevant as they enable interims to navigate stages of the interim assignment cycle within an organization. Two such concepts viewed as relevant to interim effectiveness are transformational leadership and positive leader-member exchange (LMX). These respectively relate to a particular approach to leadership, and a specific way of developing and maintaining relationships with team members.

In a systematic review on leadership in temporary settings (Tyssen, Wald & Spieth, 2013), it was found that transformational leadership (leadership that inspires followers to trust the leader, to perform, and contribute to the achievement of organizational goals) strongly and positively affected followers in organizations. Transformational leadership has also been found to be influential in fostering commitment to change (Herold, Fedor, Caldwell



& Liu, 2008). Follower commitment to the organization was found to be associated with higher levels of transformational leadership from the CEO and board-level colleagues. To have a board-level management team composed of highly transformational leaders who can effectively communicate with each other and coordinate their efforts was crucial to the success of the team managing change situations (Colbert, Barrick & Bradley, 2014).

However, the importance of a transformational leadership style may depend on the type of assignment. Muller and Turner (2007) found that only sensitivity, communication skills and influence were valuable for success in highly complex projects. Alternatively, projects that reposition the company's strategy to a changing market environment would have a greater need to achieve targets, and so a transactional style (i.e. exchanging rewards for high achievement, reprimanding and correcting poor performance) would be more suitable. The balance of findings however points to benefits of the characteristics of a transformational leadership style for effectiveness in interim assignments.

Relational models of leadership highlight the importance of good quality relationships between leaders and followers (referred to as positive *leader-member exchange*; *LMX*). Interims with positive leader-member exchange (LMX) may be more effective, since research indicates that high-quality leader-member relationships develop more quickly (Tyssen, Wald & Spieth, 2013; Liden, Wayne & Stilwell, 1993). Furst and Cable (2008) found that employees who have a positive relationship with their manager may attribute tough actions and decisions to necessary situational factors, which reduces the likelihood that they would resist the leadership efforts of interims. Employees in low quality LMX relationships, accustomed to transactional and low trust exchanges with their managers, may view the use of influence tactics suspiciously and be more likely resist the requested behavior. This latter point is important for the preparation stage of our proposed cycle, so that interims know the kinds of leadership style that predecessors have deployed, and that followers have

encountered. It follows that swift relationship building is also relevant to the entry stage of the proposed cycle, and for the delivery, especially for developing high quality relationships with key team members who can support the interim's vision and goals.

Notably, the quality of the LMX relationship is a function not just of the leader, but also of followers. For example, the combination and interaction of the both leader and follower individual differences have an effect on the nature of their relations (Richards & Hackett, 2012; Zhang, Wang & Shi, 2012). This raises the question of whether there is an effective profile of individual differences for followers being managed and led by interims. This may reflect resilience and openness to change for instance, or willingness to express ideas and communicate.

### **Motivation**

Why are interims motivated to pursue careers as interims rather than permanent leaders or executives? Attempts to address this question in the literature point to interims having different motivations from permanent managers. Goss and Bridson (1998) suggested that motivation relates to reasons that encourage an individual to be an interim for a career and can range from negative (no choice) through ambivalent (best option right now) to positive (preferred career choice). They predicted that motivation will correlate closely with capability, since those with the highest levels of capability are likely to have a more rewarding and secure career. Boyne and Dhaya (2002) suggested that interims pursue their own interests by selecting assignments that meet their income expectations, but also choose challenging and flexible assignments, and have pro-social motivations of improving organizations, with the ultimate aim of delivering better services.

Inkson, Heising and Rousseau's (2001) qualitative investigation of 50 interims found that interims also see organizations as potential career resources, which fulfil motivations of employment, challenge and learning, and the interims reciprocate by providing organizations

and stakeholders with prosocial behaviors. This reciprocal exchange represents an unwritten set of assumptions about what interims expect to provide and gain while on assignment (a *psychological contract*). Inkson et al. (2001) continued to suggest that a transactional psychological contract progressively changes to reflect the interests of the parties and their growing information about each other.

### **Competencies**

Competencies are “*observable workplace behaviours [that] form the basis of a differentiated measurement [of performance]*” (Bartram, 2005, p.1185-1186). As such, they are patterns of observable, performance-related behavior that draw upon aspects of KSAOs (Roberts, 2005). Competency modelling is increasingly used in human resource management (Woods & Hinton, 2016; Campion et al., 2011; Soderquist, Papalexandris, Ioannou & Prastacos, 2010).

The importance of competencies is reflected in propositions around the role of capability represented in managerial experience, needed to meet the organizational needs and perform in the resultant managerial role (Goss & Bridson, 1998). The implication is that capability and by extension, competencies develop through experience. There are several competencies identified in the literature as being relevant for interim effectiveness (see also summary in Table 2), although as with leadership styles, these reflect evidence based on the kinds of tasks that characterize interim assignments, rather than on the study of interims explicitly.

Tyssen, Wald and Spieth (2013) recognised some of the most important senior-level interim competencies were to be able to build a team, communicate and motivate people, all linked with Bass’ (1990) skillset of intelligence, persuasiveness and eloquence. In the context of organizational change, Gill (2002) suggested that positive and appealing language can include message framing, for example linking the message with valued benefits, reflecting

people's values and beliefs, matching body language with words, moving from 'I' statements to 'we', and expressing confidence in people's ability to achieve. Gill also argued that the motivation of stakeholders arises from interims' short-term wins and publicly recognising and rewarding people who make these wins possible. This entails planning and creating obvious/conspicuous improvements during the change process. Furthermore, motivation and inspiration arise from clearly communicating the alignment of organizational goals and individuals' needs, wants, values, interests and aspirations and from the use of positive language (Gill, 2002). Communication style is therefore underlined as a critical competency.

Emotional competence has also been highlighted as important with respect to leadership in temporary settings. The ability of a leader to detect, use, understand, and manage emotions is crucial for leading in environments with prevailing authority gaps (Tyssen, Wald & Spieth, 2013). Tyssen et al. (2013) also suggested that emotionally competent leaders in temporary settings may appeal to intrinsic motivation of people with whom they need to collaborate. This increased intrinsic motivation may compensate for any perception that the interim has less authority than a permanent executive. Furthermore, findings from research using emotional intelligence concepts indicate that some emotional intelligence sub-dimensions (influence, motivation, and Conscientiousness) are important across all assignments, indicating a link between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership (Müller & Turner, 2007). This study also found that emotional competence was a significant contributor to assignment success in most of the interim situations, as was sensitivity and the ability to communicate. Relatedly, other sources purport the need for courage to allow the emotions of their employees to be expressed, releasing emotional tension for example, the persistence to maintain focus on the business in the midst of the turmoil, and the patience to deal with employees individually (Thach & Nyman, 2001).

### **Individual Antecedents of Interim Effectiveness: Summary**

The literature points to an initial set of personal characteristics for effective interim performance around Conscientiousness, Extraversion and Openness, communication, emotion management, team building and motivation. However, we also observe that to date, the literature on personal characteristics of interims is quite limited. Although each of the identified core individual characteristics and competencies could be somewhat uniquely framed in the context of interim effectiveness, equally they are likely important to some degree in all leadership and management settings.

From our literature review, we are able to propose a framework of core competencies linked to the assignment cycle. That is, we propose where competencies appear to be relevant at specific assignment stages (see Table 3). Our positioning of the emergent characteristics with the stages of the interim assignment cycle serves to better integrate individual antecedents of performance of an interim with the common demands that interims face while on assignment.

### **Discussion and Implications for Human Resource Management**

This review has examined literature on interim leadership and management, focusing on the main contributions of interims in management, and the consequent individual characteristics of interim effectiveness. The emergent findings from the review underpin a proposed interim assignment cycle, describing the common stages, and associated demands of a typical interim assignment. From this, an initial profile for interim effectiveness is proposed. Linking the two, competencies may be divided to a degree across different stages of the cycle, helping to understand the dynamic nature of effectiveness and how performance plays out during each assignment.

This final section reflects critically on the evidence base for the review to identify key areas for future applied research and implications for human resource management practice.

Given the key role that interims play in managing business effectiveness in challenging times, such research has high potential value for organizational productivity and sustainability.

### **Empirical Studies of Interim Effectiveness and Performance**

The first and most problematic gap in the evidence base on interim effectiveness is a lack of empirical studies. A substantial proportion of the sources available for the review were non-empirical articles. Of those that were empirical, at least half were qualitative and experiential. Among those remaining, there remains no robust longitudinal study of the individual predictors of effectiveness during an interim assignment. Without such evidence, there is a limited basis upon which to develop interim selection, placement and performance management practices.

Research has also neglected to set out a model of the performance outcomes of interim leaders and managers and how they may be differentiated from permanent leaders. In practice this leads to a further significant gap in the methods and tools available for the management of interims in organizations given the absence of a formal performance model or indicators of effectiveness during interim assignments. The proposed interim assignment cycle provides some potential directions to addressing this gap. For example, interim effectiveness is set against the background of each of the stages and successful completion of each stage facilitates overall success during the assignment. Performance measurement could therefore begin by considering indicators of successful completion of each stage.

### **Managing Interims: The Context of Interim Effectiveness**

Related to the gaps of performance and competency models for interims, is a significantly underdeveloped examination of the contexts of interim performance. For example, while Mooney et al, (2012) and Farquhar (1995) highlight different roles fulfilled by interims, there appears to be a preponderance towards the perception of the interim as ‘the fixer’. There is a risk that this perception could lead to problems of interim placement and

performance if the dominant prototype for an interim is determined around this change-oriented, 'fixer' role.

To illustrate, in an extension of the research on the work transitions cycle that influenced our assignment cycle, Nicholson (1984) proposed that transition approaches could be classified based on whether the worker is open to adaptation and adjustment, and the degree to which the job role and context may be crafted or changed. A typical 'fixer' would potentially approach assignments in a way that assumes a high degree of change needed to the environment and their role in it, yet little need for individual or personal change and adaptation. In time of crisis-driven change management, this approach is likely effective, yet in other situations (for example in the 'seatwarmer' or 'groomer' roles), the approach could be counterproductive. Much greater clarity about the interaction of individual effectiveness antecedents (i.e. competencies) with contexts of interim assignments is needed through research.

A further implication of the over-emphasis on the 'fixer' role is a lack of literature and commentary on the relational aspects of interim performance, relative to the literature on permanent leadership. A significant challenge for interims in the *Preparation* and *Entry* stages especially is building relationships, networks and trust with new colleagues. The relation-oriented skills needed for these are less prominently featured in the literature and experiences shared by interims, than the action-oriented skills of performance during the assignment.

### **Selection Methodology for Interims**

A further area where research is needed is in the development of approaches and methods for assessment and selection of interims. The proposal of an initial set of individual antecedents for interim effectiveness invites consideration of how they could, through further development, be incorporated into selection of interims. There is limited literature on interim

selection, and it is clear overall that the context of selection is highly distinct from selection of permanent leaders, managers and executives.

Interim selection is often necessarily under time pressures to conduct succession planning (Mooney, Semadeni and Kesner, 2017). However, the flexible and pragmatic approach to career choices taken by interims (Russam, 2005) means that those hiring interims should see interim management as a form of unique personal service, whereby extended and careful communication and personal contact are crucial; and where quality is more important than price (Smid, Van Hout & Burger, 2006).

Companies supplying interims should take care to establish an effective discourse around the needs of the organization (Goss & Bridson, 1998). An experienced senior executive should be designated to review the organization's experience with interims on assignment using performance goals clearly defined in the assignment brief (Smith, 2008). Furthermore, it is also useful to examine how the supplier of interims gained its information about the individuals enlisted to them, how they are selected for an assignment and how their skills and experience are validated (Goss & Bridson, 1998). It is tempting to only regard interims' CVs or second-hand accounts of reputation without asking whether that individual meets the needs of the organization. However, it is not guaranteed that the individual will perform similarly in each new assignment. Senior executive interim hires are not always prepared to submit to normal selection methods (Goss & Bridson 1998), so the support from interim suppliers is important in this respect. Support is also important to factor in situational need into interim appointments, for example by broadening board access to human capital (Mooney, Semadeni & Kesner, 2017), and by prioritising interim experience such as crisis management (Farquhar, 1995), or company knowledge (Liang, Liu, Wu & Zhang, 2012). Businesses should also keep in mind that the method of leader selection determines leaders'



'legitimacy' and hence the degree to which interims consider themselves responsible to lead a turnaround (Brandts, Cooper & Weber, 2014).

A further differentiating factor is the social exchange that characterises each interim appointment. This initial fit between interim and client is important to capture against the context of retaining effective assessment and profiling competencies and suitability in a systematic and structured way. By doing so, the benefit for clients is to ensure high quality and strong fit of the interim to the specific need of their business.

Overall, the literature and commentary indicate a high degree of informality, mutual negotiation, and intuition in the appointment of interims. This approach carries significant risk, given the varied profile of competencies and the complexities of demands in the assignment cycle. Given that interims are often supplied by specialist agencies, their role in mitigating this risk is important. A future challenge is to approach selection in a more systematic and methodical way, incorporating assessment of key competencies, but to do so in such a way that the right interim is matched to the right context.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Alongside the absence of a strong empirical evidence base for the study of effective interim leadership and management, there is a similar gap in the theoretical examination of why interim assignments might succeed or fail. In this respect, our paper makes a first step in conceptualizing the mechanisms that explain why individual antecedents of interim effectiveness may influence positive organizational outcomes. The interim assignment cycle presents a broad framework of the demands that an interim would need to navigate during an assignment. Conceptually, individual antecedents of effectiveness would lead to positive outcomes because of their influence on activity and behavior during these stages.

Our model also forms a foundation for future exploration and research, which may provide grounds for further theoretical development. For example, elaboration of the stages

of the cycle could bring in and integrate alternative theoretical perspectives. In the *delivery* stage, relationships with key people in the organization are likely to be influential, so relational models of leadership (e.g. LMX) could inform the mechanisms by which performance is executed through that stage. There is also scope for examination of external factors that may moderate the impact of individual antecedents such as task identity and characteristics, availability of support resources and so forth. In short, our development of a coherent framework of interim assignment stages is a first stage in the development of detailed theory in this area.

Focusing specifically on the individual antecedents of effective interim performance, our review highlights the potential to develop and test new theory explaining the effects of individual factors on interim assignment outcomes. The literature highlighted different categories of antecedents (e.g. personality, leadership approach and styles, motivation and competencies) as relevant in this respect. However, as noted, there is likely to be interactions between these factors; for example, traits may promote leadership approaches, competency development and people's motivation for working as an interim. There is also the key issue of the contextual and organizational moderators of the relations between antecedents and outcomes. The interim assignment cycle identifies a set of stages that are consistent across assignment types. There may also be specific features of assignments that make certain antecedents especially relevant (for example, competencies of fast decision making and business focus in situations of rapid business turnaround). These considerations are consistent with tenets of interactional theories of individual differences and performance (e.g. Tett & Burnett, 2003), and suggest merit in the development of theory to capture and explain the effects of a set of core interim individual differences related to success, alongside those that are salient in specific kinds of assignment. Ultimately, such interactional approaches permit

the development of theory incorporating both personal (i.e. to the interim) and contextual (i.e. to the organization and their needs) factors of interim assignment success.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Interims are arguably the silent and often unnoticed guardians of business sustainability. They make the difference in so many situations between a business surviving or failing during difficult times. As management and business environments become increasingly uncertain and turbulent, we perceive a growing need for the contributions of interims to continuity and long-term sustainability of organizations. This background, the current high degree of informality of interim deployment in practice, and the limited evidence base that we have uncovered in our review, collectively indicate a pressing need for management scholars to better understand why and how interims are effective in their assignments, and to inform organizational and human resource management practices around how they are selected, deployed and managed. Our review and proposal of the interim assignment cycle are offered as a foundation stone for this future research effort.

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### **Appendix: Literature Search Strategy**

We performed a targeted search of the literature on interim leadership and management, setting general guiding principles for the search. We considered valid sources to be peer-reviewed scholarly articles, practitioner articles, peer-reviewed conference papers, white papers and relevant online sources (e.g. from the Institute of Interim Management). We searched for papers post-1995\*, reflecting the period since previous review articles (Farquhar, 1995; Goss & Bridson, 1998), and sought to generate a majority of source dates to be post-2007 (to provide an up-to-date representation of the literature), and source types to be peer-reviewed articles (providing the strongest evidence base).

Our initial search term specification comprised terms for interim leadership and management and core functions they perform (*interim management, interim leadership, interim executives, interim executive management, business change, change management, business transformation, business turnaround, management transition, management succession, gap management*).

Reflecting our perspective on human resource management (HRM) and the individual characteristics of effective interim leadership, we prioritized sources from general management, HRM, I/O psychology and organizational behavior journals and publications.

\*We do include some general pre-1995 articles relevant to our arguments or discussion of literature sources.

Table 1. *Distinctive Interim Personality Traits.*

<b>Personality Trait</b>	<b>Source</b>
<i>Conscientiousness</i>	Feltham and Hughes (1999) Müller and Turner (2007)
<i>Open to Experience</i>	(Feltham and Hughes, 1999).
<i>Extraversion</i>	(Feltham and Hughes, 1999).

Table 2. *Competencies Relevant for Interims as Highlighted in Published Sources.*

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Source</b>
<i>Planning</i>	Gill (2002)
<i>Fast Decision Making</i>	Gill (2002)
<i>Team Building</i>	Tyssen, Wald and Spieth (2013)
<i>Communication</i>	Tyssen, Wald and Spieth (2013) Gill (2002) Müller and Turner (2007)
<i>Stakeholder Management</i>	Tyssen, Wald and Spieth (2013)
<i>Emotional Intelligence/ Competence</i>	Tyssen, Wald and Spieth, 2013). Müller and Turner (2007)
<i>Courage</i>	Thach (2001)
<i>Patience</i>	Thach (2001)
<i>Sensitivity</i>	Müller and Turner (2007)
<i>Customer Focus</i>	Thach (2001)
<i>Business Focus</i>	Thach (2001)
<i>Persistence</i>	Thach (2001)

Table 3. *Potential individual antecedents of interim effectiveness at different cycle stages.*

<b>Interim Assignment Cycle Stage</b>	<b>Potential Individual Antecedents (from Literature Review)</b>
Preparation	<b>Conscientiousness</b> <b>Openness to Experience</b> <i>Planning</i> <i>Communication</i> <i>Emotional Intelligence/Competence</i>
Entry	<b>Openness to Experience</b> <b>Extraversion</b> <i>Planning</i> <i>Fast Decision-making</i> <i>Team Building</i> <i>Communication</i> <i>Stakeholder Management</i> <i>Emotional Intelligence/Competence</i> <i>Patience</i> <i>Sensitivity</i> <i>Business Focus</i> Transformational Leadership
Delivery	<b>Conscientiousness</b> <b>Extraversion</b> <i>Team Building</i> <i>Communication</i> <i>Stakeholder Management</i> <i>Emotional Intelligence/Competence</i> <i>Courage</i> <i>Customer Focus</i> <i>Business Focus</i> <i>Persistence</i> Transformational Leadership Positive Leader-member Exchange
Exit	<i>Team Building</i> <i>Stakeholder Management</i> <i>Customer Focus</i> <i>Business Focus</i> Transformational Leadership

**Personality Traits in bold; Competencies italicized; Leadership Style in plain text.**

Figure 1. The Interim Assignment Cycle

