

# Interim Management

Trends on the Belgian market



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# Introduction

Interim management is a flexible and effective solution for organisations. It supports them in their change processes, and brings in targeted expertise quickly. Interim managers or subject matter experts provide added value by efficiently delivering appropriate knowledge and skills. This white paper explores the role of interim management as a strategic response to workforce challenges today.

Our recent survey of more than 500 Belgian interim managers provides unique insights into the profile, expertise and projects of those subject matter experts, as well as analysing the trends in interim management in 2024. Bringing these results together enables us to share valuable information that can be used to respond effectively to labour market dynamics and exploit the benefits of interim management to the full.

This survey aims to provide in-depth understanding and also marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our project and interim management division. With its 25 years of experience, Robert Half is one of the pioneers of the Belgian interim management market. Over the years, we have helped many organisations find the right interim managers, and this white paper is a way of sharing our experience and expertise whilst looking to the future.

**We hope you enjoy reading it!**

# Key results

The results of this market survey are based on an anonymous online questionnaire among 578 Belgian interim managers. The interim managers – of all ages and active in all sectors – were surveyed in October and November 2023. Their answers provide a clear picture of the current trends in interim management. Please note that the percentages in the report have been rounded.

The survey elucidates various aspects of interim management by exploring the typical profile of an interim manager in Belgium, examining the reasons why companies turn to interim managers for assistance, and consider the average duration of interim assignments. We also take a closer look at how happy interim managers are in their professional lives, analyse their experiences with assignments and ask which skills they believe are crucial to successfully completing an assignment.



## FIVE KEY RESULTS

**1** Only one in ten would ever consider returning to a permanent job.

**2** ESG and DEI are becoming increasingly important.

**3** Six out of ten find a new assignment within a month of finishing a previous project.

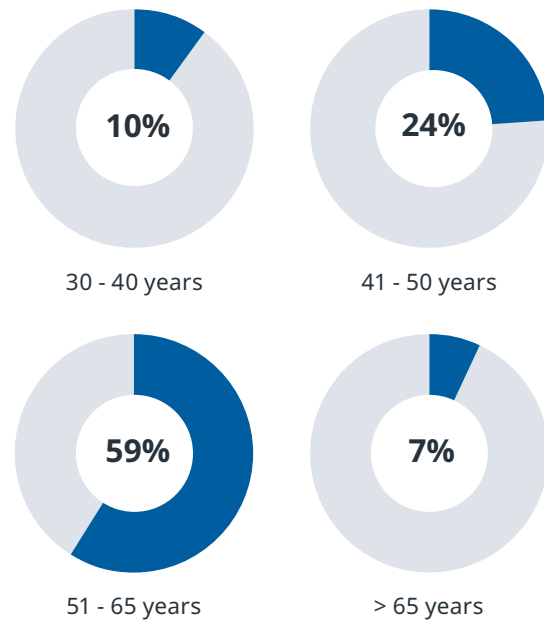
**4** At present, the duration of the majority of assignments fluctuates between 12 and 24 months.

**5** One in five do not have liability insurance and are not considering taking a policy out.

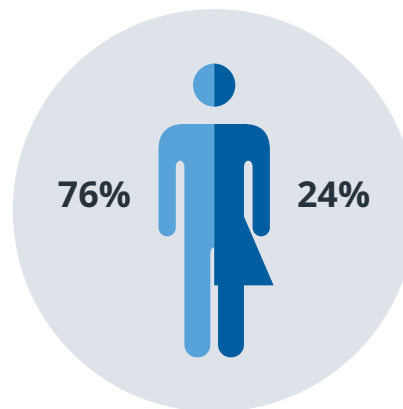
# Profile of a Belgian interim manager

Interim management is no longer synonymous with people looking for a challenge at the end of, or after, their career. Growing numbers of professionals are making a conscious choice to become interim managers, and they are doing so increasingly early in their careers. This choice is also becoming visibly more popular among women.

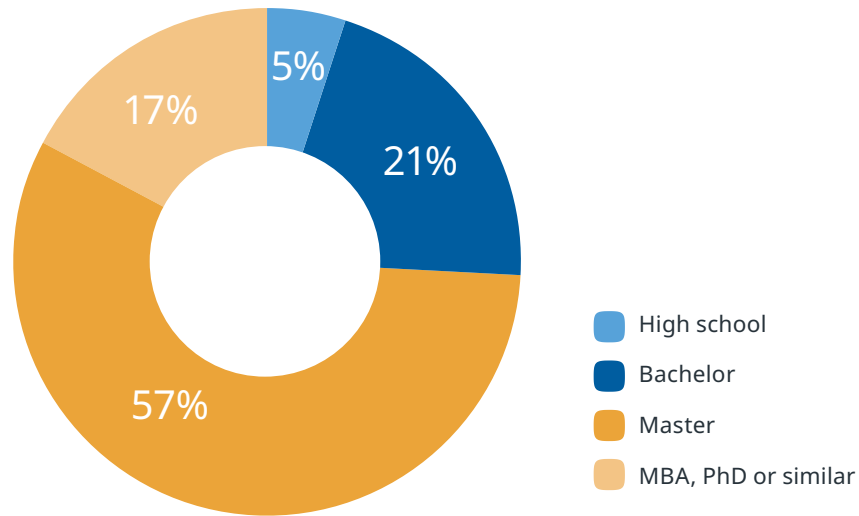
## Age



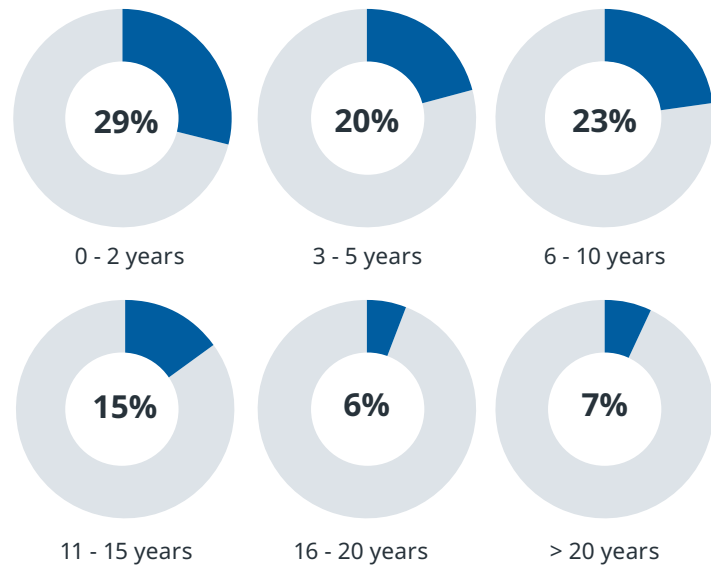
## Gender



## Highest qualification



## Number of years of experience as an interim manager



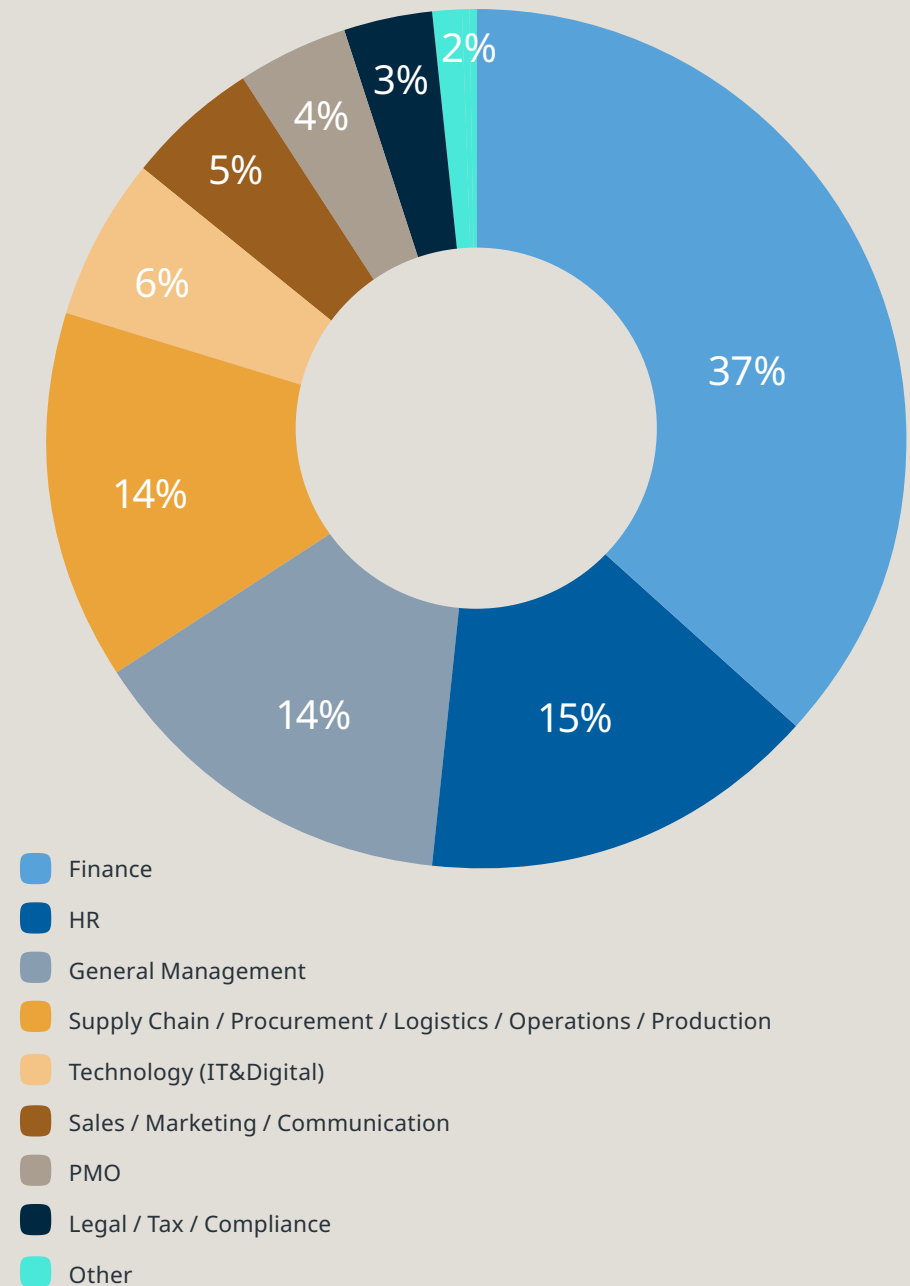
“More than 70% of interim managers has a master’s degree or higher”

# Profile of a Belgian interim manager

## Expertise

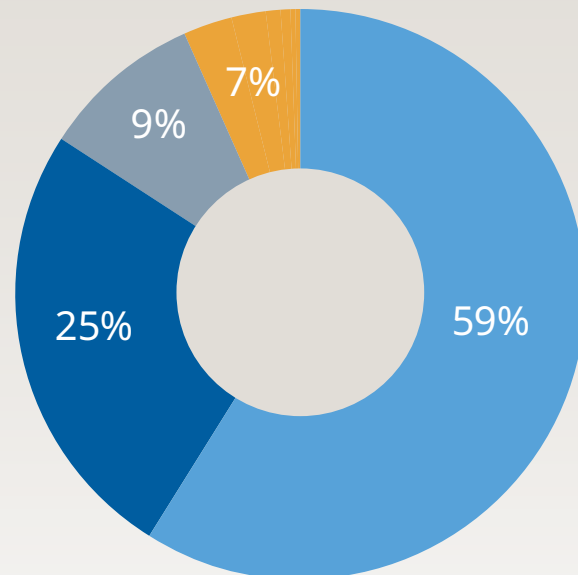
**Finance is traditionally one of the most important fields** in which subject matter experts are employed, and this is still the case. Supply Chain and HR are also well represented.

**IT & Digital are on the rise.** In an age in which technological and digital innovations have become the norm, digital transformation has emerged as a critical factor in company success and their opportunities for growth. This has led to ever-increasing demands for experts in various fields who can help develop and implement innovative solutions.



# Passion for the profession

**Six out of ten respondents left their regular job to start a career as an interim manager.** Respondents cite meeting the need for a greater challenge or looking for an ideal career move into contract work after a dismissal or restructuring as reasons for becoming an interim manager.



## Main reason for becoming an interim manager

- Own conscious decision to stop working as an employee and become an interim manager
- After being dismissed or having been in a restructuring, I did not want to look for a new fixed job
- After being dismissed or having been in a restructuring, it was difficult to find a new job and interim management was an alternative
- Other





# Passion for the profession

Interim managers particularly appreciate the **flexibility and independence** of their role. The roles bring the opportunity to work in different sectors and industries, along with the problem-solving aspect. Interim managers also cite that making a difference within a company brings colour to their lives.

## What do you like most about being an interim manager?



**17%**

Flexibility and independence



**16%**

Being able to work in multiple and different industries



**14%**

I love to solve problems so I can make a real difference



**13%**

Due to my experience, I am able to plug & play after a short onboarding



**13%**

I like change and project work



**11%**

I'm not affected by internal politics



**10%**

Be a soundboard and mentor



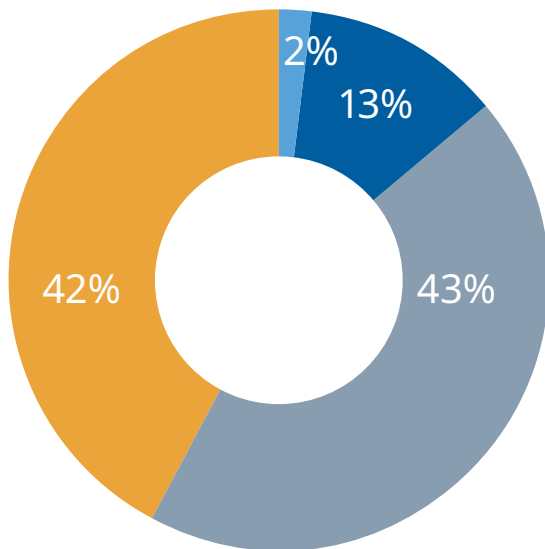
**6%**

I can make more money than as an employee

# Passion for the profession

**88%** of interim managers give their job a **satisfaction score of eight or more** out of ten. In addition, a quarter of all participants awarded it the maximum score.

There is little difference in satisfaction between men and women. People who opt for project and interim management are decidedly happy with their choice. Regardless of gender, more than 85% think a return to permanent roles is unlikely and only one in ten would consider it.



## Would you ever consider a permanent position again?

- Very likely.  
In fact, finding a permanent position still is my top priority
- Somewhat likely.  
I would definitely seriously consider it
- Somewhat unlikely.  
Never say never but it is not my ambition at the moment
- Very unlikely.  
I really do not want to go back to a permanent position



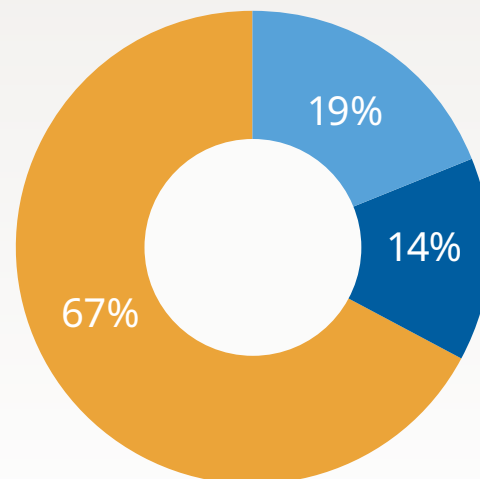
# Risks and professional liability insurance policies

Subject matters experts are liable for any errors in the fulfilment of their assignment. Occasionally, wrong decisions may have major financial consequences. This is where they can rely on a **professional liability insurance policy** to cover these risks.

Depending on the interim manager's role within the company, holding insurance may be more or less important. In practice, however, we see that more and more companies expect their interim manager to have a professional liability insurance policy, even when the companies work through an intermediary. Nevertheless, our survey shows that 1 in 3 interim managers have not yet taken out such professional liability insurance policies.

## Do you have a professional liability insurance policy?

- No, and not planning on taking one
- No, but considering taking one
- Yes



“One in five do not have a professional liability insurance policy and are not considering taking a policy out”

# Misconceptions

## Most important misconceptions about interim management



**34%**

Interim managers are believed to be more expensive than permanent hires



**23%**

Interim managers are believed to lack commitment to long-term goals



**22%**

Interim managers are believed to be only used in crisis situations



**13%**

Interim managers are believed not to take the time to understand the cultural DNA



**8%**

Interim managers are believed not to bring significant value to the organization.



# Misconceptions

Thanks to their expertise, interim managers can be deployed as a “plug & play” solution, which means that they deliver **immediate added value** after a very brief induction period. That enables companies to respond immediately to changing circumstances, start new projects or fill managerial roles in the event of absences. This flexibility goes hand in hand with specific knowledge and expertise. Companies often benefit from an external profile who sees things through a different lens, introduces new ideas and implements efficient solutions without being rooted in the existing corporate culture or structure.



*In practice, we see that there are still some prejudices about interim managers, and that companies are not always sufficiently aware of the added value they offer. The cost sometimes scares companies off. But nothing is as expensive as not being able to replace or fill key roles or having to settle for second best. In other words, this is not an expensive cost as such, but rather an investment at the very core of your business.*



**JAN VANDENBUSSCHE**

Senior Director Interim Management & Technology



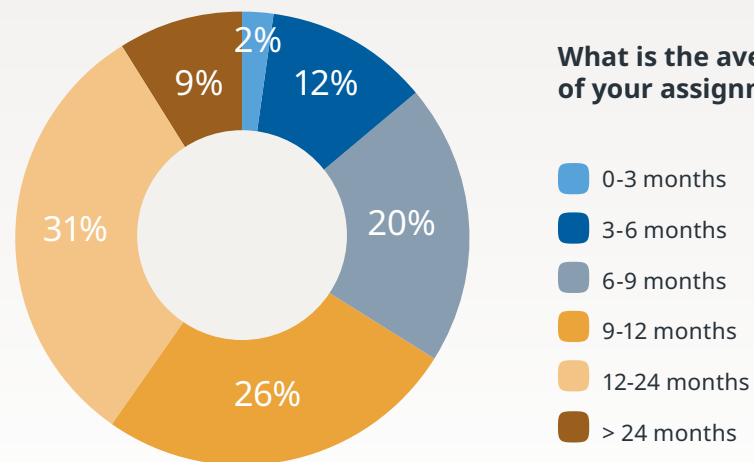
“Companies often benefit from an external profile”

# Passion for the assignments

Interim managers' experience is primarily in ensuring **business continuity, project management and change management**.

The **duration** of an assignment most often varies **between 12 and 24 months** (31%). A quarter of assignments last 9 to 12 months. Shorter assignments are less common, as are very long ones: 0-3 months (2%), 3-6 months (12%) and more than 24 months (9%).

Our survey shows that interim managers with less experience often carry out shorter assignments, and those with more experience tend to do longer ones. For instance, half of the interim managers with a maximum of 2 years of experience in the role sign up for assignments of 3-6 or 6-9 months. Conversely, interim managers with 6 to 10 years of experience carry out most of the assignments that last longer than 24 months.



*We see a tendency towards longer projects. Whereas a survey we conducted a few years ago showed that the average duration was usually 6 to 9 months, we are now seeing an increasing number of assignments that take more than 9 months.*

*By their very nature, some projects require more time, such as more complex ERP or CRM assignments, business intelligence or a company's digital transformation. The pandemic has given digital transformation a huge boost. This trend is continuing – and it is one where AI may still spark off a revolution – and there is a correspondingly high demand for such subject matter experts in this type of assignment.*

*Another explanation might be found in the current 'war for talent'. Companies find it difficult to fill their vacancies, which makes them reluctant to let high-performing interim managers go. Their expertise is often redeployed in other projects to keep their knowledge in the company.*



**JO BLOMMAERT**

Senior Director Interim Management

# Passion for the assignments

**Two thirds work full-time on an assignment.** Women take on part-time projects more often than men. Furthermore, we see that most interim managers focus on one assignment at a time. Only 15% work simultaneously on two different projects. This means that companies can almost always count on interim managers to **focus entirely on their current assignment.**

**Hybrid working is common practice** – six out of ten interim managers now combine working from home with work at their client's premises. On the other hand, 60% have noted that companies expect more on-site presence from their staff than they did in the post-pandemic period. If the client **allows hybrid working**, 40% of the interim managers are **open to longer commutes.**

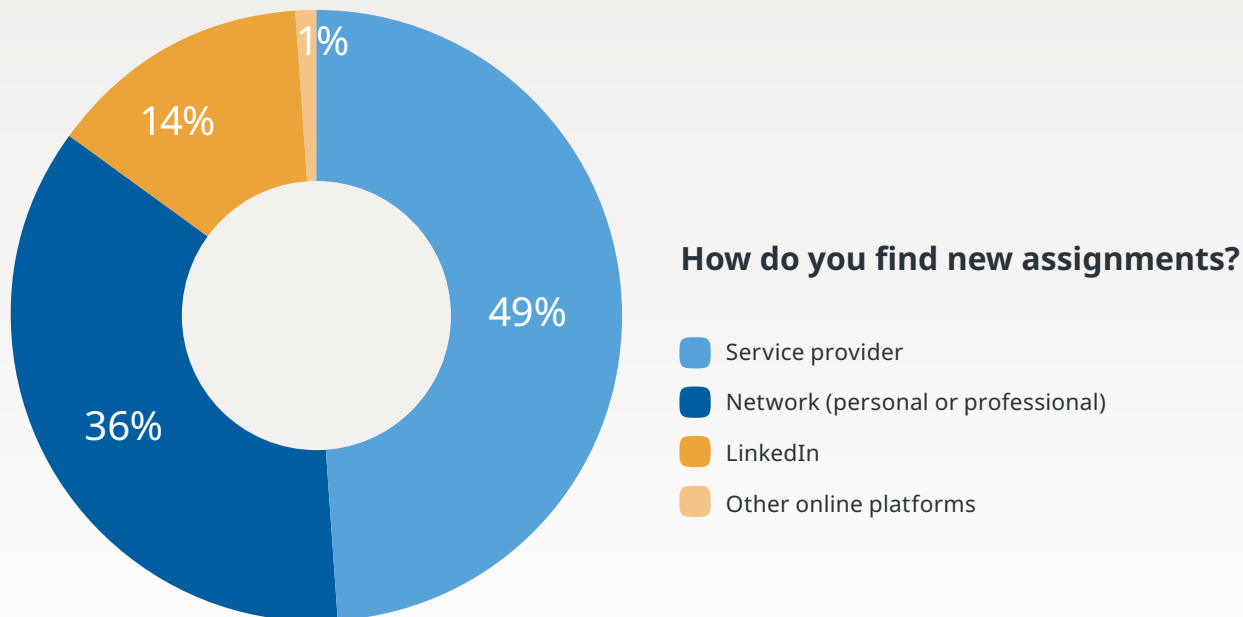
**Interest is the most decisive factor** that leads interim managers to choose a particular assignment. About three quarters of these respondents are drawn to the most interesting project. However, interim managers also believe it is very important to respect the ethical code of interim management, which means opting for the client who is first to decide.



# Passion for the assignments

Interim managers usually find a **new position easily** when an assignment ends. One in five of them are back at work **within two weeks**, and four in ten find a new assignment within a month.

To make this happen, half of the interim managers (49%) use the services of an intermediary or service provider. The network they have built up themselves (36%) and professional platforms such as LinkedIn (14%) also help them find new assignments.



*By working with service providers, interim managers ensure continuity in their assignments and have the opportunity to work on interesting projects that they would probably not have been aware of otherwise.*

*At Robert Half, we have 25 years of experience in supporting interim managers, and we see the difference we make for them on a daily basis: we take away their concerns about finding new assignments, and when doing so we always look at their specific professional expectations and ambitions.*



**JAN VANDENBUSSCHE**

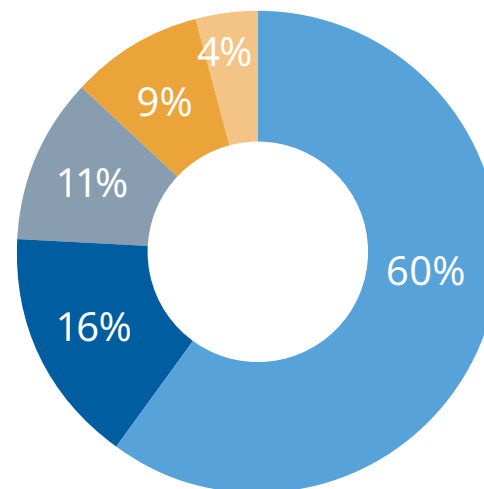
Senior Director Interim Management & Technology



## Pitfalls

The respondents report unclear agreements between the parties about expectations and goals as the biggest obstacle to the successful completion of a project (60%). A mismatch with the company's culture can also throw a spanner in the works (16%).

### Biggest pitfalls



- Alignment of expectations and goals between parties
- Evaluating the cultural fit with the organization
- Establishing a strong governance structure
- Defining clear performance metrics and KPIs
- Other



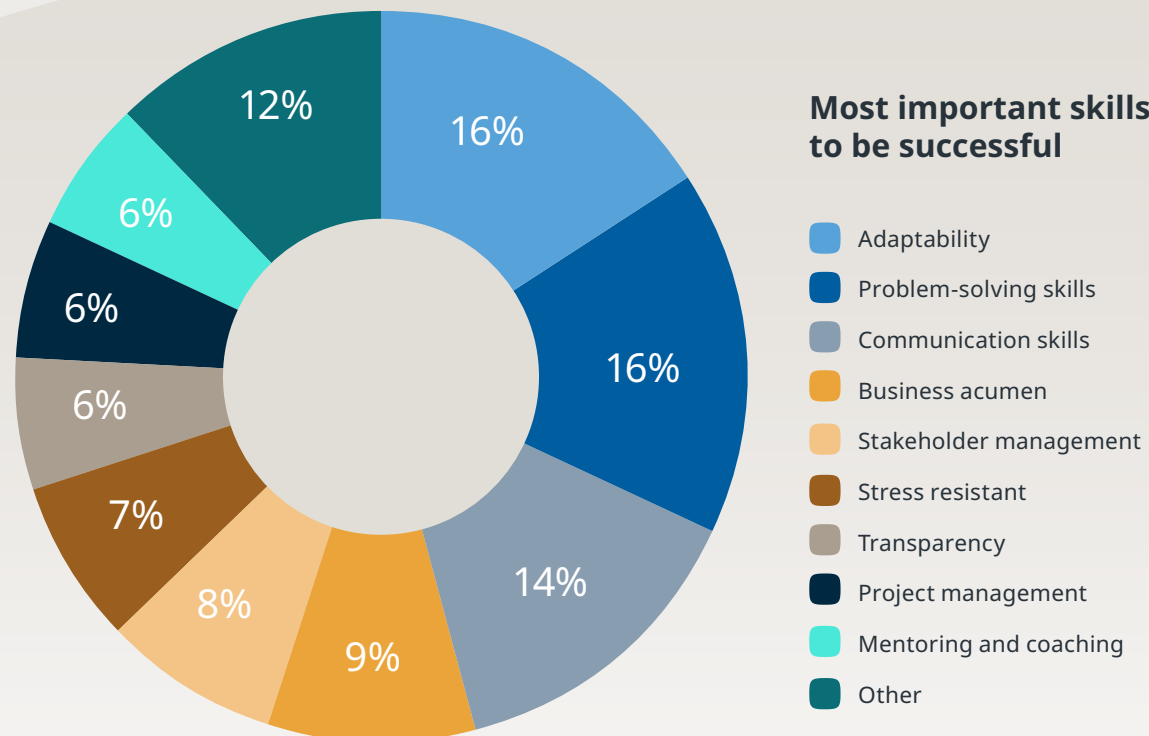
*During negotiations with companies, it is extremely important to agree on what is expected of the interim managers, so that the objectives are clear before a project begins. Likewise, working with a service provider can add value. We ensure clear and transparent communication between the two parties.*



**JO BLOMMAERT**  
Senior Director Interim Management

# Skills

Interim managers indicate that **adaptability** is the most important skill they need to successfully complete a project. Good communication skills and strong problem-solving skills are also in the top three.



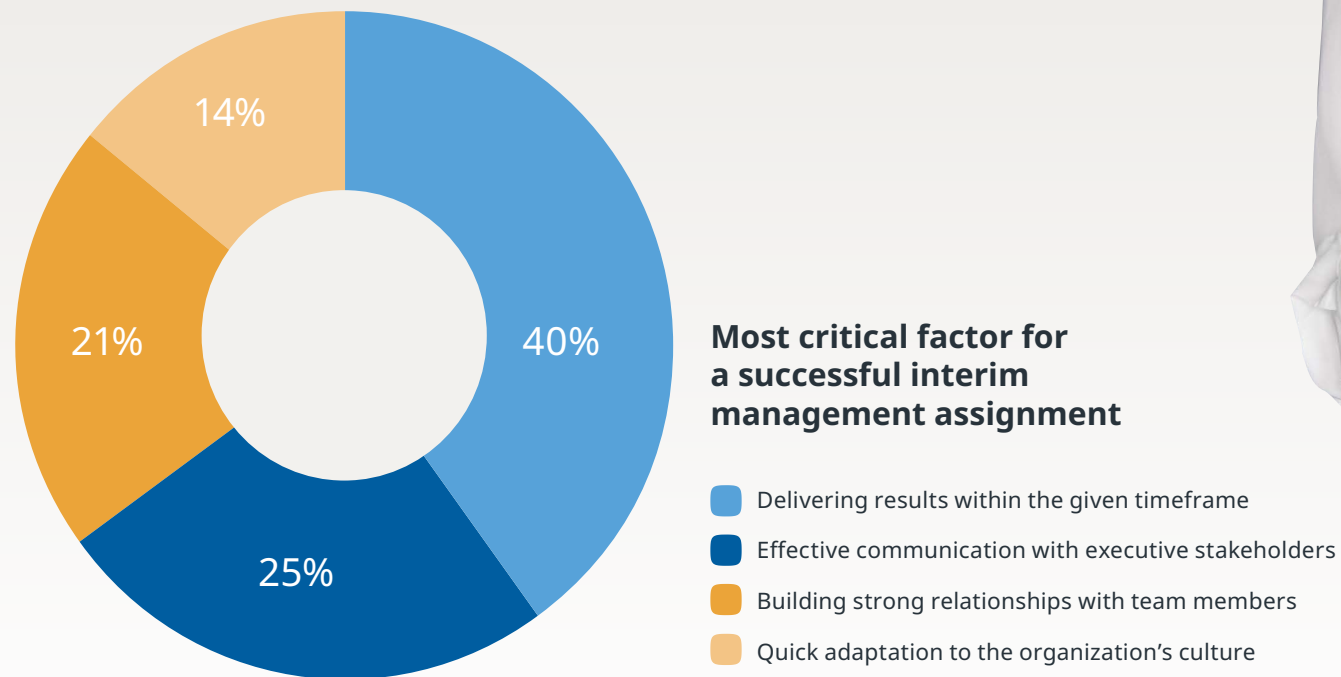
*The crux of the matter is not 'having 20 years of experience' as an interim manager, but the real question is, given those 20 years, which skills have I learned, unlearned and relearned, and that is what they call being adaptable in order to succeed in an Interim Management assignment.*



**PROF. DR. DIRK BUYENS**  
Partner Vlerick Business School

# Skills

For four out of ten respondents, the most important factor in being a successful interim manager is achieving the intended results within the assignment's time frame. Effective communication with stakeholders is cited by a quarter of respondents, followed by building strong relationships with team members (21%), and adapting quickly to the company's culture (14%).



# Rates

The majority of interim managers charge a **fixed daily rate**. Two thirds do not worry much about how their prices compare to others who may be in the running for the same assignment.

Rates can also be adjusted according to the nature of the assignment. For example, one in two managers agree to accept a lower rate if they can be certain of a longer assignment. This willingness is greatest among interim managers with limited experience (less than 5 years).

Conversely, more than six out of ten interim managers indicate that they charge a higher rate for very short assignments (e.g. a quick scan in a few days), to compensate for the flexibility to be available for such short periods and thus potentially miss out on the opportunity for longer projects.

Other factors (apart from inflation and indexation) that, according to interim managers, can contribute to higher rates are changes to the content of the assignment (more complex or challenging) and the interim manager's increasing experience.

## Reasons to increase rates

**29%**

In line with inflation

**27%**

More challenging or complex scope

**24%**

Becoming more experienced

**13%**

As assignments lengthen, my expertise becomes increasingly pertinent

**7%**

After taking additional courses and certifications



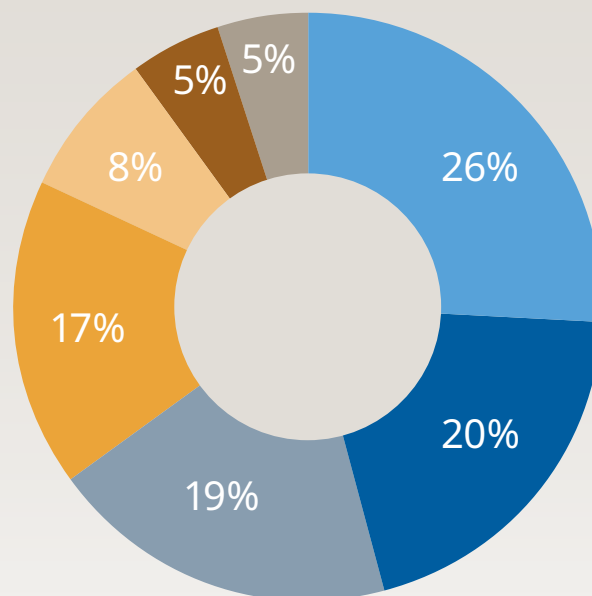
# Trends in 2024

The accelerated pace of **digital transformation** is seen by interim managers as the most important business trend for 2024. Besides this, interim managers believe the ongoing **war for talent** and the focus on optimising business operations and **profitability** will play important roles. Committing to **sustainability and cybersecurity** are the last two trends in the top five.



## Main business trends in 2024

- Accelerated digital transformation
- War for Talent
- Operational excellence and profitability
- Sustainability
- Cyber security
- Supply Chain security
- Immersive customer experience



## Trends in 2024

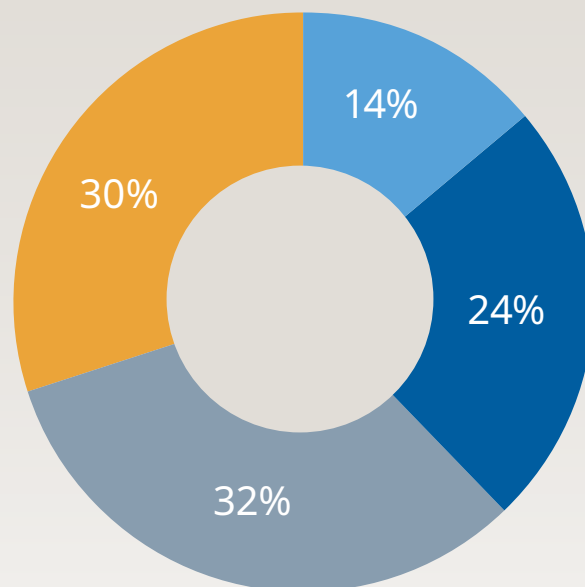
It is worth noting that the majority of interim managers indicate seeing little or no increase in the importance of **AI** in the companies where they have worked in the past two years. Undoubtedly AI will play a much bigger role in the near future.

The majority of interim managers are not worried about the potential impact of AI and automation: more than nine out of ten embrace technological evolution or adopt a neutral stance, in particular noting that while AI may influence the future of interim management, it will not replace human expertise.



### In how many companies have you seen the importance of AI increase in the past 2 years?

- In almost all companies
- In some companies
- In few companies
- In no companies



*The practical experience of the interim managers offers a clear indication that organisations are currently in the early stages of integrating AI into their business models. We should also bear in mind the recent EU AI Act, which plays a pioneering role in regulating AI. Adapting and optimising business models and business processes for AI therefore requires specific high-level expertise, where interim managers in digital and IT could play a pivotal role.*



**BARBARA BOURDEAUD'HUI**  
Senior Manager Technology



## Trends in 2024

How sustainable are companies today, when we look at factors such as **ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance)** and **DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion)**?

Interim managers note that organisations are certainly aware of the environmental and social challenges. Nearly two thirds of companies consider ESG awareness important, whereas the other third are still non-committal.

When it comes to promoting diversity, equity and inclusion, respondents see room for companies to take further steps: 49% believe it is important to build a diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace. Interim managers themselves also attach importance to working for clients who promote diversity and inclusion in their teams.

**How important is DEI awareness in the companies you have recently worked for?**

49%

Important

43%

Neutral

8%

Not important

# Trends in 2024

Recently, a new European directive has come into force, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). This gives organisations a guideline for structuring their sustainability efforts and thus contributing to a climate-neutral continent. But that does not change the fact that it is difficult for many management teams to decide which steps to take. Because every company is different, the sustainability themes they need to report on are different as well. The implementation of this new directive is complex and involves a lot of internal work.

Here, too, subject matter experts can take the burden off companies' hands. One thing they can do is put together an extensive team of internal and external stakeholders, from all departments and levels. That enables companies to create the broad support base they need to achieve their sustainability goals. Interim managers can help to draw up and implement a concrete action plan, setting goals and developing a strategy for each sustainability theme.

**In terms of expectations for 2024, Robert Half sees market demand for interim managers continuing to grow.**



*We have certainly begun 2024 with great confidence. The past year has not just been busy for us, but for the entire interim management market. Because despite the slowdown in economic growth, labour shortage is still a real problem in Belgium. Some sectors are thriving, others are struggling... but even companies in difficulty often need support from temporary senior professionals.*



**JO BLOMMAERT**

Senior Director Interim Management



*Companies are increasingly open to interim management solutions. If you want to remain competitive, it's essential to bring in temporary expertise, for both subject matter expert topics and strategic projects. So there are a whole host of benefits: immediate solutions, plug-and-play deployability, flexibility, specific expertise and experience, efficient cost control, faster implementation of crucial projects, an independent perspective, better risk management, knowledge transfer to your own staff and so on. That is why we expect companies to continue to rely heavily on interim managers in 2024 to achieve their goals.*



**JAN VANDENBUSSCHE**

Senior Director Interim Management & Technology



# Our partnership with Vlerick Business School

As an interim manager, the pressure is high to stay up to date with every issue and every topic in the business world. Together with **Vlerick Business School**, we set up a program that assists experienced interim managers in gaining an insight in and consolidating knowledge of the core management concepts underlying their activities and projects.

The possibility to set up a network, to discuss among interim managers and the refreshment of a number of aspects important to interim managers add up to a real return on investment.



## Discover our different programs:

- ↓ Mastering Interim Management
- ↓ Advanced Mastering Interim Management



*The Mastering Interim Management program is the ultimate update in strategy building and change management. I have read the right books on the subject, but since strategy and change management are hot topics, those books do not include the latest vision.*



**PHILIPPE VAN TROOST**  
Interim Manager





# About Robert Half

Robert Half's Interim Management practice is specialized in offering flexible talent solutions to companies in need for project assistance or specific expertise in case of an expansion, a restructure or major change. Via our service offerings, companies can rely on the expertise and knowledge of interim managers.

Through our 25 years of experience and in-depth knowledge of the industries, we act in a dual function for our clients and candidates, as market barometer and trustworthy ambassador, and business advisor.

## Get in touch

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