

CHANGING LANES: FROM PERMANENT TO INTERIM

BY AZ AHMED

From personal experience, I can understand the fear that changing roles can elicit, having worked at one organisation for 17 years before moving on. I imagine the decision to change from permanent to interim is a much more daunting prospect. However, the pattern I've observed from speaking to interim managers is that once they have decided to move to interim, they consistently choose to remain working on this basis.

This anecdotal impression is supported by last year's IIM survey 2023, which has tracked interim longevity. With continuous working on an interim basis increasing for 9 years or less: 5–9 years (+1.1%), 1–4 years (+2%) and for less than a year (+ 3.7%), suggesting there is a move toward interim working. It is worth pointing out that there was also a reduction in interims for periods longer than 9 years, potentially due to early retirement or a move back to permanent.

A future indicator of longevity could also be early entry into the interim market, with an increase of 2% in interim managers aged less than 40. The average age has dropped from 54.9 in 2022 to 53.7 in 2023. A frequent reason for those in permanent employment not making the move to interim is the understandable fear of being out of work for long periods. However, last year's survey showed that there has been a reduction in the average gap between assignments, which is down from 3 – 2.6 months.

In fact, 79% of interims have a gap of less than 3 months, and for 53%, it's less than 1 month. Among these statistics will be interims who have chosen to take time off for personal reasons, to travel, etc., which will skew the figures.

Longevity of the interim market has been fuelled by several factors in the past few years creating more opportunities for interim managers. One reason is economic instability, which has driven uncertainty for employers and led to interims being appointed rather than permanent staff. Similarly, due to the impact of the economy, organisations have restructured and downsized. To achieve this transformation, project/programme roles have grown in popularity. The 2023 IIM survey supports this notion, with nearly a third of interims working in business change/transformation or programme/project management roles.

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In the long term, the interim market has been further bolstered by the COVID pandemic, which has led to candidates in both markets – permanent and interim – reprioritising choices to maintain a better work-life balance. Interim caters to lifestyle choices more naturally due to its temporary nature, allowing for greater flexibility as organisations are willing to be even more flexible with arrangements around working from home, compressed hours, varied start times, etc.

The diversity of roles offered and the ability to move from contract to contract quickly is often cited as another reason for remaining an interim manager. The value of seasoned, evergreen interim professionals is greatly felt in short term contracts where they can deliver short, sharp change or cover an existing role. IIM voting last year highlighted that 26% of interims had 3 or more assignments in the previous 12 months. Moreover, nearly three quarters of all interim assignments were less than a year, with 42% less than 6 months.

Finally, and perhaps courting some controversy but certainly part of the long-term appeal of interim is the remuneration, which has seen an increase in day rates over the past 15 years.

If you haven't yet, please do utilise the opportunity to share your views on myself and colleagues at Anderson Quigley, as well as the world of interim at large on the [IIM - Institute of Interim Management](#) annual survey before it closes on April 30th, this is incredibly valuable to the industry to better support you in the future. **[You can take the survey here.](#)**

And please do get in contact with your thoughts on staying in the market on a long term basis.



Az is an experienced interim consultant and is guided by his desire to help individuals join the interim sector and to support the higher education institutions in appointing credible, transformational leaders who drive forward change.

[You can learn more about him and contact him here.](#)

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