

**INTERIM EXECUTIVES MAKE** great project managers. Projects tend to be of a finite length, with a finite budget and specific objectives – making them ideal candidates for the short-term injection of expertise that interims bring. Interim executives also represent the dedicated resource that projects need to succeed: trying to get someone with a day-to-day job to manage an important project too can be a recipe for disaster.

And successful project management involves skilful upwards, downwards and sideways management – something that interim executives excel in. What's more, interims work in a structured way, and are very task- and deadline-focused.

Such skills are in great demand.

According to Christine de Larcy, Managing Director of Impact Executives: “Growing numbers of organisations are approaching us for interim professional project and programme managers, because they want to minimise the risk that their projects and programmes will fail at a time when every pound saved or made could spell the difference between survival and failure.”

Kiran Grewal, an Impact Executives interim manager, has been doing project/programme management for a range of different clients for over 20 years. She says that most in-house project/programme managers focus on the ‘hard’ aspects of the job – the timelines, budget control and progress reporting – at the cost of the equally important ‘softer’ aspects – the politics, communications and people management.

She recently completed a programme for internet company Yahoo, which involved relocating its European headquarters to Switzerland and covered a variety of sub-projects, including selecting and fitting out real estate, organisational design, defining HR packages, the physical move, all the legal aspects, back office process changes, and liaison with Swiss authorities.

The biggest challenge interim project/programme managers face, says Grewal, is getting the programme/project off the ground in the first place. “We are typically brought in when the project has run into trouble,” she says.

The next challenge is to get executive sponsorship and involvement. “You can't rely on middle management to escalate the kind of decisions you need to make a project successful.”

**INTERIM EXECUTIVES** ARE IN GROWING DEMAND FOR THEIR PROJECT AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT SKILLS

# Programmed to succeed

‘Delivering a project or programme successfully is a very skilled job. The job of a professional like me is to make it look simple,’

And during the programme or project itself, one of the stiffest challenges is to get non-project functions – who are usually very busy doing other things – involved too. But, she says, once the project is up and running and has gained momentum, the organisation needs less input from the interim – and some organisations take back control of the programme at this stage.

Fiona Melvin, another Impact Executives interim manager, says most of the projects and programmes she has managed in her career have been to do with acquisitions and turnarounds. “They typically involve large-scale complex change, last between six and nine months, and you act like a chief

## PROJECTS VS PROGRAMMES

“The terminology tends to be used interchangeably, but, in fact, projects and programmes are two different things,” explains Grewal. “Projects tend to be clearly defined and quite short-term – typically between one and 12 months. Programmes are usually longer-term – up to three or five years – and they tend to evolve so that what you end up with may be quite different from what you started out thinking you needed. But because programmes are less rigid than projects, an important part of programme management is to manage its evolution. Programmes are also, typically, bigger than projects and may involve lots of different projects.”

operating officer until the operation is on its feet or stabilised again.”

This year Melvin expects more turnaround projects designed to increase efficiencies and reduce costs. “The skill sets required are the same, but the mood will be more sombre and the amount of money we have to do things will be less. But we often find the money from opportunities dormant within the business. Delivering a project or programme successfully is a very skilled job. The job of a professional project/programme manager like me is to make it look simple.”



YAHOO!