



Photo: ClipDealer

Interim managers are expected to get projects up and running in six to nine months, before moving on without having left behind a void.

## Manager for hire

**Management:** Most people would be scared off by a constant pressure to perform, new situations, and uncertain future prospects. Bona fide interim managers, however, thrive in such situations. They think of it as a challenge, as independence, and an opportunity to make a difference. Their creed? Roll up your sleeves and get to it. More and more solar energy companies are using these modern nomads to meet the quickly changing demands of the market.

When Nedim Cen was named CEO of Q-cells in March, he had already been its CFO for nine months. With his experience at restructuring companies, he appeared to be the only logical choice. The financial market was expecting a new front man for the company's new strategies. That Cen was an interim manager was little noted: he was a temporary exec who would leave the company as soon as the restructuring was finished. From

there, he would be onto the next mission for his company, Alvarez and Marsal.

His case brought to attention a phenomenon that was invented in the Netherlands in the 1970s, and for years in Germany its occurrence has become more and more frequent. Managers are no longer simply at the top of a company's hierarchy. They focus on what they do best and then change in quick succession from one posting to the next. As a

general rule, they already have behind them a substantial career as an executive in a salaried position, both in their home country and internationally, as well as some years freelancing their talents. Their customers are companies lacking something, whether specific expertise or a leader with a vision. Interim manager put out fires. Depending on the position, in Germany they are mostly paid between 600 and 1600 euros a day and usually stay





Sabine Kauper: "It's not easy replacing a department head temporarily."

on the job for six to nine months. In that time, they are expected to get projects up and running in such a way that they can move on again without leaving behind a void.

In order to be chosen, these managers maintain wide-ranging personal relationships, take part in such social networks as Xing, and work with headhunters. The latter are not comparable to temp agencies but function rather more like a talent agent. Provided an interim manager fulfills certain criteria, has the necessary mindset, and his professional skills are in demand, he is then added to a pool, from which the provider makes proposals for its customers. It is just big enough that the provider's employees are personally familiar with the managers. "We take care in developing our talent pool," said Rayk Jakobi of provider Bridge IMP. "What is important for us is to ask whether this is an interim manager in the classic sense or someone whose self-employment is just an emergency solution?" Those who are really looking for a full-time salaried position are not usually able to make themselves expendable when the time comes. You only truly know whether a person has the necessary qualities of an interim manager after an extensive one-on-one interview and thoroughly scrutinizing their references.

As opposed to salaried positions where one has an eye on the candidate's future potential, interim managers should be somewhat overqualified. The more experience they have, the faster they can be brought into the mix, thereby fulfilling the order more efficiently. Interim manager Michael Spies says that one of his advantages over salaried employees is the fact that he can be completely devoted to his contract. He separates himself from

his family, and "then I give 180 percent for six to eight months, after which I get some downtime to recharge my batteries." Even if interim managers do occasionally get a full-time contract, it's not worth trying them out first as an interim. "Approximately 20 per cent of our customers ask if they can retain the manager," said Erdwig Holste of Management Angeles. "But up to 90 per cent of the managers reject the offer."

Interim managers are often used in one of three ways. Most often, they stand in for executives in posts that are temporarily not filled, for instance because the old executive was fired or became ill, or perhaps because the search for a replacement is taking too long. Around a third of all interim managers were filling vacancies in 2009, according to the annual provider survey conducted by Germany's AIMP (Arbeitskreis Interim Management Provider). The lack of expertise in upper management has made this option common in the photovoltaic sector. For instance, Phoenix Solar AG was on the lookout for a new human resources director after the old one took over the helm of the company's newly founded further training center. But the ideal candidate had to give six months' notice at his employer. CFO Sabine Kauper is very satisfied with the interim manager who took over the job in the meantime. "It's not easy replacing a department head temporarily," she says. "He doesn't have the 100-day pass that new employees have; he has to jump in headfirst. He has to lead even as he becomes familiar with new fields."

### How to get a good overview

Good interim managers have special ways of getting the job done. For instance, Michael Spies has a long talk with each employee in the first week. He has them tell him about their work, and he asks a lot of questions in order to put the pieces of the puzzle together to get a good overview of the situation. "I quickly find out what's going on in the company. And I also figure out who the good employees are that I need to listen to most."

When financial investor Granville Baird spun off Meier Solar Solutions GmbH in the summer of 2008, the entire executive board was filled with interim managers for the time being. This quick solution gave the company time to find the best people to manage the firm over the long term. When current CEO



Michael Spies: "I give 180 percent for six to eight months, then recharge my batteries."

Florian von Gropper finally got onboard, he became the first permanent member of executive management. Today, he says the procedure was a good idea because it gave the company the chance to get going quickly even as it remained flexible. AS interim managers can be let go at any time Gropper was quickly able to replace two other executives. "They were even able to pick their own successors. After all, they were the ones best able to say which abilities were needed. And there were no envious behavior," he reports.

Aside from sales positions, which require close personal customer contact, interim managers can be used just about anywhere in the company. But if they are involved in strategic planning, in product development, or at the executive level, they are bound to gain insider knowledge and learn trade secrets. "Of course I am taking knowledge with me," says Michael Spies. But he is prohibited from capitalizing on that knowledge. This is why he always refrains from directly switching to a competitor. And when it is the same industry, then he says his "ethics of non-competition" oblige him to make sure that he at least has a much different task. After all, the contract he signs with a competitor will probably be his last one.

Classic project work is the second most typical case for interim managers in Germany with 30 percent of hirings, followed by change management at 14 percent. In both cases, the manager has a clearly delineated task to perform within a certain timeframe. In particular, it pays to have an external expert handle change management, in which employees become prepared for a rollout or a revision of processes and structures. Ideally, the stand-in manager will have already handled several such projects and therefore have



far more experience with such transitions than permanent company staff. Furthermore, once the change is implemented, the interim manager is no longer needed. If a permanent executive handled the transition, that person either would have to do so alongside their normal tasks,

making them less focused, or would have to be set aside solely for the project. Phoenix Solar is currently using an interim manager to roll out a new ERP program – software that maps the company's entire resource planning and therefore concerns every line of business.

Q-Cells got support from an interim manager when planning a new office in France. "There is so much to take into consideration," explains future Head of French Business, Daniel Cintolesi. "You can't simply hook everything on to the company; rather, you have to set up all of



#### THE INTERIM MANAGER PROVIDER BRIDGE IMP

The number of interim managers in the solar energy sector is slowly increasing. In other industries interim management has rapidly become an integral part of day-to-day operations. In Germany in 2009, the chemicals and pharmaceuticals industry accounted for around 15 per cent of all interim placements, and the mechanical engineering and telecommunications/IT sectors had 13 per cent respectively. According to the Interim Management Provider work group, the market share in the energy and environmental sector was five per cent.

According to data provided by the Institute of Interim Management, there are presently around 2,000 interim managers working in the United Kingdom. The Dachgesellschaft Deutsches Interim Management e.V. platform estimates that there are around 1,500 interim managers in Germany. The Swiss Interim Manager national platform speaks of between 4,000 and 6,000 interim managers. In the Netherlands interim management has become a widely used solution. For over 20 years companies have used the services of interim managers and the market has displayed incredible growth over the past ten years. According to the Nederlandse Vereniging voor Interimmanagers, around 40,000 interim managers join companies as managers on a temporary basis.

Interim managers are typically hired to provide the following services:

- Fill temporary top management vacancies
- Execute special tasks or projects
- Work on restructuring, reorganization, turnaround processes or avoiding insolvency
- Help with fusions and takeovers
- Develop and open up new markets
- Start-ups

It is difficult to say just how many truly qualified interim managers are currently working worldwide. This is because the job title is unprotected. What distinguishes a "real" interim manager is that he or she has earned the qualifications and experience required for this job title over the course of their professional development through proven project successes and by building personal skills. A dependable alternative when seeking an interim manager is to use the services of a professional interim management provider who will identify suitable candidates on the basis of their experience, qualifications and social skills.

As interim managers are often brought in to handle sensitive, highly critical corporate situations, providers have to be able to react swiftly without ever losing sight of the client's specific requirements. At Bridge IMP, we always select the potential candidate for a project on the basis of the enterprise's individual demands and targets. The combination of an intense dialogue with the client and our many years of experience in selecting interim managers allows us to propose a hand-picked group of candidates with the skills needed for the solar energy industry within a very short period of time. We recently placed an interim manager in the Italian subsidiary of a German solar company. His responsibilities there include improving process optimization and international communication. The aim is to successfully restructure the company from its present retail basis to a focus on project business.

Bridge IMP views its interim managers as independent service providers who do not focus on their own profits, but on the successful

completion of the project. "Many companies are as yet unaware of the many, immediately tangible benefits of an interim manager, an analytical implementer, who bypasses 'pretty presentations' and long drawn-out conceptualization in favour of rolling up his or her sleeves and getting on with the task at hand," says Antje Lenk, Managing Director of Bridge IMP. "Effective temporary managers take care of operative management tasks and are willing to assume entrepreneurial responsibility. An interim manager is always willing to act as a sparring partner for the company and will implement important projects more effectively and at greater speed." There is an increasing demand for seasoned executives who will respect existing corporate values and are capable of developing and building these values under the terms of their mandate. An interim manager needs a certain set of skills; alongside the right qualifications and experience, these include personal characteristics, such as level-headedness, a commitment to transparent, open communication and the ability to listen and react with sensitivity to the needs of the company and the team members.

It also takes a certain mindset within the company to allow an interim manager to work successfully. Essential requirements are a flexible structure and a willingness to embrace change. As interim managers bring to the company an impartial outsider's view of the situation, businesses must be prepared to take on board new experience and be open to external know-how. All relevant information and suitable resources must be provided to ensure that the hand-over process is fast and efficient.

Bridge IMP, headquartered in Grünwald, Munich, was founded in 2009 and has been delivering first and second level executives as interim managers to large corporations and medium-sized enterprises across all industries and sectors. Managing Director Antje Lenk is a respected industry insider who has a long and successful career in placing interim managers. With its portfolio of carefully selected, highly qualified managers with proven track records, Bridge IMP helps to bridge staffing gaps and can provide proactive, results-driven interim managers to handle projects and orders within 24 hours.

Rayk Jakobi, consultant at Bridge IMP GmbH & Co. KG



Rayk Jakobi, consultant at Bridge IMP, is responsible for the provision of interim managers for the international solar energy industry.





Photo: ClipDealer

An interim manager needs to be able to listen and react with sensitivity to the needs of the company and the team members.

the lines of business from scratch, come up with a new communication structure, and consider risks. All of that quickly becomes unwieldy." He says that, by hiring interim manager Urs Beckmann, the firm got third-party expertise that came in handy later. "We used this project to come up with documentation for use as a blueprint in the founding of other offices." The experts are used to having their knowledge purchased in this way. "While the added value of my expertise is in the specific application, if the company comes up with a blueprint solution that works, then that is my success. In the end, it increases customer retention and

leads to new projects," Beckmann says. It can also pay to have an expert come in for limited-term foreign projects because it is so hard to find someone willing to do the job on the labor market. Yet when the task is too specific, it can also be hard to find the right interim manager.

"If you are looking for someone with experience for a solar project in northern Africa, there may only be one or two candidates," says Rayk Jakobi. Photovoltaic projects therefore sometimes resort to managers from related industries. As Erdwig Holste puts it, "Our experience has been that specialists from the automotive and semiconductor sectors can

handle production issues very well. In this way, highly developed, transferable production standards can be effectively used. For utility companies, we find a lot of parallels in the telecommunications sector, where similar problems had to be solved four or five years ago."

Most managers with experience in restructuring, the fourth most common area, come from other industries. At ten percent, the share of the interim manager pie is relatively small, but one that often continues to be closely associated with the profession. When we think of interim managers, we imagine someone coming in to cut costs, lay people off, shift production abroad, or spin off divisions. After all, banks, investors, lawyers, and liquidators generally negotiate nearly 20 percent of such tasks. Plus, when interim managers are hired because of third-party demand, they often face stiff resistance from within the firm. "There are times when investors send someone in so that their own relations do not sour. The game is then one of good cop, bad cop," Beckmann says.

Yet he says he always thinks carefully before taking such a job because he is not interested in brainless cost-reduction campaigns. "They just send you in there with a club, which is not a real challenge." But Beckmann says such jobs make up only a small, very special niche on the market.

"Managers do not fire people; companies do," Daniel Cintolesi agrees. "When we had to lay people off, every department head had to bear responsibility, and that was no fun." He says that getting a new face to come in and do the dirty work is dishonest.

## PV Directory

### Industry Registry

You will find a lot of useful information about products and services on the Internet pages of our advertising customers. The addresses listed below are sorted into among other criteria PV market categories. This will help you quickly locate the product you are looking for.

#### System Integrator & Off Grid

Phaesun GmbH  
[www.phaesun.com](http://www.phaesun.com)

#### Inverter

Satcon Technology Corporation  
[www.satcon.com](http://www.satcon.com)

#### Mounting Systems

Renusol GmbH  
[www.renusol.com](http://www.renusol.com)

#### Modules

Upsolar Co. Ltd.  
[www.upsolar.com](http://www.upsolar.com)



Dirk Morbitzer, however, senior analyst at Renewable Analytics, says that it sometimes makes sense to swap out executives for consolidation in some cases. As he puts it, a manager has to have a different skill set to take a company from five people to 500 than to take it back down to 400. "You have to find a much different way of communicating with employees. Some people can do that, but not everyone." He explains that bosses who are simultaneously owners of the company are generally more credible. For the other cases, he recommends interim managers. Morbitzer says the entire turnaround should be completed in twelve to eighteen months, and the position can then be made redundant.

### Tough decisions

Interim manager and restructuring expert Nedim Cen also came to Q-Cells in Thalheim for a turnaround. In June 2009, he replaced CFO Hartmut Schüning before moving on to replace CEO Anton Milner in March 2010. Nedim Cen is simultaneously managing director of restructuring firm Alvarez & Marsal. As

director of the company's German office, he has a lot more resources than a freelance interim manager would. "But that is an absolutely unique situation, a completely different league," Beckmann comments. Although it is clear that Cen will have to make some tough decisions, employees are more hopeful than fearful. "That is a man who speaks the truth even when it hurts," says Uwe Schmorl, chairman of the employee council and supervisory board member at Q-Cells. "The way he conducted himself at the employee meeting showed everyone that the days of dreaming and hoping for good luck are over. But I also had the impression that he knows where we need to go."

The prospects for interim managers in photovoltaics are very good. Companies, providers, and analysts believe that the sector faces a number of challenges where interim managers will be a good option. "The industry is currently in a major transitional phase," Morbitzer says, "which means it may make sense to purchase external expertise for a brief period. Why not learn from other industries?" Experts are also in demand when

it comes to internationalization. As Michael Spies puts it, "In the past few years, the solar sector has been especially opportunistic in opening new offices. They want the new market or company, but they have not bothered to change their German ways. Obviously, Italians, Spaniards, and others then do not feel properly taken into account." He says that you can only make the parts into a whole if you know how individual nationalities work. Urs Beckmann adds, "A lot of companies have ridden out the days of glory without actively becoming professionalized," meaning employees will now be disillusioned by deep, harsh cuts. He says it would be too bad if the positive spirit in companies were lost in the process. "You could have predicted this; it isn't necessary." But often, the option of interim managers is a budget question for companies in times of crisis. When major export industries had to make cuts in 2009, interim managers were the first ones to go. They were a costly item that could be done away with easily. As a result, orders fell by a full 22 percent after years of growth. ♦

Cornelia Lichner