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Leadership in Organisational Change: Rules for Successful Hiring in Interim Management

GERHARD SMID*, EELCO VAN HOUT** & YVONNE BURGER†

*Inter-university Centre for Organisation Studies and Change Management, Utrecht, Netherlands, **Tilburg School for Politics and Governance, University of Tilburg, The Netherlands, †Independent Management Consultant and Sioo-associate*

ABSTRACT *It is not sufficient for managers who hire an interim manager to do no more than choose 'the right person for the job' for their change projects. Too many change processes fail and that's not only due to what the interim managers do. The hiring managers themselves can do more to create success. They have many more possibilities than only in the selection phase. This article discusses a number of rules or action repertoire for this purpose. This repertoire is based on a study into the factors of success and failure for interim management in projects of organisational change. We suggest that hiring managers should focus their attention on the cooperation of all stakeholders. They might take a pioneering role in the professionalisation of all persons involved in the organisational change.*

KEY WORDS: Change management, interim management, leadership in change

Introduction

In the Netherlands interim management has grown into a mature profession with its own professional association, ethical code, training programs and so on (Reijniers *et al.*, 2003). It is common practice for managers to decide to call in outsiders for their change issues, outsiders such as interim managers with specific change knowledge and expertise. The hiring manager often limits his own role as manager in the change process to the initial phase, to choosing 'the right person for the job'. This restricted role should not surprise us. It is common for organisations to temporarily supplement specific, seldom-needed and therefore missing competencies through a swift recruitment and selection process. It is

Correspondence Address: Dr G.A.C. Smid, Sioo, Admiraal helfrichlaan 1, 3527 KV Utrecht, The Netherlands. E-mail: smid@sioo.nl

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partly the prevailing organisational management discourse in this area that urges managers to act this way. However, in change projects that we studied where this method was being used, we encountered many disappointments. Things often do not go half as well as desired. We suspect that these disappointments arose partly because managers restricted their role as described when they called in outsiders; and that there could be less disappointment and a much greater chance of success if managers had a less constrained interpretation of their role as hiring authority.

We set to work with these assumptions to generate knowledge on how to make a success of calling in interim managers for organisational change. Our assumptions were confirmed by a multiple case study into success and failure factors with interim management in organisational change. If hiring managers perform their role in a less restricted way, the chance of success and the absence of disappointment is much greater. Our research also showed that there are many more possibilities for hiring managers to exert influence than just in the initial phase. Our research material allowed us to create a specific knowledge product that supports hiring managers when they call in interim managers for organisational change. Our knowledge product is in the shape of an *action repertoire* for managers.

In this article we first explore the issue of working with interim managers in organisational change. Then we examine the literature and our own research. We present the knowledge product: the action repertoire consisting of six basic rules. We close with a discussion and a number of conclusions.

Managing Organisational Change

We can often perceive a paradox with organisational changes. People want to change and that means the organisation has to break away from its familiar patterns. Management has an active part in this task and it is certainly not easy. Whether the change will eventually take root depends on how management handles it. And yet often this same management also had a great deal to do with learning the worn patterns. That's why organisational change often doesn't work under its own steam and other players in the 'overarching management structure' (Fincham, 1999) are sought out. In practice, managers often call in outsiders such as interim managers and organisation consultants with specific change knowledge and expertise to work on their change issue, and limit their own role to that of deciding on the right person.

How does that work in practice? Many managers experience enormous pressure. *Something* has to happen. And yet the manager doesn't exactly know what the matter is. Research is often not an option; it slows things down. Meanwhile the issue keeps getting bigger and more problematic. Someone has to do something. Often there is no one available. Speed is essential. The manager rings a consultant or interim agency that he knows well. They submit someone's name. Agencies like to dramatise certain things, and the external person is raised to the level of deus ex machina, of saviour. The manager checks whether it might work out with the man (or woman). If so: straight to work, today if possible! The manager goes back to his own proper work. There's someone on the job, the problem has been organised out of the way and thereby solved. There is a lot to be said for this method of working: if it goes wrong, it's the external employee who did it.

So when hiring managers call in an interim manager they rely on the agency, considering the change issue de facto as a routine problem for which they can temporarily hire in the missing competencies. They arrange their problem out of the way, as if they were outsourcing the change issue. This way of working with interim managers is problematic. A government manager told us this about it:

> It's like feeling hungry: you just grab something, without checking what the matter is. Are you really hungry or do you just feel like a snack or do you really need a break and some fresh air?

When the results are disappointing, people often point at the interim manager. We don't deny that sometimes there are grounds for this. But we do have *questions*, such as:

- isn't it possible that the hiring manager himself or herself also has a part in that disappointment; and:
- can a hiring manager also do things to make a success of calling in interim managers for organisational changes?

External Organisational Professionals in the Literature

Over the past few years the literature has given a great deal of attention to the role of external staff in organisational change processes. Various authors analyse the role of the external organisational professional in the knowledge economy or in business (see for example Tordoir, 1995; Clark and Fincham, 2002; Smid, 2002). Most attention is paid to the management consultants. Some attention is also given to other organisational professionals such as interim managers.

In The Netherlands quite a lot of research has been done on interim management in the government sector (see for example Banning and Klep, 1987; Boon and Devos, 1993; Wichard, 1994; van Hout, 2001; Koppens and Veenma, 2003). The authors of recent publications have concentrated mainly on the interim manager's competencies and the development of those competencies (Burger and van Staveren, 2002; Maas, 2004; Ramondt, 2004). Burger and van Staveren (2002) for instance, argue that in the initial phase of interim projects a hiring manager above all must have a good look himself at the person proposed by an agency (see Box 1). That offers the greatest chance of success, they seem to be stating implicitly.

But with this exclusive bias towards questions about the professionalisation and competency development of interim managers we are running the risk of *agency* (Rip and Visscher, 1999), or in other words: we overrate the possibilities of the (interim) manager's contributions to organisational change. Recent studies also examine other aspects, particularly the initial phase of change projects. On the basis of their empirical research, de Caluwé and Stoppelenburg (2003) generated a number of rules for good contracting in consultancy projects (see Box 2). Their recommendations strongly resemble those of Boogers and van Hout (2002).

Van't Hek (2004) mentions similar principles for calling in interim management, based on practical experience: in his opinion hiring managers would do

BOX 1. The hiring manager checks out the interim manager (according to Burger and van Staveren, 2002)

- Does he/she build up a relationship with the hiring manager that focuses on open communication?
- Does he/she start by creating enough space for taking action, in case 'the question behind the question' turns out to be different?
- Are his/her observations meticulous?
- Can he/she assess the organisation's capacity for change and willingness to change and can he/she match his intervention with what the organisation is capable of achieving and wants to achieve?
- Can he/she assess the political relationships inside the system and in the context, and does he/she use risk and stakeholder analyses to this purpose?
- Is he/she versatile if a project doesn't work out as expected?
- Does he/she have insight into his/her own behaviour and its effect on others, and can he/she make use of different behavioural alternatives?
- Can he/she critically examine his/her own way of thinking and acting as well as his/her own share in the interaction in change processes (reflection in action)?
- Does he/she organise his/her own feedback to trace pitfalls and blind spots?
- Is he/she attentive to emotional and (apparently) irrational processes (in the framework of 'feelings first' and 'feelings are facts')?
- Does he/she use a logbook (for justification to external authorities, but also for him/herself)?

well to invest in the selection process and must be strongly involved in it (see Box 3); see also Geerdink and Ten Koppel (1994).

A New Research Project

The literature suggests that the chance of success when calling in external professionals for organisational change increases if the hiring manager invests in the initial phase, checks out the proposed manager properly himself or herself, and through professionalisation also invests in himself or herself. We can pose the question: is that all a hiring manager has to do in order to make a success of calling in interim managers for organisational change? We suspected it wasn't enough.

We therefore started studying the question: how does one make a success of interim projects? Because the field doesn't really voluntarily open itself up to

BOX 2. Good contracting for consultancy projects (de Caluwé and Stoppelenburg, 2003)

- Put time and energy into the initial phase and the assignment and formulate the questions clearly.
- Communicate intensively in the contracting phase about desires, expectations, criteria, approach and roles.
- Avoid contracting phases with limited (personal) contact (as with European tenders), for in those cases divergent expectations are not exposed.
- Organise competition; that makes the hiring manager sharper.
- As a (beginning) hiring manager, invest in one's own professionalisation, through workshops or coaching on tackling ambiguity, complex processes and difficult contexts.

BOX 3. Good contracting practice in interim projects (van't Hek, 2004)

- Be clear about reason, definition of the problem and selection criteria.
- Look for an interim manager in several places.
- Get to know agencies personally.
- Choose an agency oneself.
- Meet some proposed interim managers personally.
- Choose the agency and interim manager oneself and draw up the contract together.
- Introduce the interim manager oneself into the organisation.

in-depth empirical research, we chose to cooperate closely with three prominent Dutch agencies for interim management: BMC, Twynstra Gudde Interim-management and De Roo. What they have in common is many clients in the public sector.

Now our investigations would tackle the interim projects as a whole – more than just the initial phase and/or the competencies of interim managers.

In a *preliminary phase* we discussed a number of cases with our partners to gain more insight into success and failure factors. This formed the basis of an ideal-typical project phasing, whereby we assumed various moments of influence (see Figure 1).

Then the fieldwork started. The aim of the fieldwork was to find empirical evidence of success and failure factors in interim management projects. We chose the case study as our method of research, in particular the *grounded theory* approach (Eisenhardt, 1989). This approach aimed at obtaining deeper insights into the possible (influencing of) success and failure factors in interim management projects. It became an exploratory study: it's the first time more factors were examined than just the interim manager.

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
1a. Problem identification	2a. Consultation	3a. Exploratory discussions and making acquaintance	4a. Phasing: procedural as regards content	5a. Processing
1b. Problem naming	2b. Interim agencies handle request for tender	3b. Conceptualisation with respect to the task	4b. Personal interpretation of the task: leadership and relationship with the organisation	5b. Evaluation
1c. Interim management comes into the picture	2c. Interviews/ intake	3c. Feedback to the agency	4c. Taking root and securing	5c. Follow-up
1d. Decision-making about interim management	2d. Period of deliberation	3d. Writing up of plan of approach		
1e. Making control structure more explicit	2e. Choice	3e. Approval of plan of approach		
	2f. Drawing up and signing contract			

Figure 1. Ideal-typical project phases of an interim management project, with moments of influence

The interim agencies opened up their networks and found interim managers, hiring managers and other relevant players willing to participate in the study.

A research team of Sioo employees did the fieldwork from autumn 2002 to summer 2003. The team studied 12 major cases in local or national government where interim managers had been placed, all with a clear change management component and executed on management level. We varied our selection of cases as much as possible, so that the research would involve as many facets as possible of the world of interim management and organisational change.

The team studied documents, interviewed the interim manager, the hiring manager, the agency director concerned and, if necessary, other people who played significant parts. The team collected information from all phases of the projects and studied the previous history and especially the interaction between the players. In each case, the people interviewed were asked what determined the success or failure of the interim management task involved, and who influenced it. In most instances this was the hiring managers, interim management agencies, interim managers and one or more employees of the organisation. We also asked what they had learned from the interim management project and which moments of influence possibly remained unused. This research work resulted in 12 comparable descriptions of cases and the (influencing of) success and failure factors in interim management. Shortly after this fieldwork, the team organised a work conference with agencies, interim managers and commissioning authorities to give some feedback on tentative insights and to test these insights.

Meticulous comparison of the cases resulted in the establishment of a series of solid success and failure factors. We were able to construct the intended knowledge product on that basis: an action repertoire or collection of rules for managers (hiring managers), interim managers and interim agencies who want to succeed in their respective roles when interim managers are called in for change processes (see van Hout *et al.*, 2004). The product concerns knowledge in the form of know-how, or in more general terms: knowledge of measures (Groen *et al.*, 1980; Wierdsma, 1999). It's on the level of rules, between the behavioural level on the one side and the level of insight and principles on the other (Wierdsma, 2004) (see Figure 2).

Knowledge Product: Six Clusters in One Action Repertoire

We constructed an action repertoire based on our research into the success and failure factors of interim management in change projects; this repertoire is for managers who want to achieve success in their role as superiors when interim managers

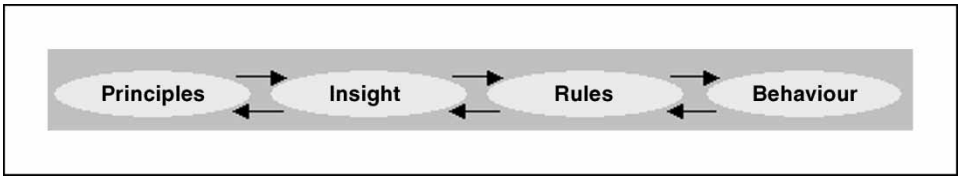

Figure 2. Wierdsma's model

are called in for change processes. The repertoire has six clusters of rules. We describe these rules below and illustrate them with the case material from our studies.

We can argue that successful hiring managers:

1. keep control of the task;
2. are active before the interim manager is appointed;
3. choose their interim manager themselves;
4. influence the diagnosis and plan of approach;
5. remain involved in the execution of the task; and
6. give meaning.

Rule 1: Keep Control of the Task

Successful hiring managers take up their own responsibilities explicitly. They assume an active role and take up an assertive position. They take control, claim problem ownership for themselves and take the initiative (see Box 4). They make sure that they themselves have a clear position of power in the organisation that they derive from their position in the hierarchy and from a base and support within the organisation. By bringing in an outsider, they deliberately cause a displacement in the playing field. In the hierarchy they are always superior to the external professional. They are a clear and recognised point of contact to the external professionals and show strong leadership towards them. They stay at their post. A change in management would not contribute to the chances of success in an interim task. Successors often have their own (different) ideas about the problem and the approach.

Good contracting means: don't go too fast, and invest in reflection. Anyone who wants to get ahead fast will make elementary mistakes. Allowing for a moment of reflection is always worthwhile. The people who do their homework keep the task under their own control. This 'sticking to it' in (all phases of) the interim management project is *the* challenge for every hiring manager.

Rule 2: Be Active Even before the Interim Manager Arrives

Hiring managers who really contribute to success are active in the preliminary phase. They don't see interim management as a solution but as one of the

BOX 4. Keeping control of the task: hiring manager is problem owner!

A medium-sized municipality has been characterised for some years by a lack of control, chronic mutual distrust and an extremely high turnover in management functions. The organisation is divided along class lines and the division of qualifications and tasks has been termed vague. Despite various organisational analyses the municipality has not been able to turn the diagnosis into a feasible restructuring plan. Different parties pass the buck back and forth and no one dares take on the responsibility. The Municipal Executive takes the initiative: it hires an interim manager and proves itself to be owner of the long-drawn-out problem *and* contact point for the interim manager. The municipality heaves a sigh of relief: there is light at the end of the tunnel: a way out of the deadlock.

instruments in a process of change. They don't separate the specific issue that an interim manager has to work on from the general change management context. The change process continues after the interim manager has left. Successful hiring managers invest in investigating the problem. They recognise the situation with an open mind. They work out the scope, the context, the intensity and the urgency of the problem. They make a stakeholder analysis and try to make clear what the mutual relationships are and what the interests and perceptions are. They also examine the behaviour of people who realise that an interim manager is possibly coming. These people already sort themselves provisionally. This always makes a lot clear already: new coalitions arise immediately.

Successful hiring managers work out why it is meaningful to call in someone from outside. Are strangers needed to make people fall into line? Or is it just that no internal staff are available? They are heedful of the risk of damage. They think through the nature of the task. What is the chance of the task escalating prematurely? They know they are working with a pressure cooker where concealed problems and hidden interests and considerations can quickly rise to the surface just when they're not expected. They work out what is needed: someone who is good functionally, or someone who can also tackle the change management aspect. They take care of the embedded administration, think about the direction, about the relationship between the interim manager and the organisation, about attitude and control and how things will take root (see Box 5). In short: successful hiring managers get off to a peaceful start and first map out the issue themselves. This prevents a lot of suffering, as experience shows. If crucial information doesn't rise to the surface until later, the task will have to be adjusted, costing a lot of energy and time. The earlier the skeletons are out of the closet, the better.

Rule 3: Hiring Managers Make their Own Choices

Successful hiring managers decide themselves which agency and which interim manager to take their chance with. They take up the responsibility and make that

BOX 5. Thorough preparation for the coming of an interim manager

In a large municipality an interim manager is temporarily taking the place of a sector head who is to become deputy head in the same department. As interim manager she is also given the task of giving the initial impulse to a large-scale structural change; she gets straight to work.
In the evaluation the task is seen as successful, because the hiring manager prepared the coming and the tasks of the interim manager right down to the last detail. To start with, he spoke intensively with the withdrawing manager, who remained close to the interim manager both hierarchically and as regards content. Conflicts were nipped in the bud by creating clearness beforehand and making good agreements. In the second place, the initiative for the structural change was also well prepared. The interim manager enters the organisation with what she believes is a very well thought-out programme for introduction and settling-in set up by the organisation. This gives her all the space and possibilities to orient herself and get to know the employees and the organisation. Initial meetings are already planned, and a first plan for meetings has been drawn up for the interim manager. The interim manager sees the settling-in plan as a success factor in this phase of the task: not only does it make her feel very welcome; it is also an efficient and pleasant way of starting and orienting herself in the new task.

BOX 6. A hiring manager lets someone else make the decision

The urgent need for an interim manager arises in a wide organisational change. During the meeting, one of the directors rings an interim manager he knows and hires him on the spot. The director doing the hiring at this moment is not the actual hiring manager in control.
He pays for this in the end. The management team, at too great a distance, assessed the task incorrectly. The apparently simple operational task quickly takes on the more explicit nature of change management. This makes close cooperation between the hiring manager and the interim manager essential. However, the hiring manager and the interim manager clash due to substantial differences of character. The hiring manager is 'obsessed with achieving the planning', is dominant, decisive and strongly goal-oriented. This doesn't go down well with the interim manager's diplomatic, process-oriented and personal approach.
In the evaluation the member of the board who hired the interim manager says: 'I think someone with a stronger personality would have fitted the task better; someone who was capable of searching out the conflicts and could handle the sergeant-major character of the hiring manager constructively.'

evident. They promote openness. They give the interim management agency enough information to enable the agency to supply a suitable interim manager. They check whether they can trust the interim agency and/or the interim manager. Successful hiring managers do not rely too heavily in the matching process on the interim agency or the interim manager, do not adopt too subordinate an attitude and avoid the role of victim. They take on responsibility themselves in describing the issue and in the final choice of an interim manager; they know what will happen if they neglect to do this (see Box 6). They also don't let urgency take the lead. They do not relinquish their influence to a 'buyer', to the interim management agency or to a matcher. Their problem is too unique for that. They bring in experts for the matching process and managers and/or administrators who are functionally involved in the issue. A successful hiring manager builds in the possibility of re-contracting and switching players. To that aim they agree on frequent go/no go moments. They cut the task into pieces, build in assessment moments and adjust the task at every assessment moment.

Rule 4: Hiring Managers Influence the Diagnosis and Plan of Approach

A successful hiring manager places the issue in the hands of the interim manager and gives him/her enough space and time to work to perform his/her task successfully. Hiring managers also really do want to give him/her that space, without retreating too far back themselves (see Box 7). Hiring managers do not regard the interim manager's (extra) diagnosis as a sign of mistrust, but as a professional test of their own observations. They acknowledge that different views on the issue and its approach are possible. They approve the final plan of approach themselves, even if that is meant to be up to the interim manager. And so there is a communal frame of reference and a document that the hiring manager can hold the interim manager to. Successful hiring managers are not caught off guard by a plan of approach; they ask the interim manager to provide continuous feedback during the diagnosis

BOX 7. The hiring manager really kept his distance

A public organisation is making the change to a market-oriented, commercial business operation. The hiring manager has several studies done into the business operation, but does not really go into it much himself. An interim manager is hired to provide some stimulus to this change project and gets to work on diagnosing the organisation and the issue.
It turns out that the hiring manager has made mistakes. A few days after the appointment of the interim manager, the organisation is found to be on the edge of bankruptcy. The organisation was already running at a loss for some years, has a negative equity capital, strongly decreasing turnover and a liquidity position that puts it only two months away from a moratorium on payment(s). How could things get this far?
The interim manager can only make assumptions. 'The financial manager was overworked, the director was oriented more towards professional matters than financial-economic ones, and the executive board of the foundation stayed too far away.'

phase. Sometimes they call in a few employees of the organisation for the diagnosis and the creation of the plan of approach. A successful hiring manager can wonder whether the investment in a diagnosis and a plan of approach is really necessary. Sometimes acting swiftly and ignoring the paperwork can contribute to success. But that only applies if the hiring manager properly knows what the problem is and can work the interim manager in himself.

Rule 5: Good Hiring Banagers Remain Involved in the Execution of the Task

Successful hiring managers keep the means and the aim properly separated. They don't think that they have solved their problem by hiring an interim manager. They move intelligently along with the dynamics of the task. They don't clamp on at all costs to the basic principles of a task. They continually check whether the nature of

BOX 8. Three game types in interim management

- **Shipwreck survivors on an uninhabited island (cooperate under pressure)**

In this first game type, the players believe they are in a crisis situation with no space for conflicts. Divergent interests therefore have to be forced into line. We distinguish two game patterns:
(1) the interim manager or the hiring manager takes on absolute leadership; and (2) players look for a solution that can be borne by everyone: they try to convince each other and not to exclude each other.

- **Gladiators in an arena (the fight)**

In this second game type, players take no account of the interests of other players: self-interest prevails. The mutual interactions can be typified as a fight or struggle aimed at surviving at the expense of the others. Players only make coalitions if they believe they can turn them greatly to their own advantage.

- **Negotiating merchants (pure negotiation)**

In this game type the players do not necessarily stick to their own interests, but are willing to relinquish them if they are compensated in some other way. The players imagine they are in an exclusive supply-and-demand relationship. The division of the sources of power is crucial in this game type: particularly the players' hierarchical position and their authority to make decisions.

BOX 9. Change of game type observed too late

An interim manager is appointed in a public organisation that has just become independent and is on the edge of bankruptcy. The interim manager takes firm control. His style can be typified as crisis management: he puts some employees in their place and suspends others. He deliberately passes over his MT a couple of times to retain speed in decision-making. He steers the primary process personally, brings in a number of orders and succeeds in saving the organisation within a few months.

Once the greatest danger has receded, the interim manager stays on to help the organisation get more used to its new (partly commercial) role. The game type changes: after all, a collective effort and support base are needed for restructuring the organisation. But the interim manager continues with his crisis management style and is scarcely able to change the functional and personal relationships that arose in the crisis situation.

In the evaluation the interim manager says: 'The crisis management style is addictive . . . it is difficult to assess when you should change style. I just kept on acting quickly and forcing things through. I didn't understand that the perception of urgency was wearing off. I didn't see that in time.'

the task has changed, and keep an eye on the type of game they have run into with the interim management task. We distinguished different game types in our study (see Box 8).

Each type of game has specific requirements and can have negative side-effects. A successful hiring manager monitors whether the game type being played still matches the task (see Box 9). After all, the task tends to change continually.

The hiring manager regularly holds the progress of the project up to the light with the interim agency and the interim manager and makes sure there is feedback and that the task is adjusted. A successful hiring manager also keeps looking

BOX 10. A purely 'symbolic' tying off of the ends

An interim manager is given the task of revising a public institution's administrative process. The reorganisation is part of a political agreement the hiring manager has committed himself to. The enormous political time pressure means the interim manager cannot involve the staff of the institute enough in the reorganisation. He does succeed in bringing off the reorganisation in time, but even during the task he points out that after his contract ends a lot of work will still have to be done to really get the staff on the side of the organisational change. The interim manager's praises are sung in the concluding meeting and he is complimented by both the hiring manager and the institute's director.

The interim manager can only see this meeting as a symbolic marking of the end of a task that strictly speaking he did fulfil. He expects huge problems at the institute in the long term. The hiring manager seemed only interested in meeting a political commitment, not in an actual organisational change.

Some months after the end of the interim task, the hiring manager leaves the institute. The new regular head of the administration doesn't have a good word to say about the interim manager: he accuses him of having only wanted to score an operational, short-term success without paying attention to the support base inside the organisation and the organisational change in the long term.

around outside the task. He/she continually keeps an eye on what is happening in the environment of the task. He/she suppresses the inclination to reduce the change process to the task the interim manager is working on. He/she continually looks at the task in its context: what is happening in the total process of change that the organisation is undergoing? He/she draws conclusions: are there changes of context that demand modification of the task or even make the task superfluous? Are the effects the interim management has on the organisation and the change process the effects he/she really wants?

Successful hiring managers also promote openness towards the other players in the project. They cooperate in ad hoc modifications to the task in connection with unexpected twists in and around the project. They show willingness and a high degree of flexibility. If necessary they totally revise the problem definition that they drew up themselves. They stick to the go/no go moments. Good hiring managers admit that no one can precisely know beforehand what the final result of the task will be. They approach the interim project as a process of advancing insight, where there is room for the specific qualities of the other players. They stick to business and do not allow themselves to be led astray. A successful relationship with the interim manager and the interim agency is a business relationship; the hiring manager realises that he/she has a strong position in that relationship. If necessary he/she will stand on his/her authority according to the dynamics to influence the task and even to switch to a different interim manager.

Rule 6: Good Hiring Managers Give Meaning

Effective hiring managers explicitly take over again once the interim manager is 'ready'. They make sure they know what to do for the result to take root. They tie off the ends. They give meaning to the project that has been completed. They note the principle that there are 'never strokes of luck' in interim projects. They ensure that the interim manager's reputation is duly and justly acknowledged and indicate what he/she contributed to the process of change that will now proceed further under its own steam. They don't play games (see Box 10), for they know that this could be disastrous for everyone.

Discussion and Conclusions

We examine a number of aspects in more detail in this concluding section. Firstly: what conclusion can we draw with respect to our initial assumptions? Secondly: what is the quality of the knowledge product? Thirdly: what does the use of these rules presuppose? And finally: what is the basic principle?

Back to the Assumptions

The conclusion is clear: managers in processes of change who introduce external staff such as interim managers into their organisation have many more possibilities of exerting influence than just in the selection phase. This conclusion is based on the action repertoire sketched above, which we were able to construct on the

basis of a study in which 12 cases were examined meticulously. The six clusters of rules are:

- keep control of the task;
- be active before the interim manager is appointed;
- choose the interim manager yourself;
- influence the diagnosis and plan of approach;
- remain involved in the execution of the task;
- give meaning.

We can typify this knowledge product as a set of empirically founded rules and sub-rules that are between the behavioural level and the level of insight and principles (see the model of Wierdsma, 2004, see Figure 2) as far as the level of knowledge is concerned. These action rules cover much more than just the initial phase and/or the competencies of the interim manager.

Quality of the Knowledge Product

Of course we can question the quality of this knowledge product, using four well-known criteria (Groen *et al.*, 1980). We must point out that the sector the cases come from is specific. Knowledge of measures based on the public sector in our 'polder country' (a 'voice economy', Unger, 2002) cannot of course be generalised to all other sectors, nor to more Anglo-Saxon-oriented practices ('exit economy'). It is true that the application of the principles of new public management in the public sector reduces these differences, and so increases the general validity of the knowledge product. It is also true that the presence of a hiring manager will make or break this knowledge product. That manager is often absent; sometimes external employees have to invest a great deal in constructing the hiring manager's system (Voigt and van Spijker, 2003).

In addition, the knowledge product is currently still in the form of a text, presented as a book; we haven't experimented yet with other forms such as presentations, DVD, training or workshops.

And does the product also really strengthen the position and the behaviour of hiring managers and thus increase the change project's chance of success? We will only be able to ascertain *that* in a subsequent empirical study. It no longer has to be an exploratory study; now we can test whether the rules we have come up with are of sufficiently high quality or need supplementing.

From Dilemmas to Deeper Insight

The knowledge product raises dilemmas at the level on which it is currently formulated ('rules'). For example, on the one side the repertoire says: Invest in thorough preparation. And yet further on in the interim project new and unexpected events will always occur. A flexible attitude and the will to adjust the task are needed in that case. The repertoire also says: If you want to be successful, remain sharp and involved. Yet there are so many other issues taking place that

require attention. It can also be very convenient for a manager if he actually manages to shove a problem *off* his own plate.

These dilemmas are part and parcel of the complexity and dynamics of processes of change at this level in the public sector. Simply applying rules won't help. It's not surprising that underlying competencies are essential for dealing with those dilemmas. In Wierdsma's model (2004) (see Figure 2) these dilemmas are on the level of 'insights' and 'principles'. They might be phrased a bit like this: 'Don't avoid dilemmas and don't take a gamble, that is what we learned from our study.' We can clarify these kinds of insights or perhaps principles to a certain extent and bring them back again to the level of 'rules'.

The Working Principles of the Hiring Manager

We can argue that on the level of insight the manager should control his/her reflexes with this kind of change issue – should not organise the issue away from himself but should approach it with an investigative attitude. His/her primary point of view will no longer be that of 'problems' needing 'solutions'. The hiring manager can also consider what appears to be a 'problem' as a result of actions by various players or of patterns and processes behind it in the organisation. The players in the game can't always see through this. Often they are the co-producers of the 'problem' without really realising it (or being able to realise it). Intervention in patterns and processes behind the problem is necessary to clear up such a 'problem'.

To put it briefly, a 'problem' is not a problem but a unique issue that is a change issue. Change issues come in all sorts and sizes. They can be friction between strategy, structure, systems and processes, or conflicting policy objectives or policy being put into practice incorrectly. They can of course also be a non-functioning manager or people who are not mutually compatible. But whatever it is, as hiring manager you don't always see it straight away. The issue often only comes to the surface as a 'problem' that needs a solution and for which you don't have anyone on hand.

Back to Rules

We can also derive 'rules' from this deeper 'insight', such as: don't rush too fast into the 'solution'. A hiring manager should pay some attention to the previous history, the actors (how was the 'problem' produced), the field of influence, possible planning in phases, roles and interventions, the progress of the process and consolidation.

The following kinds of questions belong here:

- How do the dynamics in the organisation fit together?
- What is appropriate to do?
- Who is going to do that? How do I choose that person? If I put someone from outside in that position, that will result in new dynamics. How do I monitor whether that is working well? How do I as hiring manager maintain contact with what the new player is doing? Are the dynamics developing in the right direction?

Another rule could be: don't consider the issue as a matter that you can outsource, but see it as a unique situation (of change) in which the external support is only meaningful if it is of a high-quality nature (see also van Hout, 2001) and that depends to a great deal on the person supplying that support; the 'chap' counts first and only then the 'shop'. As hiring manager, 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.

Finally: The Basic Principle

In this article we aimed mainly at one of the players in change projects that involve external staff as well. Orienting ourselves as exclusively as this on the hiring manager does have its limitations. Just as with the study into interim management that was mainly directed at the professionalisation of and development of the competency of interim managers, we run the risk of 'agency' (Rip and Visscher, 1999) – that is, we overestimate the possibilities of the hiring manager. Our study just showed us that there is no single player who has the key to success. It was precisely in the work conference with the interim managers, the agencies *and* the hiring managers that we became aware of the fact that success depends totally on the continual teamwork of the key figures in the organisational change project. Now this insight should not of course result in a waiting game: because everyone is responsible, the process doesn't belong to anyone and no one is responsible. Our conclusion on the contrary is that the hiring manager can take up a special responsibility here. If managers call in an external service provider for their change issue, they must concentrate above all on the continual teamwork of the stakeholders. They can arrange that they themselves, the interim agency or the shadow manager accentuate the interim manager's awareness of the situation and that of other people involved, and sharpen their own position as well, by continually putting the following questions on the agenda:

- What is each person's own position and strength and what is the position and strength of the other stakeholders?
- How are we as stakeholders involved in this teamwork and what is its game type?
- How does my behaviour influence the teamwork?
- How much space do we leave for each other?
- How can we trust each other?
- Do we have to agree with each other?
- What do I get out of the task and what does this mean for the other stakeholders?
- Has something changed in the meantime and do we have to take action because of that?

Thus the hiring manager acts as the director of the conversation on a meta-level. He/she takes on a pioneering role in the professionalisation of all stakeholders involved in interim management for organisational change. The reflective questions above can serve the hiring manager as a guideline. In practice the parties involved can further develop this guideline.

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Notes on Contributors

Dr G.A.C. (Gerhard) Smid, CMC, is a director of studies and design consultant at Sioo, the Inter-university Centre for Organisation Studies and Change Management in Utrecht, The Netherlands. He published widely on themes such as professional work, innovation and learning.

Dr E.J.Th. (Eelco) van Hout is an assistant professor at the Tilburg School for Politics and Governance of the University of Tilburg. He wrote his doctoral thesis on interim management and teaches organisation studies.

Dr Y.D. (Yvonne) Burger is a management consultant and management coach and is a Sioo associate. She has published on public sector management, interim management and recently on coaching with Erik de Haan (Ashridge, UK).