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Interim Roles Pop as C-Suite Exodus Continues

By [Lindsay Frost](#) May 12, 2025

Fast-paced turnover in the C-suite mixed with challenges stemming from the tumultuous business climate has led to ballooning demand for interim executives, new data shows. These temporary leaders are stepping up and stepping in to help companies navigate short-term projects and crises, as well as maintaining business continuity — without getting too comfortable, sources said.

Although companies typically choose to tap their own talent to fill roles on a temporary basis, search firms are expanding interim practices as boards look beyond their own walls for specific expertise and experience to join the C-suite until they name a permanent successor, sources told Agenda.

Boards should carefully assess the needs of the company when an executive departs as they consider the upsides and downsides of bringing on temporary leaders.

"We've seen a lot of businesses going through a huge amount of change and more pressures around driving performance and cost optimization," said **Lisa Farmer**, co-leader of **Boyden's** global interim management practice. "Because of this, companies are looking at interims as these are key individuals that have been doing this for a very long time, and they are purely focused on ... being able to come into businesses and enact change very, very quickly."

"They're resources that are very powerful," she added.

Just for NowThere was a 310% increase in U.S. and European companies seeking interims for leadership positions last year compared to 2020, according to a [new report](#) from the Business Talent Group, a division of **Heidrick & Struggles**. The majority (53%) of these placements were specifically in the C-suite.

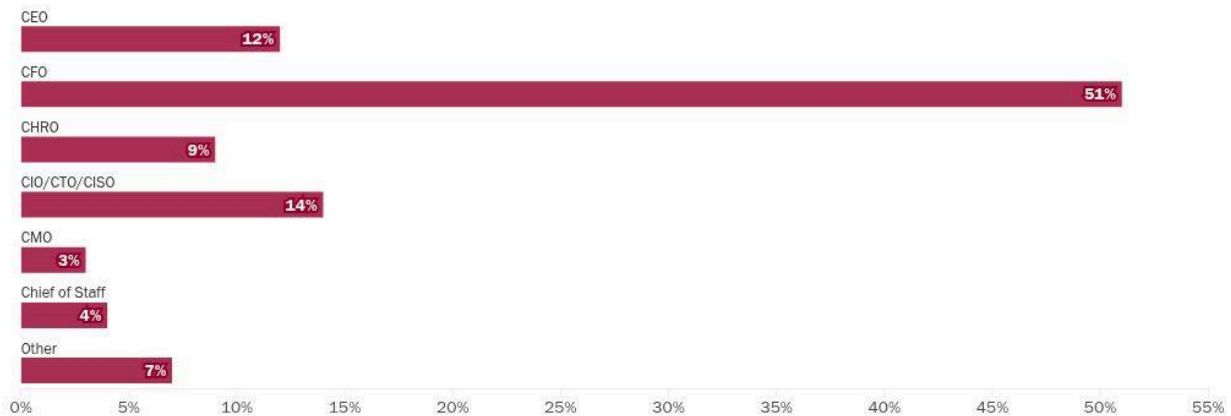
"As the business landscape experiences relentless and accelerating change, the demand for agile leadership has never been more critical," wrote **Sunny Ackerman**, global managing partner for on-demand talent at Heidrick & Struggles, in an email. Interim talent can "keep organizations resilient and future-ready in an unpredictable environment," she added.

The most in-demand role is for interim CFOs, the data shows. Some 51% of C-suite interim requests from companies were for finance chiefs. The demand for finance talent, specifically experience with financial controls, accounting, audit, financial planning and analysis and modeling, are among the top in-demand skills for interim executives, according to the BTG report.

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Most Interim Execs Are CFOs

Percent of interim executives named to C-suites at U.S. and European companies in 2024



Source: Business Talent Group

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Companies that named interim CFOs in the past year include **Autodesk, Corpay Inc., Fastenal, Logitech International, Martin Marietta Materials, Starbucks** and **Western Digital Corporation**.

"Soaring demand for finance leaders highlights the critical need for experts who can steer organizations through financial uncertainty, preserve short-term performance and chart long-term success," Ackerman wrote.

Indeed, CFOs' responsibilities have expanded beyond core finance duties, now touching on technology, cybersecurity, AI, HR and other issues, Farmer said. These demands are not only [driving turnover](#), but leading companies to bring in CFOs with those skills to serve temporarily.

Interim CEOs are also stepping into the role [more frequently](#). Some 19% of CEO successions at S&P 500 companies so far this year resulted in naming an interim CEO — the second-highest percentage since at least 2013, according to **ESGauge**.

Companies that named interim CEOs in the past year include **Crown Castle, Dollar Tree, Five Below** and **Lucid Group**.

Beyond the increased turnover, companies are also seeking interim leaders with specialized skill sets to meet the wave of disruption businesses are facing. Indeed, demand for interim chief information officers, chief technology officers and chief information security officers increased 20% between 2023 and 2024 and 21% for interim data, digital and IT leaders at all levels, according to the BTG report.

Internal or External? Typically, large public companies choose interims from within, sources said. For CEOs specifically, boards often tap directors, including leaders in the boardroom, to fill the chief's shoes while a search process is undertaken. Roughly one-third of interim CEOs came from the board last year at Russell 3000 companies, [according to The Conference Board](#).

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In the past 12 months, these included **Baxter International**, **Kroger**, **Masimo** and **Timken Co.**

"The standard knee-jerk reaction of a U.S. public company is that they look around the board and somebody either raises their hand or they point at somebody and they say, 'You're now the interim CEO,'" said **Robert Jordan**, CEO of **InterimExecs**.

"Sometimes that's an OK move, but most of the time, that person is just a babysitter. They're a placeholder. And the implicit message is, 'Just sit there, shut up and sign off on the financials.'"

However, search firms have expanded their interim practices as a result of companies' looking for specific areas of expertise, as well as experience in transactions and transformations, Jordan said.

With interim executives coming into a company from the outside, "you get instant expertise. You're not wrapping your corporation up in a long-term employment agreement that could cost you a massive amount of money, or destroy the business, if you get it wrong," Jordan said.

External interim executives can bring cross-sector and objective best practices into the company, Farmer said.

"They bring that freshness of perspective because they're not within that business," Farmer said. "They don't get embroiled in the politics. They can look objectively at what the business needs."

It can also be cheaper to bring someone in externally for an interim role, and companies won't have to look at things like stock options, bonuses and other payroll negotiations, said **Karen Burke**, HR knowledge advisor at the **Society for Human Resource Management**.

"You're paying just a small fee ... to get these skills to come in, to turn your company around or to implement some product or process," Burke said. "This is a person that comes in blindly, knows what they're supposed to do, does it and then moves on."

In fact, Farmer said, sometimes boards are so happy with an external interim's performance that they want them to stick around. But they need to remember that what's needed in the short term is not always what's needed for the long-term health of the business.

Ultimately, it's the board's role to have a plan in place for who might serve on an interim basis if needed and consider where this person should come from.

Boards should think about culture fit, skills, industry experience, geographic mobility and the ability to deliver and execute on what the business needs, Farmer said.

"It's really important for them to understand what the business requirements are and why this person is needed. Preparation is absolutely key."
