

# boyden PROPHEt Insights Study: The Interim's relationship with a business

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## Interims have the Nelson Touch

Fostering initiative and granting leeway for others to carry out their individual orders.

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This article highlights the findings of our latest research in conjunction with **Boyden**, and draws an analogy between the Nelson Touch and the approach taken by many interim directors allowing them to make a fast impact. Our study is based on our innovative profiling tool, **PROPHEt**, which helps senior teams understand their motivations, decision making styles and relationships in a commercial context. This study looks at how interims are likely to work and at their potential dynamics in business.

## Five key lessons come from the PROPHEt Insight Study:

1. A significant majority of interims lead through the use of values, ideas and intentions – those they are leading are clear about the intended picture of success.
2. These interims influence and inspire others to achieve a goal.
3. They show twice as strong a preference for taking the lead, compared to the appetite shown by our normed average executive.
4. They motivate through people, rather than managing to orders.
5. Interims show twice as strong a preference for inspired decision making, feeling one's way.

This study looks at the useful attributes that are common across the interims that distinguish them from our normed sample of 1500 Executives with similar backgrounds. These insights are told with '*The Nelson Touch*' used as a back drop.

Our research is based on the profiles of 144 UK Interim Executives from the Boyden stable. This population consisted of senior interim directors, operating at executive and board level. They are used to provide leadership, cover absent executives, deliver operational efficiency, manage mergers and acquisitions, turnarounds or other change related programmes. They are exceptional professionals, who, between them work across all sectors and functions in leadership roles.

Importantly there was a significant minority who are atypical of these characteristics, preferring to take a very different approach to their assignments. In reading this article, we focus on the whole data which creates a profile of a typical interim, but it is essential that when looking at any one interim, hirers understand this typical/atypical dimension.

## Lessons in Interim Relationships

### 1. Leadership through the use of values, ideas and intentions

Nelson insisted that once his subordinate captains were acquainted with his ideas and intentions, signals became almost unnecessary. One contemporary historian suggests that whatever the advances in radios, computers, satellites, and sophisticated electronic communications systems, war's fog will remain as resistant to technological fixes as the common cold has to the march of modern medicine. This notion accentuates the need to consider enduring fundamentals: relationships and the personal communication from the leader remains paramount. Our study shows that nearly three times as many interims show a strong propensity for the role of 'Evangelist' compared with the average executive.

The **Evangelist** role is influential, inspiring, passionate and enthusiastic. Their strongest contribution to their businesses is the enthusiasm for, and buy-in to, plans for the future. They are motivated by capturing hearts and minds and being in the limelight. They relish being at the front. They are typically full of ideas and are great at selling the vision to galvanise people into action. The interims are able to hit the ground running by capturing people's imaginations.

### 2. Influencing and Inspiring others to achieve a goal

In Nelson's favourite play, Henry V (Shakespeare) there was the quote 'A little touch of Harry in the night' describing how the king would calm his soldiers on the eve of battle. Nelson often spoke of his captains as his 'band of brothers' and 'we happy few', both references from Henry V. In the play Shakespeare portrays the King as someone who was loved by, and an inspiration to his men, and it seems that Nelson aspired to be like him. The interims were twice as strongly motivated than our norm group by 'Influence'.

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Twice as likely to have a strong preference  
for **Influence** than a typical executive

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**Influence** is about being gregarious, convincing and persuasive, motivated to lead others towards an outcome. Due to their ability to charm, interims are more likely to be able to push people beyond what they feel is comfortable and therefore produce results faster than could be achieved with a more gentle approach.

### 3. Strong Leaders

One key military strategy that Nelson focused on is: centralised planning and decentralised execution. The basic requirement of decentralised operations is preplanned response in accordance with commonly understood doctrine. Nelson did not win at Trafalgar because he had a great plan; he won because his subordinate commanders thoroughly understood the



plan and their place in it well in advance of execution. Team members must be prepared to take action when certain conditions are met; they cannot always anticipate minute-by-minute guidance and hand-holding from their leader.

Being prepared to take accountability for the plan and take action is the basis of a preference for **Leading**, a desire to set direction. Interims show twice as strong a preference for taking the lead and accountability, rather than executing and managing delivery against a plan. They like to be at the forefront of decisions but won't necessarily oversee the minutiae, preferring to empower others to deliver.

#### 4. Motivating through people and encouraging open discussion and initiative, rather than directing and giving orders

Motivating through people presupposes team member initiative and feedback. Team members are expected to solve problems at their level of control, in lieu of appealing to higher authority. This approach fosters individual initiative at all levels and encourages team members to make specific recommendations for changes based upon their assessment of the situation.

Open discussion is at all times appropriate. Nelson, for his part, made a habit of availing himself of frank discussions and the sharing of ideas among officers well attuned to one another. Nelson was said to have quipped that an order is a good basis for discussion. As a subordinate commander, he repeatedly "modified" orders to accommodate changing circumstances, the most famous instance coming at Copenhagen in 1801 and producing a swift and stunning victory. A man of indomitable determination, Nelson shaped battle space circumstances to his will, rather than merely responding to them as lesser men might.

Twice as many interims show a strong preference for the role of Motivator compared to our norm population of executives.

The **Motivator** is charismatic, sociable, likable and full of get-up-and-go. Motivated by making things happen, winning loyalty and earning respect, they prefer to work in unstructured situations where there is high degree of variety and a loyal and hardworking team. They are energetic, informal and personable and have a let's-do-it style that galvanises teams into action. They can be frustrated in situations where they have to adhere to formal processes and where there is little variety.

This approach encourages dialogue and collaboration, wherein a team is able to adapt and respond whatever the circumstance. For interims, it is likely to be a changing business context in which they are brought in to lead; hence being able to empower and motivate their teams is critical and will create lasting value, beyond the interim's tenure.

## 5. Inspired decision making: Feeling one's way

Nelson regarded war's fog as he did its close physical equivalent, the darkness of night, using it when he could to his operational purpose. One of Nelson's great victories, at Aboukir Bay in 1797, was fought in the dark under seemingly adverse conditions. Nelson seemed in his element: *"I had the happiness to command a Band of Brothers; therefore, night was to my advantage. Each knew his duty, and I was sure each would feel for an enemy ship."*



**Interims show 2x as strong propensity for Inspired decision making**

Twice as many interims compared to the norm group shows a propensity for **Inspired** decision making: being highly imaginative, building a picture in their head of success – and using this picture to instigate change and feel their way to a decision. They believe in their ideas and are not afraid to offer new and different thinking. They don't always need to depend on amassing and assessing all the data before reaching a conclusion. This allows them to make an impact quickly when appropriate.

## Working together: Maximising Nelson's touch

### DO:

- **Focus** quickly on establishing a joint realistic vision and plan and getting support from all important stakeholders.
- **Invest** in getting to know each other personally quickly, how you prefer to work and make decisions, what motivates you and what most frustrates you both. Agree rules of how to avoid pulling apart under pressure.
- **Work** together to build the right relationships around the team and ensure that joint expectations of success are communicated to these people to ensure that you are seen to be on the same page.
- **Ensure** there is a regular formal check-in process that covers how your relationship is working, not just how the work is going.

### DON'T:

- **Be too independent of each other.** A really strong, close, transparent relationship will maximise the value of the assignment.
- **Lose sight of transition.** Focus early on how to develop skills and know-how in the rest of the business, post the assignment finishing.
- **Overly focus on reporting.** Focus on alignment around the plan and decisions, and focus on pace of execution. Harness the energy that will be in the relationship.
- **Don't appease each other.** Be very clear and direct with each other – do not see challenge as confrontation. Approach the tough issues fast.

*"I cannot command winds and weather."* – **Nelson**

**About PROPHET**

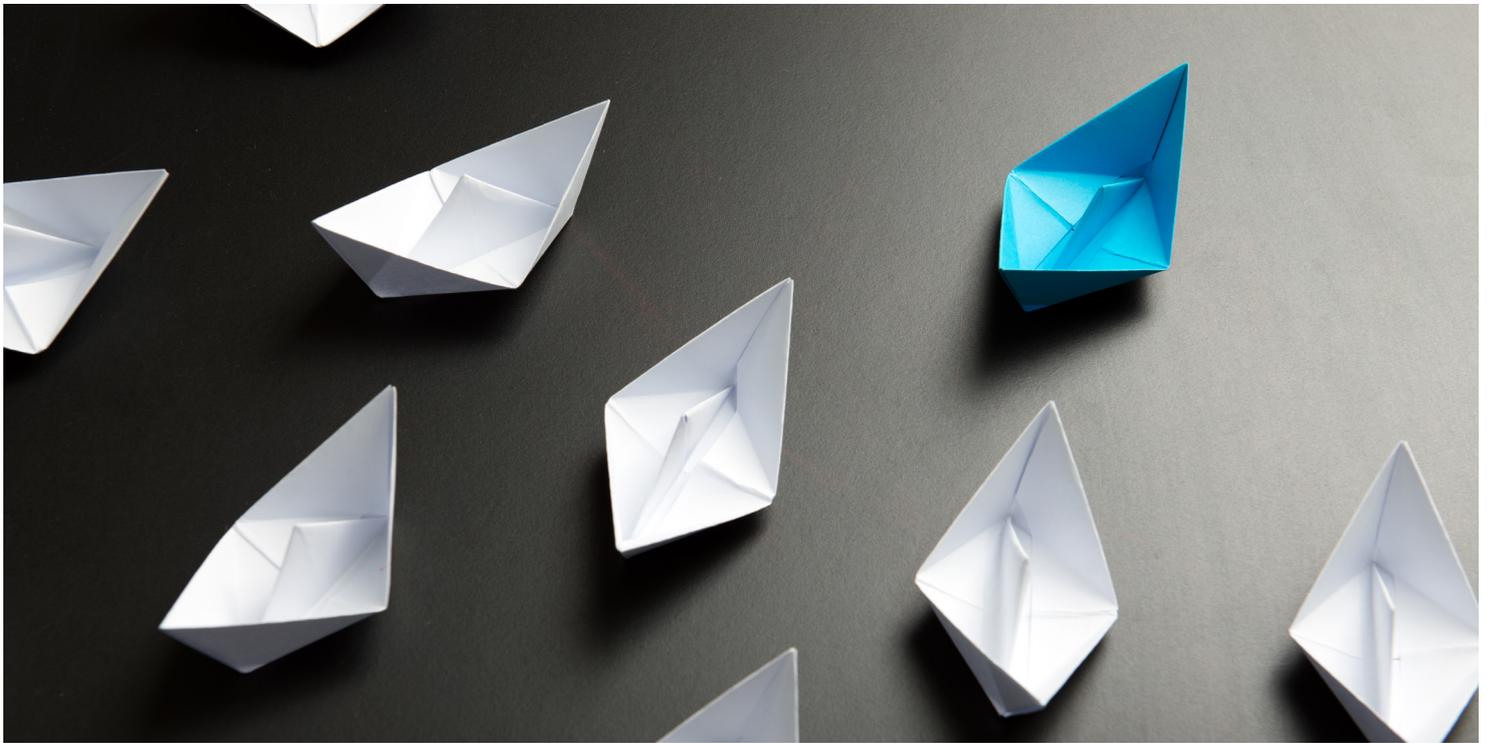
PROPHET is a business-focused profiling tool that helps individuals understand their strengths in a commercial context and how they can bring value to their organisation. PROPHET helps individuals understand who best can complement them; helps teams understand how to get the best from everyone and the right relationships to enhance performance significantly; and helps organisations understand the potential of their people to execute business strategy.

**Source**

Boyden invited its stable of 600 interim executives to take part in this research and be profiled using PROPHET. The data is drawn from the 144 who took part.

**About Boyden**

Boyden is a premier leadership and talent advisory firm with more than 65 offices in over 40 countries. Our global reach enables us to serve client needs anywhere they conduct business. We connect great companies with great leaders through executive search, interim management and leadership consulting solutions. For more information, please visit [www.boyden.com](http://www.boyden.com).



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