

# The Annual Interim Executive Survey 2023

Watermark  
SEARCH INTERNATIONAL

# Contents

## Overview

Foreword	04
Welcome	05
Executive Summary	06
Survey Highlights	16

## The Executive

Interim Executive Avatars	18
Survey Results	19

## The Experience

Overview	27
Survey Results	28

## The Environment

Overview	35
Survey Results	37

## About

Interim Partner Profiles	42
Watermark Capabilities	44

### Disclaimer

While every care and diligence has been used in the collection and preparation of the information in this publication, we are not responsible to you or anyone else for any loss suffered in connection with the use of this content. Where liability cannot be excluded, any liability incurred by us in relation to your use of the content, is limited to the extent permitted by law. We are not responsible for any errors, including those caused by negligence, in the material. The information provided in this publication is not intended to constitute business or other professional advice. We make no statements, representations or warranties about the accuracy or completeness of the information and you should not rely on it.

### Copyright

© The Ambition Group Pty Limited 2023. All rights reserved. Except as permitted by the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth), no part may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, communicated or transmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the copyright owner.

For the best experience, we recommend using the free software Adobe Reader, or iBooks if viewing on an Apple mobile device. Interactive functionality may be limited when viewed in a web browser.

 [Download Adobe Reader](#)

# Overview

---

Foreword	04
Welcome	05
Executive Summary	06
Survey Highlights	16



# Foreword

## New ways of working

The world of work has been in a state of flux. Sure, there was the COVID-19 pandemic that saw Australia's largest work-from-home experiment and record low levels of unemployment, but there were some loud voices out there who were urging caution with a naive belief that things would settle down and we would just go back to the way things were.

Well, I think it's safe to say that this is most definitely not the case. As the tides of change continue to sweep through, and articles posted all throughout the news and social media overwhelm us, it can be hard to think about where to put our focus. Which is why the release of the Watermark Interim Executive Survey is so timely.

This report helps as a guide to navigate through uncharted waters. While hybrid working won't go away as one of the top challenges facing organisations, we've seen the economy slow down and organisations tighten the purse strings. This has also led to a real interest in contingent labour and interim executives, which provide the flexibility for organisations who aren't wanting to make any long term bets amongst so much uncertainty. And of course, there's the elephant in the room – generative AI. Research from OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, revealed that almost one in five people globally (who have access to the Internet) have used ChatGPT in a single month. This is the quickest adoption of any technology in human history and putting your head in the sand is just not an option.

So, where does that leave us? This report outlines five key themes for leaders to think about in response to all of this. There's longevity, which is all about how to build a sustainable organisation through resilience in the pursuit of legacy.

The skills revolution, ensuring workers have access to up skilling and re-skilling opportunities underpinned by a focus on agile lifelong learning so they're empowered to succeed at what they do while ensuring they remain future-fit. At the heart of employee engagement is then meaningful work, drawing line of sight between the contribution of individual employees to the impact they're having with a focus on value over productivity. With so much change, a focus on agile planning helps navigate uncertainty with confidence. And then finally, adaptive leadership, is the glue that holds it all together by ensuring leaders are able to successfully steer their teams through ambiguity.

To add to this, the report offers data-driven insights and real life examples to help you make the future of work a reality today. Well done to the team at Watermark on another great publication.



**Dr Ben Hamer**  
Chief Futurist, CreativeCubes.Co



# Welcome

## A new vision for Interim Executives

The market for temporary staffing solutions is growing globally – and it's being led by incredibly fast growth in Asia Pacific. So it's little wonder many global search firms are augmenting their traditional search offerings with Interim Executive solutions.

Most markets are doing this through organic growth, but in the US they're so keen to meet demand quickly, they are buying Interim Executive businesses to almost instantly bolt on these offerings.

In Australia we've experienced 8.38% annualised growth for temporary staff services since 2018<sup>1</sup>, with the Australian Interim Executive market a key contributor.

Watermark is proud to have pioneered this interim talent market more than 13 years ago – and we've continually championed and grown it across Australia ever since.

We certainly learn from past events but are firmly focused on the future. In Australia right now nothing is certain: whatever your personal beliefs on where the economic environment will take us, change is coming. We believe the skills that have been prioritised over the last ten years will no longer be enough to drive us forward. Instead, there is a new set of themes emerging in the workplace that will drive future success for our leaders, employees, and customers



# 8.38%

**Australia's temporary staff services grew by 8.38% annually since 2018.**

Watermark believes we now need to offer our employees a different vision, set of experiences and values. We will share these with you in detail throughout this evidence-based report, though here is a summary of the five key trends:

- 1 Longevity
- 2 Skills revolution
- 3 Meaningful work
- 4 Agile planning
- 5 Adaptive leadership

These themes pose new questions for us all. How we accept, reflect on, prioritise and action them will define the next stage of growth.

It's been our pleasure to survey the market for you again this year and we hope you find the report informative and inspiring.

**David Evans**  
Managing Partner  
Watermark Search



<sup>1</sup> Temporary Staff Services in Australia – Number of Businesses 2008–2029, IBISWorld, January 26, 2023

# Executive Summary

## 5 trends impacting the future of work

“Boards are increasingly asking their executive teams about the future, ‘Where will growth come from? Will we have the people to get us there? And what will need to radically change?’ Building foresight capability and the muscle for future thinking is becoming one of the most important skills for the future, especially for those who play a lead role in shaping it.”

Dr Ben Hamer, Chief Futurist,  
CreativeCubes.Co

# 1

## Longevity



# 2

## Skills revolution



# 3

## Meaningful work



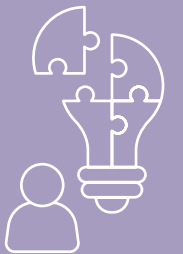
# 4

## Agile planning



# 5

## Adaptive leadership



## Executive Summary continued

## 1

## Longevity

The antidote to ageism?



Our survey respondents made it very clear organisations need to: “refresh attraction and retention strategies”, with more than two thirds (68%) of participants selecting it as the most important way to change the concept of longevity in our workplaces.

**Businesses can deliver on this trend by:**


Designing dedicated attraction strategies targeting age brackets previously not considered, such as mature workers



Improving retention by encouraging their loyal workforces to take breaks from work through built-in sabbaticals.

“Greater acceptance of mature hires, more neuro divergent and disability hires as a result of low employment rates and a need to consider ‘alternative pools’ of hires. Sadly, not a proactive move, but more of a reactive response ...”

**Comment from a participant in our Interim Executive Survey**

“The world is facing several changes simultaneously – including a tight labour market, job churn from technological advancement and a declining population. Meanwhile, people in many countries around the world are living – and working – longer. In fact, the World Health Organisation estimates that between 2015 and 2050, the proportion of the world’s population that is more than 60 years old will nearly double.”

**David Evans**, commenting on research from World Economic Forum 2023<sup>2</sup>



The next two most popular strategies to address longevity are: “create new policies to accommodate multiple generations in the workforce (eg it is conceivable to think company benefit will not only include childcare but also eldercare options)” (51% of respondents); and “the embedding of lifelong learning initiatives that retrain the workforce as demand for skills shift” (48%).

We see longevity emerging as a strong trend with profound implications for almost all parts of an organisation: from employers and employees, to products and services – and the consumers of those products and services.

As longevity also has implications for communities and the infrastructure to support them, it needs to become a priority for all levels of government, and we note recent developments in policies extending paid time off for family caregiving, elder care, along with funding for retraining and further education opportunities.

Most peoples’ careers are now unlikely to end at the retirement age of 67. Instead, more people want (or need) to work longer to pay for a longer life and / or add to their savings for when work is no longer viable. This means they are planning a portfolio of work which may include Interim Executive, contracting, part time, flexible, hybrid, volunteering, board, advisory, consulting or a mix of any of these work arrangements.

<sup>2</sup> Ageing and health, World Health Organisation, 1 October 2022

**Executive Summary** continued

“People are living longer, and the population is ageing. According to leading researchers, the average 10-year old child who lives in a nation with one of the longest average life spans can expect to live to at least 100. That means up to six decades of work. Today in the US, 10,000 people turn 65 every day, and in just 11 years, millennials, who already represent the largest generation in the labor force, will start to turn 50.”

Introduction to the LSX Longevity Leaders Trend Report 2020<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, organisations need to address career longevity as a business imperative, not just a “nice to have”. Those that do are already realising the benefits and value of a multi-generational workforce, especially the retention and passing on of wisdom (or corporate knowledge).

As with other diversity considerations, greater understanding of the needs of people in a cohort (in this case older people) can also contribute to better strategies to meet those needs in the market – and drive profits. In fact, a recent report from AARP noted economic activity in 2020 driven by people age 50-plus accounted for about 34% of global GDP (worth US\$45 trillion, which is expected to grow to US\$118 trillion or 39% of global GDP by 2050).<sup>4</sup>

**68%**

of survey respondents prioritise “refreshing attraction and retention strategies” as the key factor to transform workplace longevity.

**51%**

of respondents favor “creating new policies to accommodate multiple generations in the workforce.”

<sup>3</sup> “How longevity and the future of work will transform all sectors”, LSX (The network for life science executive leaders), 11 August 2020

<sup>4</sup> The Global Longevity Economy Outlook, AARP, 10 November 2022

## Action plan for embracing and benefiting from career longevity

Watermark Search has developed a “longevity formula” to help organisations and individuals alike develop a “longevity plan” (see page 10, Table A) based on our research and collectively lived experience. We also offer the following recommendations for organisations:

- ✓ Executives need to think creatively about talent, keeping longevity in mind: how to value it, where to find it, how to unleash it and how to keep it.
- ✓ Leaders should foster a culture of respect and fairness for all, particularly by creating opportunities for meaningful work and skills development.
- ✓ Policies affecting recruitment, assessment, retention, compensation, life-long learning, health and wellness, and retirement all need to be age- and stage-inclusive.
- ✓ “Returnship” programs can help revitalise organisations by bringing people back to work for a new life chapter, such as parents returning to work, or retirees wanting to resume their careers. Flexible work arrangements can also attract and entice people back into the workforce.
- ✓ Organisations can also attract talent by deploying Interim and contract workers, whose maturity, mentoring and experience can uplift capabilities.





## Executive Summary continued

So how do you articulate your unique value proposition – your core talents or superpowers – into your formula that can plug into an organisation’s needs? Elatia Abate, founder of The Future of Now and a *Forbes* Leading Female Futurist who consults in the future of work and leadership, explains it’s time to reimagine your work future as a Career Mosaic rather than the traditional career ladder:

“Unfortunately, most of us don’t know how to create careers that bring us wealth or happiness – let alone both. This is because the way we have been taught to think about careers through the lens of ‘The Ladder Model’, where you start on one rung, on one track, and keep climbing until retirement. This model has long passed its expiration date. There is a much more effective way to construct a career as disruptions of all kinds increase the level of uncertainty most of us face. This new model is the Mosaic Career™.”

<sup>5</sup> “From Ladder to Mosaic Career™”, LinkedIn post by Elatia Abate, 10 August 2020

With the Mosaic model, we shift our working worlds from a singularly focused track, based on a central skill set, to a composition of talents, creativity, skills, and values that center around a common theme or series of themes.”

Elatia Abate, Futurist<sup>5</sup>

Abate advocates for seasoned, experienced people to tap into their core talents and identify where they can best meet organisations’ needs. The Mosaic Career model champions alternatives to the old ways of thinking about career paths:

Mindset	Education	Collaboration
Sniper versus Scientist (old way versus new way), Or versus And	Skills versus Values, Job search versus Entrepreneurship	Networking versus Community building

Abate says these career approaches: “wouldn’t require someone to be a full-time employee, but rather working on multiple projects for multiple companies, participating in healthcare pools for their insurance needs. The anticipated growth of remote work options will add to the flexibility for older workers, as they avoid the physical toll of commuting, leaning into their mental acuity and knowledge to continue to contribute”.

## Top 3 most popular ways to build a longevity plan



69%

### Community

Building a strong professional network and maintaining positive relationships with former colleagues.



61%

### Results

Demonstrating a results-driven approach and add value to each assignment.



49%

### Upskilling

Continuing to develop new skills and keep up-to-date with industry trends and innovations.

Source: Watermark Search Annual Interim Executive Survey 2023

“We are not defined by our work – who we are defines the work that we do.”

Tammy Erickson, Adjunct Professor of Organisational Behaviour at LBS and author of *What’s Next, Gen X?* and *Plugged In: The Generation Y guide to thriving at work* (Harvard Business School Press).



## Executive Summary continued

## Longevity Plan

## The worker (candidate)

- Have you identified the type of work that aligns to your purpose and passion?
- Who are you when you are at your best self?
- To what extent are you investing in lifelong learning and skills to remain current?
- How are you investing in healthy relationships and networks to keep up your vitality?
- To what extent are you keeping in touch with multi-generations to remain current?
- Do you have a wellbeing routine embedded in your week to build strong physical and mental health?
- Have you completed an audit of your finances? Are you able to sustain your financial resources as you live longer?
- Are you creating time for new experiences to broaden mindsets, build resilience and agility?

## The work and workplace (client)

- To what extent are you investing in building strong leadership through the organisation, valuing a multigenerational workforce?
- Is the organisation's vision clear and connected with everyone in the organisation, in particular an ageing demographic?
- How are you crafting meaningful work with a strong focus on purpose and the community in which we live?
- Are you clear on the skills required for today and tomorrow, and a strategy for borrowing, buying, and building these across the multigeneration in the workplace?
- What policies and initiatives support the health and wellness of workers working into their 60s and beyond? (eg flexibility, eldercare / childcare allowances, sabbaticals, learning)?
- To what extent do you understand the value of baby boomers in your organisation – and do you understand how to leverage their expertise?
- Is now the time to commit to a multi-stage work strategy in your organisation? What is your plan for engaging a worker across a 60 year career?

Table A

Michael Clinton, a journalist from *Esquire* Magazine recently wrote a thought-provoking article titled, “The New Longevity Isn’t Coming. It’s Here”<sup>65</sup>. He imagined and described what the world would be like in 2040, and this extract really resonates with us as it aligns with our survey results:

**“In the 2040 workplace there has been a massive movement to retain, retrain, and redeploy employee talent over 60. It’s not unusual for 70-year-olds to be leading intergenerational initiatives, especially as most companies refocus on the needs of aging consumers and find themselves in talent wars for seasoned, experienced employees who understand the shifting landscape. A hot new executive search firm that has aligned itself with the new breed of management has led the charge to break down the old-fashioned idea that people over 60 are not employable.”**

Michael Clinton, writing in *Esquire*

<sup>65</sup>“The New Longevity Isn’t Coming. It’s Here”, *Esquire* article by Michael Clinton, 18 October 2022

We believe Watermark Search Interim Executive is already that “hot new executive search firm” – though of course what we do isn’t new to us: we’ve been advocating for our cohort of Interim Executives for more than 13 years.



## Executive Summary continued

## 2

**Skills revolution**

The future belongs to those who learn more skills and combine them in creative ways



We are in the “skills based” revolution, moving from the concept of a “job” title to “skills” to define work.

A study by Deloitte<sup>7</sup> found that organisations which align workers with work that fits their skills and capabilities are:



“We need a reskilling revolution. Why? Because in a world where we’ll be having at least 20 different jobs across five careers, job titles are no longer currency. Skills are. And we need to spend 15% of our working week learning and developing new skills to stay current.”

Dr Ben Hamer, Chief Futurist,  
CreativeCubes.Co

52%

more likely to be innovative



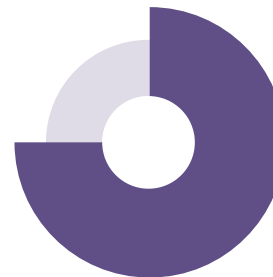
57%

agile in deploying talent to critical work



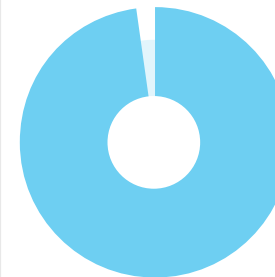
75%

focused on promoting diversity and equitable outcomes



98%

more likely to retain high performers and have a reputation as a great place to grow and develop



<sup>7</sup> “The skills-based organisation: A new operating model for work and the workforce”, *Deloitte Insights*, 8 September 2022

## Executive Summary continued

## 3

## Meaningful work

Having a purpose is the difference between making a living and making a life



We are still seeing the impact of “The Great Resignation” that occurred the past couple of years during and after the pandemic, when a record number of employees left their jobs looking for more purposeful, flexible and satisfying work.

In response, employers have put in place Employee Value Propositions, which not only help to attract talent to their organisation but also help retain workers. We’re also seeing them try to stay ahead of the war on talent curve through the adoption of two new dimensions added to the well-known HR model of Buy, Borrow, Build: Bind (retain key talent and skills) and Boost (fast track planned promotions).

According to research by Bain & Company<sup>8</sup> there are three keys to purposeful work, each clearly having more weight than the old buy / borrow arrangement for attracting and keeping talent:

1

Make work interesting

2

Connect jobs to the company’s mission

3

Build learning into work

While some employers have scrambled to “win” the war for talent by offering more flexibility, more pay, and fast tracked promotions and succession plans, the dial does not appear to have shifted significantly. Some organisations have also attempted to inspire their people with snazzy mission statements, slogans and spin (eg new versions of the old “Our people are our greatest asset” message) but these have also missed the mark.

This year saw our survey respondents flexing from Interim as a Plan A to an openness to exploring permanent opportunities as they sought their next contract. In 2023, 40% of our respondents said they had no preference for Interim or permanent, while one in ten see Interim as a gap fill. With the general trend of decreasing job tenure in Australia, we predict more respondents will continue to place more importance on the nature of work higher than the contractual engagement method. We’ve seen several market dynamics contribute to decreasing job tenure recently, including: employees desiring workforce mobility, technological advancements and the rapidly changing requirements of skills required in today’s workplace.

Recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics<sup>8</sup> (ABS) suggests job mobility is at its highest in the past decade (9.5%), with one in five workers and 24% of professionals having changed jobs within the year, while a further third have been in their role less than four years. While the ABS reported 2.3 million people left or lost a job in the year ending February 2023, it noted the annual retrenchment rate was 1.4% – the lowest on record since 1972.

“It’s obvious when you think about it. The most inspiring thing about work is the work itself ... and the opportunity to grow ... professionals state their ability to learn and grow is roughly twice as important as getting a raise, and more than twice as important than the relationship with their manager. This reinforces the point I’ve been making for the last year: ‘The Learning Curve is the Earning Curve’. As soon as you feel you’re no longer growing, it’s time to look for a new job.”

Josh Bersin, Global Industry Analyst<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Purposeful Work: The Secret Weapon in the New War for Talent*, Bain & Company report by Michael Mankins, Eric Garton, and Dan Schwartz, 4 January 2023

<sup>9</sup> Job mobility statistics, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 30 June 2023

<sup>10</sup> “New Research Shows ‘Heavy Learners’ More Confident, Successful, and Happy at Work”, LinkedIn article by Josh Bersin, 10 November 2018

## Executive Summary continued

## 4

**Agile planning**

Plan scenarios to thrive rather than merely survive in this volatile environment



Just like IT projects that have moved from a Waterfall approach to the agile, iterative, and real time approach, organisation's need to have shorter, sharper plans across various talent planning scenarios. The five year "set and forget strategy" no longer serves a business.



Scenario planning in a BANI (brittle, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible) environment will be key for nimble decision making:

**External and financial market disruption**

- + internal post pandemic organisational redesign / transformation
- + change resistant leaders
- + a sprinkle of AI

The World Economic Forum 2023 published its global economic outlook at its May 2023 Summit, which noted experts are divided about the prospects of a recession in 2023, with 45% expecting a recession and an equal number expecting to avoid one.



# 45%

**Experts' views on a 2023 recession are split, with 45% anticipating a recession and an equal number foreseeing its avoidance.**

"At the summit, trends that are expected to shape growth most profoundly in the coming year included geo-economics and a changing geography of supply chains, rapid advancement and adoption of technology – including generative AI – and stronger industrial policy, especially measures to enable greener growth and the energy transition."

**World Economic Forum 2023<sup>11</sup>**

<sup>11</sup> "Chief Economists Outlook: May 2023", World Economic Forum, 1 May 2023

## Executive Summary continued

## Scenario planning – when and how to engage Interim Executives

## Scenario A

## Challenges



economic headwinds



pressure to cut costs and right size your business while still facing the skills shortage

## How an Interim Executive can help



Bring in a short-term fix to help the CFO plan and deliver cost savings, cash flow and budget re-alignment.

## Scenario B

## Challenges



concerns about cyberattacks, governance and reputational risks



shortage of talent in the organisation to deal with these risks

## How an Interim Executive can help



Bring in a risk expert and / or a cyber expert to help assess the situation and upskill the current team so they are better prepared for future risks.

Our advice to clients in this uncertain market is to scenario plan. Yes there is ambiguity around the economy but there is also a need to transform the organisation for future fitness post pandemic, whether through a restructure of the business operating model, a divestment strategy, a growth strategy or an M&A strategy.

The Interim Executive talent pool comes into its own in uncertain market conditions or even a crisis – Interim Executives are available immediately, have years of experience, can deliver at speed and will help continue to develop your organisation through the next business cycle successfully.

Our survey confirms in the past 12 months the Interim CFO assignment has risen to the number one requirement (34%). This reflects a cycle in the market's needs for the Interim Executive. The role of Chief People Officer was most in demand (no surprise) throughout Covid. During the past 12 months we have also seen a demand for Finance / Strategy and the combined CFO / COO role, especially for finance and strategy experts who can drive transformation. We attribute this to the business trend of cost focus, as organisations right size and prepare to potentially front into economic headwinds. The CFO skill set has always been in demand for Interim roles throughout the 13 years of this survey.



Chief transformation officer / change director was a close second functional skill requirement at 32%, which is down 9% from last year (41%). We attribute this change to organisations transforming and redesigning their businesses to be more digitally enabled and moving more functions to online-first, which allows them to meet the customer online (for example, retail, services and customer support).

The third functional reason for bringing in an Interim Executive is a tie between COO (28%) and CEO (28%), with the swing for CEO up 3% and COO down 3%.



In the past 12 months, Interim CFO assignments have become the top requirement (34%), reflecting a market cycle in demand for Interim Executives.

34%



Chief Transformation Officer/Change Director was the second most critical skill requirement at 32%, down 9% from last year (41%).

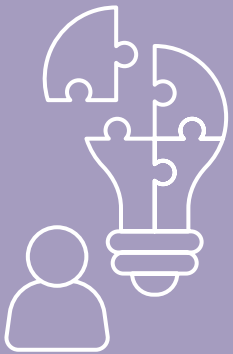
32%

## Executive Summary continued

## 5

**Adaptive leadership**

It's not the strongest or most intelligent, it's the most adaptive that will sustain



The evolved and dynamic leader needs a new toolkit of skills. The go-to bag of management tricks that got you into a leadership position will not be enough to lead a team or organisation in 2023 and beyond.

Trust is a key currency – a move away from fear. If you want cut through as a leader and benefit your organisation, you must be responsive and adaptable in the fast-paced business world. Now you are likely to lead five generations of workers, a combination of power “human” skills combined with your industry and domain expertise will be essential.

Interestingly, in answer to the question, “What would be the biggest issue to influence or disrupt business strategy in the coming year?”, a new answer raced into the top four this year (chosen by 32% of respondents): “Fear of change and ‘old way of thinking’ by leaders”.

**32%**

of respondents believe that “Fear of change and ‘old way of thinking’ by leaders” will be the biggest issue influencing or disrupting business strategy in the coming year.



# Survey Highlights

## 5 trends impacting the future of work

**1.**  
Longevity




Almost 50% of Interim Executives who have embarked on their portfolio career choose to do this indefinitely for the flexibility, variety, social engagement and to sustain longevity in the workplace.

**83.9**  
years

With average life expectancy currently at 83.9 years in Australia, increasing one year every decade, sustaining longevity in the workplace is a key focus for our respondents.

**2.**  
Skills revolution




**20%**

of respondents cited “currency in skills” as why they choose to be an Interim Executive.

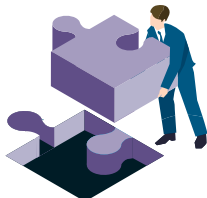


“How” Interim Executives remain current is critical. Reading market and industry publications, engaging in networking at conferences, seminars and with professional groups are at the top, with “in person” gatherings building momentum post pandemic.

**3.**  
Meaningful work



Meaningful assignments, where they can have an impact, are more important to Interim Executives than the tenure they are engaged for (Interim or more permanent).



In 2023, the biggest drivers for choosing Interim Executive as a career of choice (in order of importance) are:



the freedom to choose one’s work schedule to fit neatly within other work and life commitments; the variety of clients and sectors; and the challenge of new assignments.

**4.**  
Agile planning



**58%**

of respondents chose “finding / retaining the best people” as the number one external disrupter / influence to business strategy.

**41%**

chose “post pandemic organisational transformations”.

**42%**

chose “financial / market disruption” (up a significant 23% on same time last year).

**42%**

chose a new answer this year: “fear of change and ‘old way of thinking’ by leaders”.

**5.**  
Adaptive leadership



The key attributes valued by clients in Interim Executives are:



the ability to guide and motivate teams to deliver



develop and implement strategies to drive business growth.

Domain knowledge

Adaptability and speed

are key skills rounding out those highly sought by organisations looking to rapidly evolve their business models to thrive in the post pandemic world.



# The Executive

---

Interim Executive Avatars	18
Survey Results	19



# The Interim Executive Avatars of 2023

The Interim Executive avatars of 2023, Eloise and Ivan, actively pursue Interim assignments for the flexibility, variety and challenge. Meaningful assignments, where they can have an impact, are more important to them than the tenure they are engaged for (interim or more permanent). Their leadership, strategic thinking, stakeholder engagement and emotional intelligence skills are the key attributes their clients seek from them.

Like their colleagues Erika and Ian from 2022, Eloise and Ivan are life-long learners, curious, well read, digitally literate and networked. They stay relevant by keeping informed of market trends and proactively developing new skills through short courses, professional and industry development.

In 2023 their main challenges are a lack of consistent income, coupled with promoting themselves through multi-channels to best secure a pipeline of work. Brokers are a very important channel for sourcing work as are prior job contacts and face to face networking.

In the past 12 months, Eloise mostly finds an assignment within one month of her prior engagement and is paid a daily rate of \$1300–\$1800. She is mid-to-late 50s. Eloise is usually engaged as an Interim general manager or C-suite direct report to the CEO. She has been kept busiest in the healthcare, government and not-for-profit sectors, and relative to Ivan, busier in Financial Services.



You will find Eloise working on business transformation driven by the need to improve performance or drive out cost, sitting within the enterprise program / transformation office or human resources departments.

Post pandemic, Eloise took more time to re-evaluate her career and make a shift from permanent to Interim work because she values the ability to work in a hybrid way. Her portfolio of work mostly combines Interim and NED roles. In 2023 she chooses to work this way indefinitely. To maintain her longevity as a portfolio worker, Eloise focuses on nourishing her networks, learning new skills and remaining current.

## Eloise

**Age:** Mid-late 50s

**Daily rate:** \$1300–\$1800

**Main titles / roles:** Interim general manager, C-Suite

**Main sectors:** Healthcare, government, not-for-profit

**Portfolio:** Interim, NED roles



Ivan is in his early 60s. He is paid \$2000+ for 25% of his work, and more often at \$1300–\$1500 per day. Like Eloise, he is usually engaged as an Interim general manager or C-Suite direct report to the CEO. He is engaged as the Interim CEO for one-in-five assignments. In 2023 Ivan has been kept busy in the government and not-for-profit sectors, and relative to Eloise, he is busier in technology services. Functionally, Ivan is called on for his transformation, finance and chief executive skills.

Post pandemic Ivan was less inclined than Eloise to re-evaluate his career and make changes. In 2023 he places more value on the ability to work in a hybrid way and has become more flexible in the daily rate he is willing to accept. His portfolio of work mostly consists of Interim and consulting work. Like Eloise, he chooses to work this way indefinitely. To maintain his longevity as a portfolio worker, Ivan focuses on nourishing his networks and demonstrating bottom line results in all his endeavours.

## Ivan

**Age:** Early 60s

**Daily rate:** \$1300-\$1500 or >\$2,000 (25%)

**Main titles / roles:** Interim general manager, C-Suite

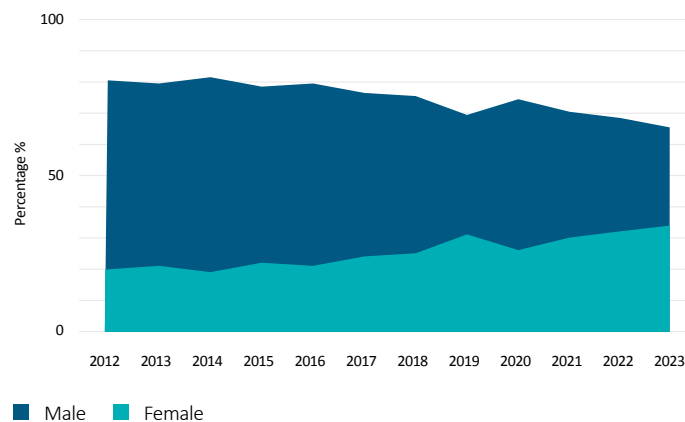
**Main sectors:** Government, not-for-profit

**Portfolio:** Interim, consulting work



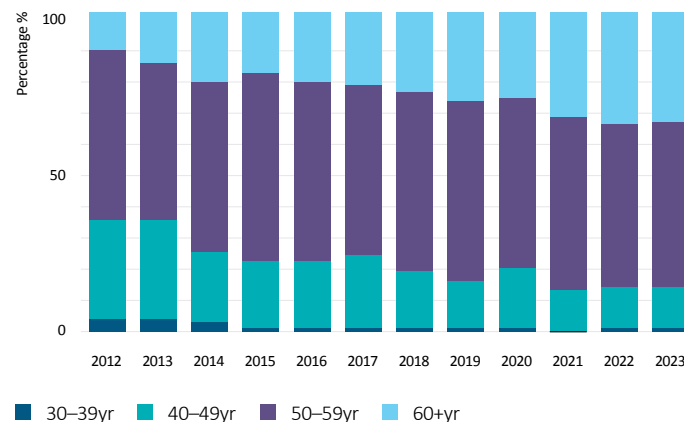
# The Executive Survey Results 2023

## Women stepping up



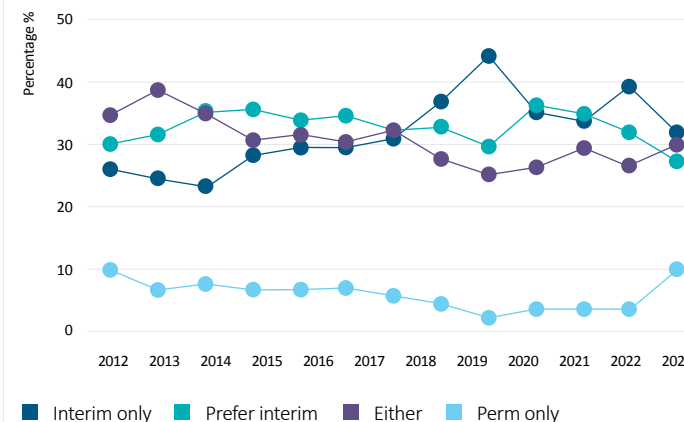
In 2023 we see the highest female representation at 34%, a 63% increase over the past 10 years. This percentage is reflective of the overall representation we see of women in executive and board roles across corporate Australia. We predict this will continue to rise and there will be a more equal gender representation by 2040. At Watermark Search our gender representation on assignment has outperformed the market over the past 12 months, with 57% male and 43% female appointments. (Currently in 2023 it's 50% each). Interestingly for comparison, the European International Network of Interim Managers reported a 14% female representation in their most current market survey.

## 50-59 is the new 50 – prime life stage



Consistent for the 13 years of our survey, more than 50% of respondents are represented in the 50-59 age group. A further third are in the 60+ age group. This aligns with Interim and a portfolio way of working often being a post executive-career decision. With average life expectancy currently at 83.9 years in Australia, increasing one year every decade, sustaining longevity in the workplace is a key focus for our respondents. Coupled with financial flexibility often experienced later in life and seismic social focus on wellbeing post-pandemic, we predict this trend to continue over time.

## Meaningful work takes primacy over buy / borrow arrangement

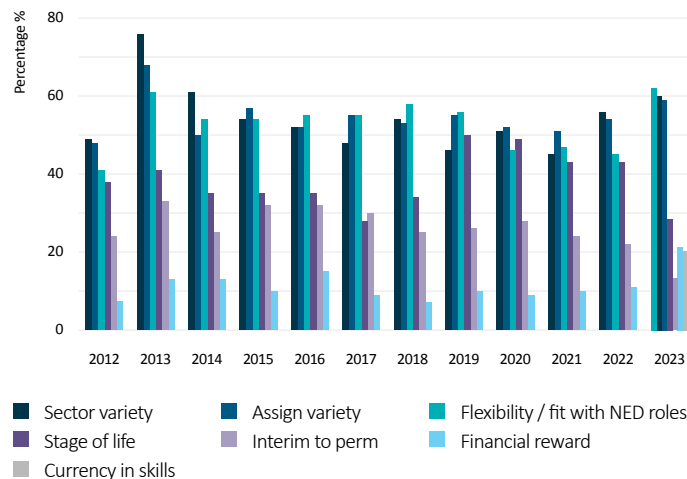


This year saw our survey respondents flexing from Interim as a Plan A to an openness exploring permanent opportunities as they sought their next contract. In 2023, 40% respondents had no preference for Interim or permanent with one in ten seeing Interim as a gap fill. With the general trend of decreasing job tenure in Australia, we predict the importance the nature of work, over the contractual engagement method, will continue to influence respondent's results. Several market dynamics have contributed to decreasing job tenure, these include employees desiring workforce mobility, technological advancements and the rapidly changing requirements of skills required in today's workplace.

The most recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggests job mobility is at its highest in the past ten years, with **1 in 5** in their role less than a year and a further third less than four years.

The Executive Survey Results 2023 continued

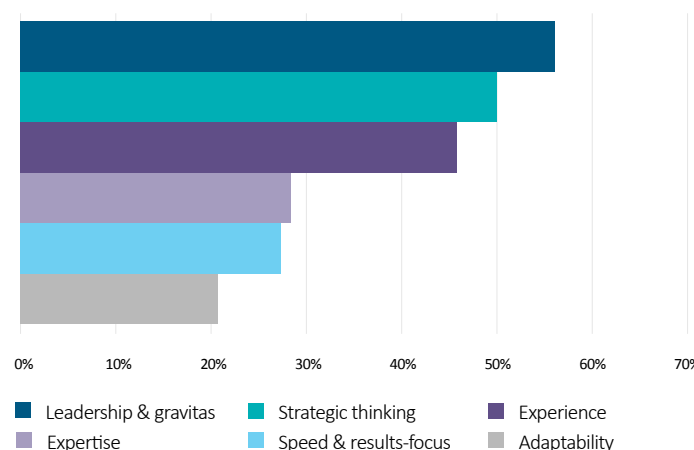
## Variety and flexibility grow in importance



**Flexibility** – the freedom to choose one’s work schedule to fit neatly within other work and life commitments, grows in importance in 2023. Closely followed by the variety of clients and sectors and the challenge of new and assignment, rounds out the trifecta of drivers for choosing Interim as a career of choice. These drivers have been enduring across the 13 years of this survey. Longevity (balancing work, life and wellness) continues to have a strong presence and underpins the importance of flexibility.

Currency in skills and financial reward were new this year, with 20% of respondents citing both as important.

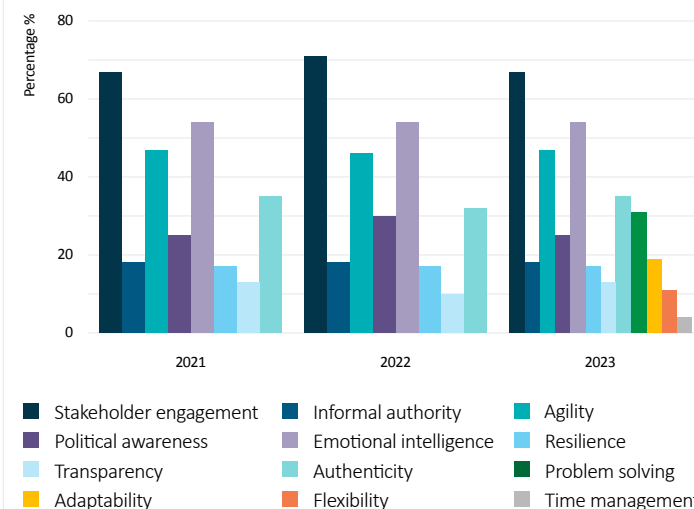
## Steering delivery and business growth, the crowning jewels



The ability to guide and motivate teams to deliver and develop and implement strategies to drive business growth are the key attributes valued by clients in 2023. Interim Executives typically bring a breadth and depth of accumulated experience, can think on their feet, and execute quickly. As organisations redefine the experience of work navigating new ways of working, physical and digital workplaces, and the integration of AI and technology – leaders who can connect people to their work and each other to deliver results, are “the crowning jewels”.

Domain knowledge, adaptability and speed are key skills rounding out those highly sought by organisations to rapidly evolve their business models to thrive in the post pandemic world.

## Trust is the most valued human skill



The lifeblood of an organisation is the relationship between its people and their ability to work together and deliver outcomes. Resoundingly this year, stakeholder engagement and the ability to build trust quickly at all levels, is the key “human” skill valued by clients of the Interim Executive. This is a consistent trend year on year with other “relational skills” including emotional intelligence and authenticity. Trust is the antidote to change resistance and the Interim Executive cohort have this as a key skill in their tool kit. New (and not surprisingly) this year was problem solving at 31%, the ability to analyse a complex situation with incomplete information and find creative solutions.

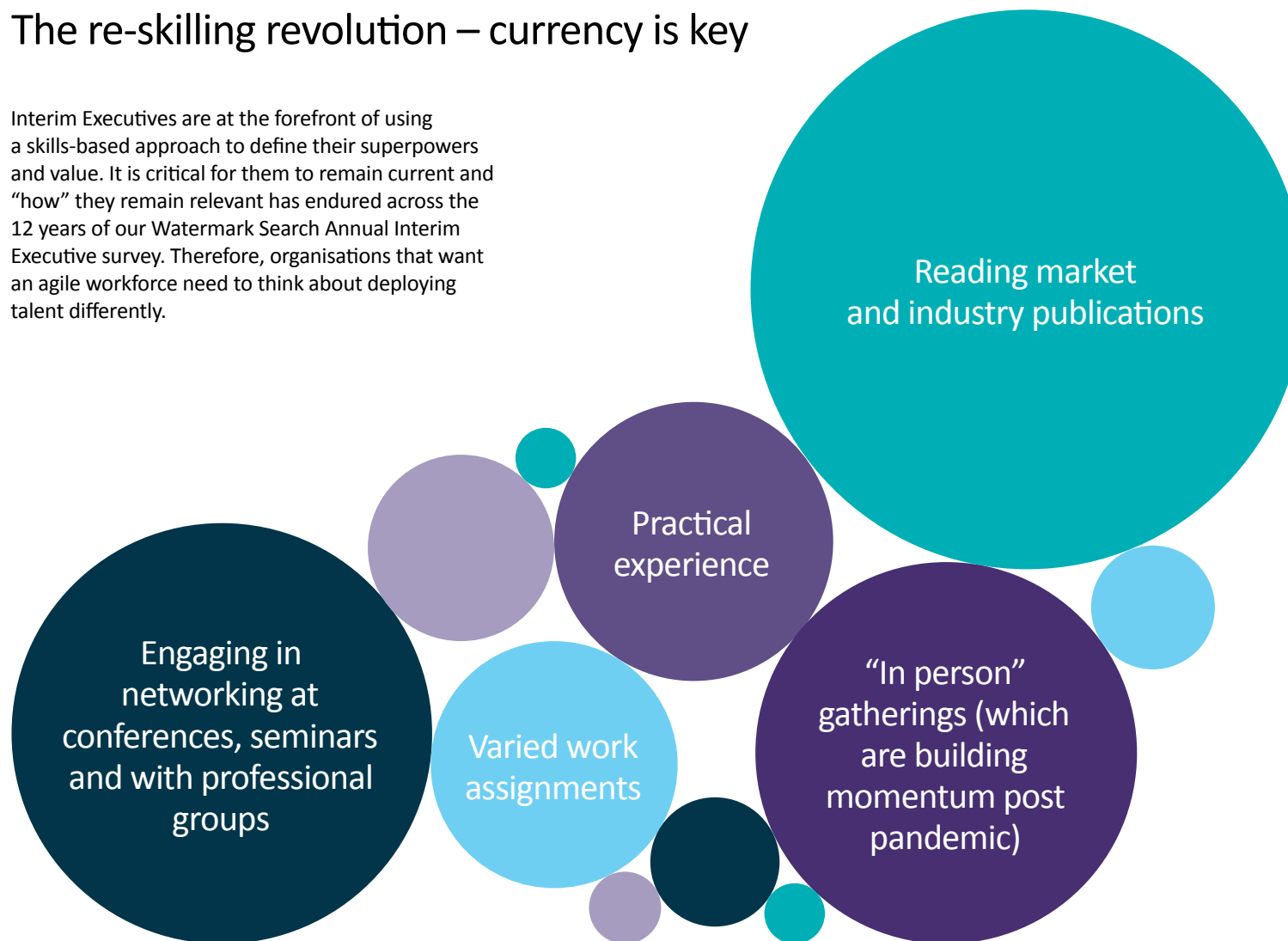
Top executive skills valued by clients

1. Stakeholder engagement **69%**
2. Emotional Intelligence **47%**
3. Authenticity **31%**
4. Problem solving (new) **31%**
5. Agility **20%**
6. Adaptability **19%**

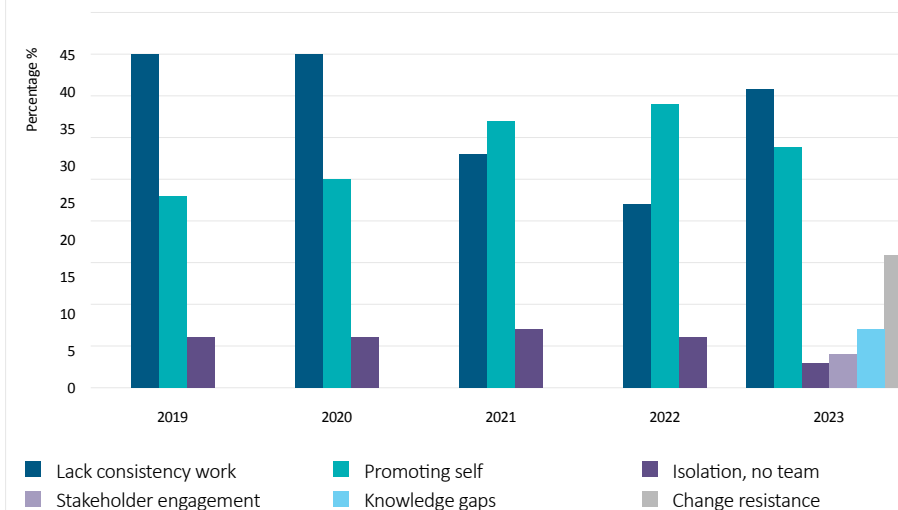
## The Executive Survey Results 2023 continued

### The re-skilling revolution – currency is key

Interim Executives are at the forefront of using a skills-based approach to define their superpowers and value. It is critical for them to remain current and “how” they remain relevant has endured across the 12 years of our Watermark Search Annual Interim Executive survey. Therefore, organisations that want an agile workforce need to think about deploying talent differently.



### Organisational change resistance – post pandemic challenge to being an Interim Executive



Uncertainty of income stream and promoting oneself to generate work continue to be two of the biggest challenges to being an Interim. This year “change resistance” polled at 16%, as an emerging challenge to being an Interim. A recent McKinsey<sup>12</sup> article highlighted that advances in AI, machine learning, robotics and other technologies have increased the pace of change tenfold. Watermark predicts that organisational change fatigue post pandemic is playing into organisational readiness to absorb and embed the change Interim Executives are often brought in to execute.

<sup>12</sup> “Tech at the edge: Trends reshaping the future of IT & Business”, McKinsey Digital, author: Steve Van Kuiken, 21 Oct 2022

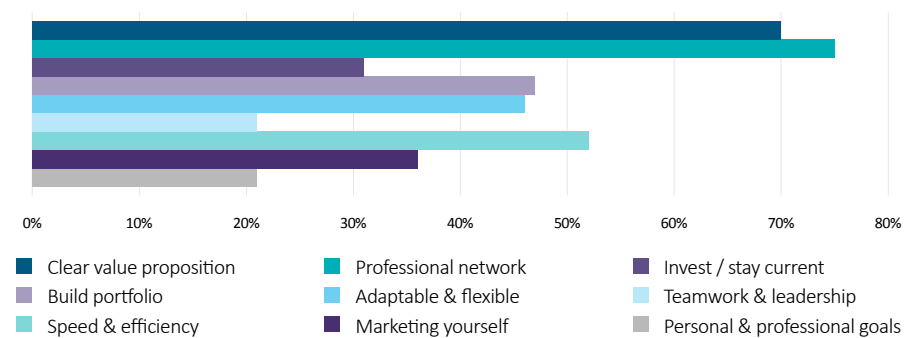
## The Executive Survey Results 2023 continued

“Covid-19 shifted our world online as we adopted unfamiliar versions of work, commerce and healthcare. Satya Nadella, Microsoft’s CEO, said, ‘We’ve seen two years’ worth of digital transformation in two months’ as more than 200 million participants joined Microsoft Teams meetings in a single day.”

Lee Shapiro, *Forbes*<sup>13</sup>



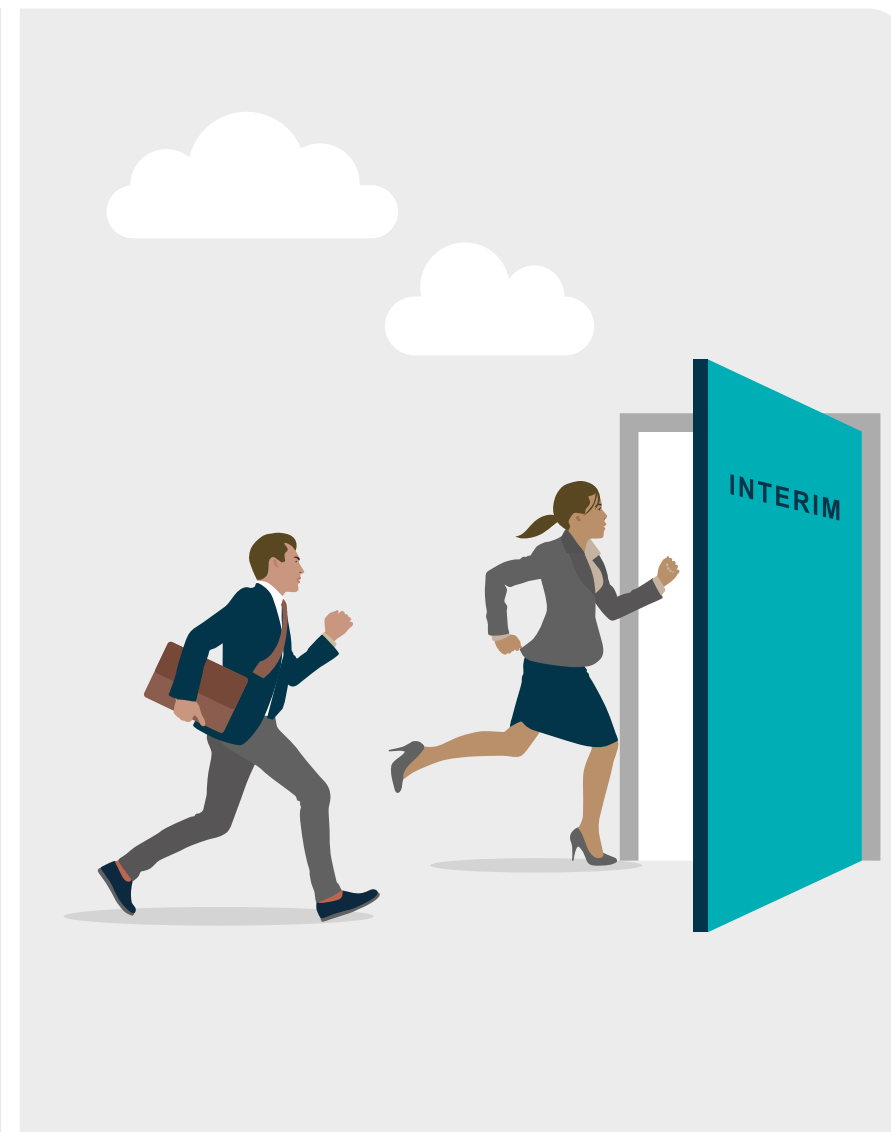
## Strong networks and compelling superpowers = success as an Interim Executive



Building a strong professional network and articulating a clear value proposition (your unique superpowers) was the stark advice from three in four survey respondents to those considering Interim Executive as a working choice.

This is consistent with their European cohort where a similar survey produced by the International Network of Interim Manager Associations (INIMA) reported that one in two assignments are generated through personal relationships. A multi-channel approach to building a pipeline of work (ie, use of professional networks, brokers, job boards, etc) yields the best result in a sustainable pipeline of work. How busy you wish to be kept as an Interim is directly linked to how active you are in the market. Self-accountability is paramount in crafting your unique pitch, sharing this with your network and letting them know how they can help you and what they should call you for.

<sup>13</sup> “The unprecedented pace of change”, Lee Shapiro, *Forbes*, 25 February 2021



## The Executive Survey Results 2023 continued

## What do Interim Executives and recruitment leaders say about Watermark Search?

“Your partners are very well regarded by host organisations as giving thorough briefs, understanding the client, providing high quality candidates, being super responsive.”

“It’s very easy to work with Watermark.”

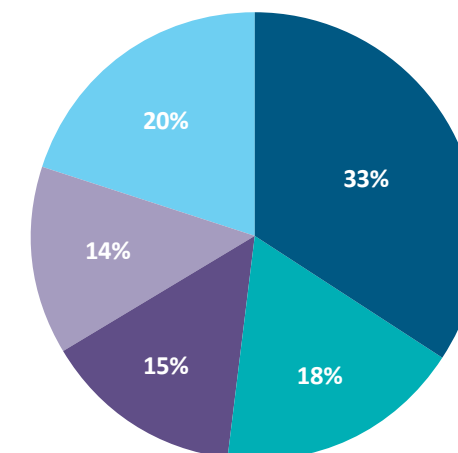
“Advocacy in this space, information available via newsletters.”

“Watermark is proactive in the marketplace.”

“Narrative is very clear around how Watermark can partner with executives.”

“Your team is not ‘selling’ to me or putting a bum on a seat, they are honest and focus on the long-term relationship rather than the immediate transaction that is making them a commission.”

## One-to-one connection with brokers



- Watermark has a strong reputation in the Interim Executive market
- Watermark has a broad network of clients and opportunities
- Offers great support in briefing, interviewing, and onboarding
- Matching candidates' skills and traits with clients and cultures
- High integrity & professionalism in all my dealings

One-to-one check-ins are an Interim Executive’s preferred contact method with brokers with webinars and networking opportunities being a strong second for education and staying connected. We are social beings and human connection in a physical and virtual environment, are essential to building long-term trusted relationships and engagement.

## The Executive Survey Results 2023 continued

### A typical “work” portfolio of a professional Interim Executive

New for 2023 we asked respondents to share the profile of their Interim portfolio. Not surprisingly most of the time was spent on Interim assignments (in the “seat” and accountability for delivering an outcome / doing a “role” / delivering a transformation) or consulting assignments (advising on a problem or solution and possible courses of action). Next was a mixture of board roles, the time commitment of these lending itself well to a portfolio way of working. In our experience the networks executives grow through their board work also feed their Interim and consulting assignments. Given flexibility and variety are the top two drivers for executives to choose to work as an Interim, it is not surprising to see volunteering and other entrepreneurial pursuits round out the mix.

- Interim assignments
- Consulting assignments
- Board / NED / Advisory Board roles
- Ventures / profitable hobbies
- Published works
- Volunteering / pro-bono work
- Other

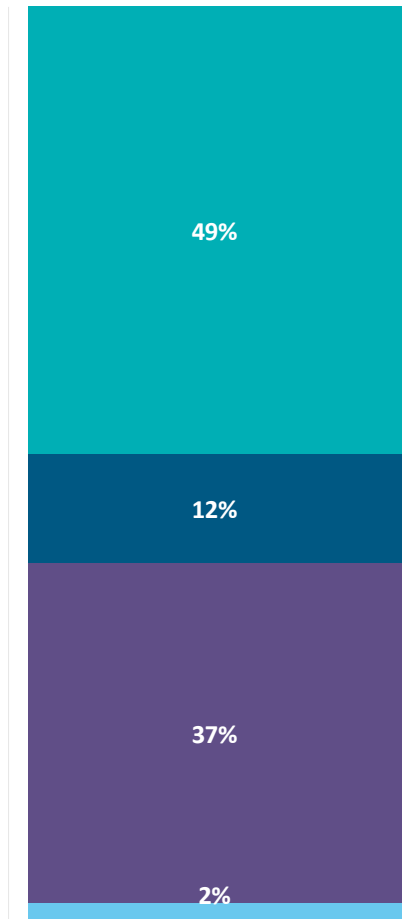


### One in two choose to work in a portfolio way indefinitely

For those who have embarked on their portfolio career, almost 50% choose to do this indefinitely; for the flexibility, variety, social engagement and to sustain longevity in the workplace. And for organisations grappling with a re-skilling revolution and attracting multi-generations to the work force, tapping into the executive portfolio work segments is must to have in their war for talent toolkit.

A further third of respondents were unsure at the time of the survey how long they would sustain this way of working while a further 12%, at the tail end of the working careers, said 1–2 years.

- Indefinitely
- 1–2 years
- Not sure
- Other





## The Executive Survey Results 2023 continued

### Questions for **clients** to consider

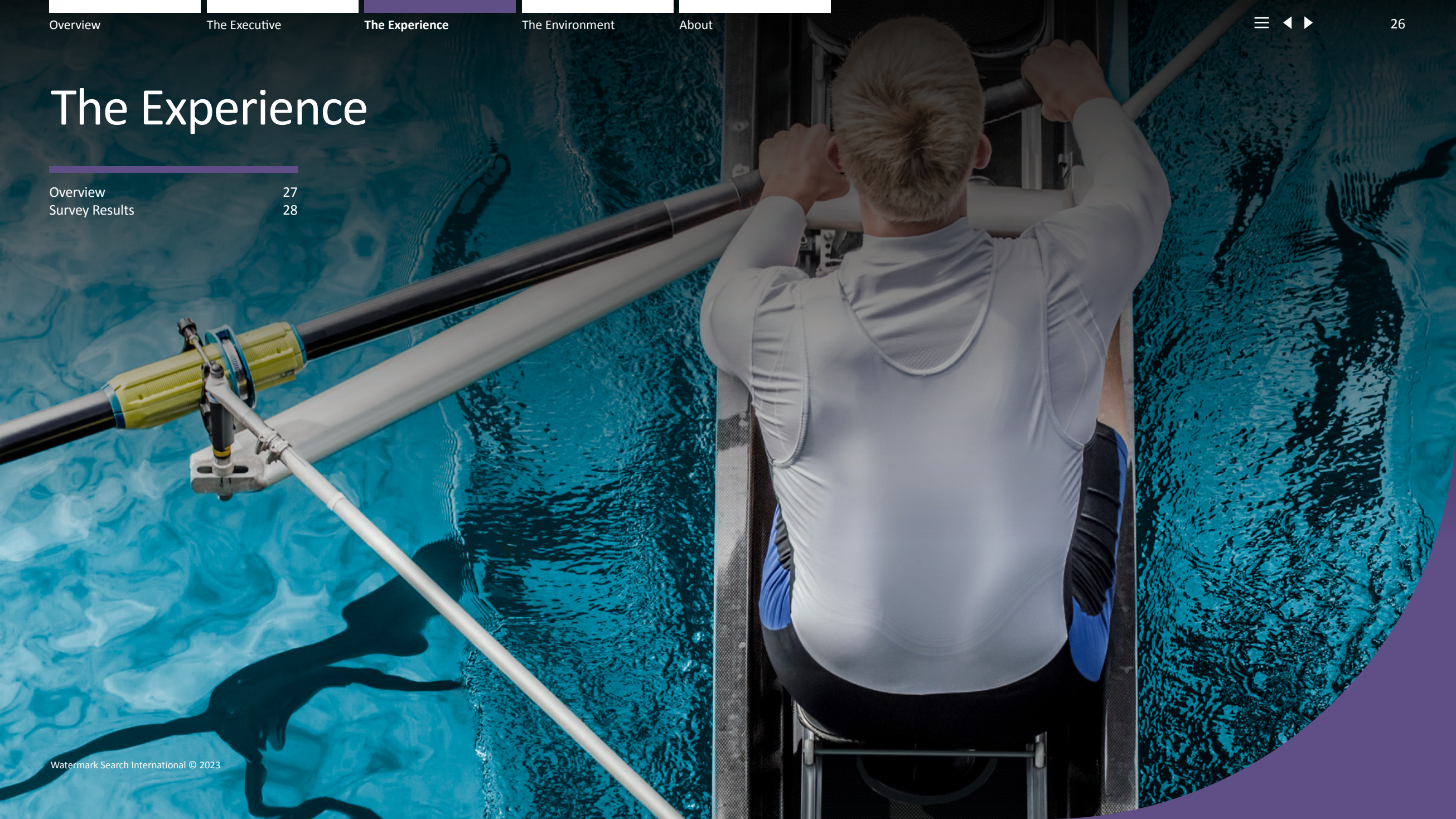
- 1** To what extent have you determined the key skills in demand in your organisation now (2023) and the future (2025 and beyond)? Have you considered the value of “borrowing” these skills from the Interim Executive market? If not, what is holding you back?
- 2** How are you building flexibility into your talent acquisition and contractual processes to enable Interim Executives to engage with your organisation?
- 3** Do you have a plan and communication strategy to create meaning and purpose for each role in the organisation? How are you engaging the hearts and minds of your workforce?
- 4** Is now the time to front into post pandemic change fatigue across your organisation? How are you identifying the pain points and are you engage with Interim Executives to support your comeback?
- 5** To what extent does your employee value proposition, policies and initiatives attract the 50-65 workforce demographic? Is now the time to review?

### Questions for **candidates** to consider

- 1** Do you have a clear and succinct pitch on the skills you can lend to a client?
- 2** Have you created a network map and do you have a plan for actively engaging this network to secure opportunities?
- 3** Do you have a plan to build currency in your area of expertise?
- 4** To what extent are you building your digital literacy?
- 5** To what extent are you financially flexible to ride the ebbs and flows in income stream that are inherent in a portfolio way of working? How will you mitigate this?

# The Experience

Overview	27
Survey Results	28



# Overview

## “For purpose” sectors leading the way in accessing Executive talent differently

The “for purpose” sectors of government (19%) health / aged care / human services (18%) and not for profit (18%) are leading the way in alternative and innovative talent sourcing at the executive level. Organisations are crying out for the wisdom and emotional intelligence (EQ) of proven executives who choose a portfolio career to address lack of specialist skills (28%) and to enable organisations to undertake the transformation and change (25%) needed to address business challenges and organisational redesign.

The survey highlights that every seat at the executive leadership table can be supported by an Interim Executive with the key functional skills in demand being CFO (34%), CTOs (32%) and CEO (28%) / COO (28%).

The “great realignment” continues to play out for individuals with three quarters of all people surveyed having cause to reassess how they engage with work over the past 12 months. For businesses to win the war for talent or retain their best talent they must provide five key levers as part of their employee value proposition (EVP):

- 1 Hybrid working arrangements (49%)
- 2 Clear values (40%)
- 3 Culture focus (40%)
- 4 Interesting and meaningful work (37%)
- 5 Work life / flexibility (39%)

## Key Statistics for Interim Executives

**55%**

1–5 months gap  
between assignments



**60%**

charge \$1000–\$1800  
per day



Engagement trends

**34%**

day rate



**60%**

of work sourced through  
prior job contacts



**80%**

find Interim brokers  
important



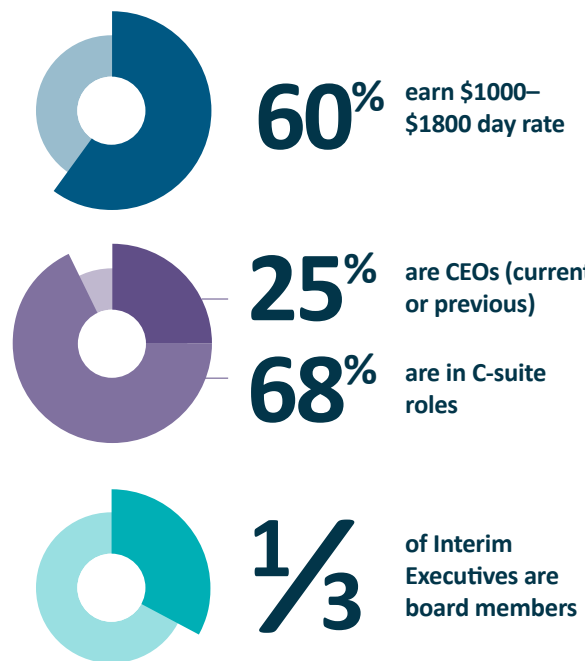
**31%**

fixed-term contract



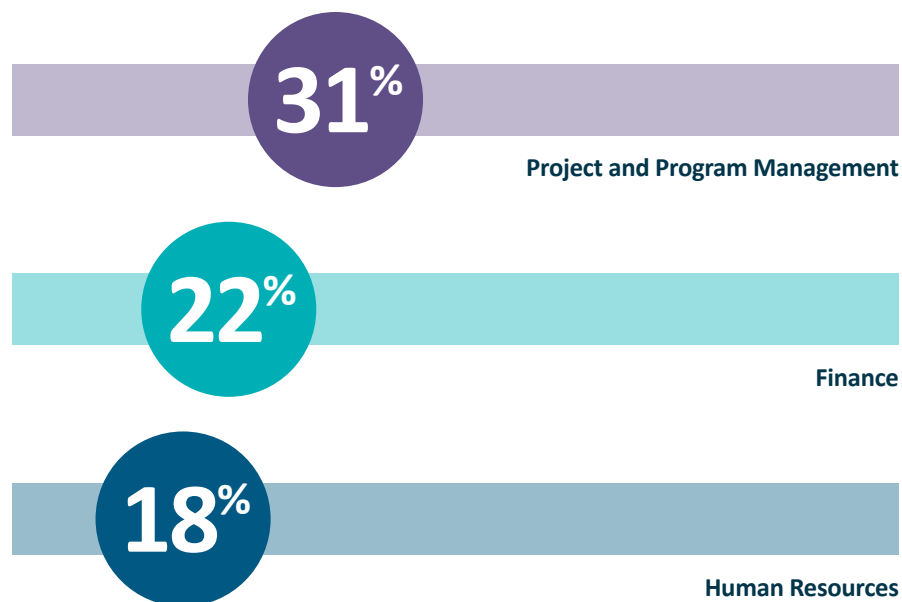
# The Experience Survey Results 2023

## Interim Executives



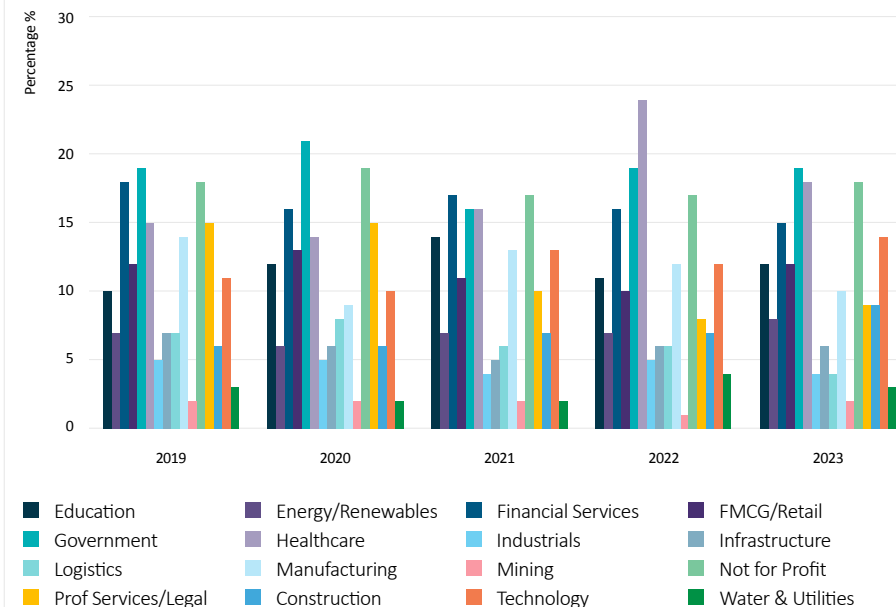
There was a slight trend down of people in general manager, head-of-department roles from 63% to 56% but this still represents over half of all respondents. We also note this year a slight increase in transformation director / project manager roles from 24% last year to 27% in 2023.

## Business still transforming all key functions to ensure sustainable operating models



One third of organisations (31%) accessed Interim Executive talent to assist with the program management of transformation initiatives. The next busiest functional areas that bought in talent were finance (22%) and human resources (18%). These top three areas were down approximately 3% each from last year. Other functional skills were spread relatively evenly and consistent with last year's results.

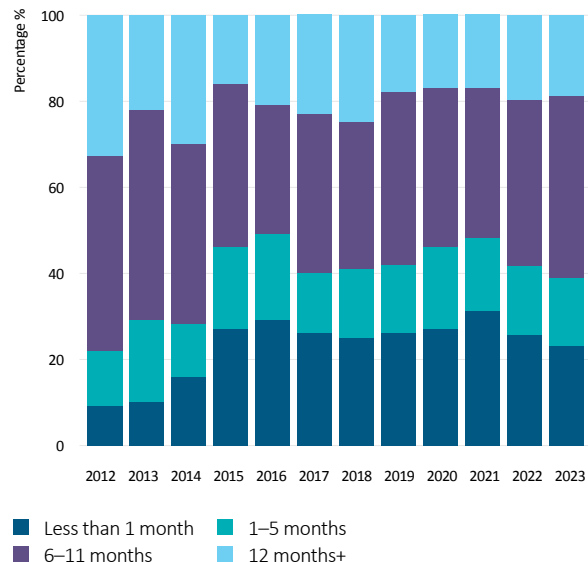
## For purpose sectors leading the way in alternative talent sourcing



Three stand out sectors each with close to 20% of respondents were government (19%), not for profit (18%) and healthcare / aged care / human services (18%). The health care / aged care / human services representation is down 6% year on year, but we feel this is normalising after a huge focus on talent into these areas during the pandemic. We noticed a slight increase in technology services to 14% which is up from 12% last year and also property and construction up 2% to 9% which we attribute to the infrastructure builds being undertaken by government and private sector.

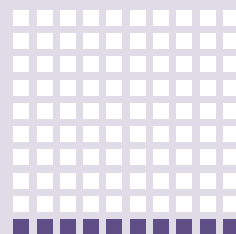
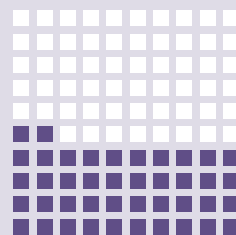
**The Experience Survey Results 2023** continued

## Breaks between assignments

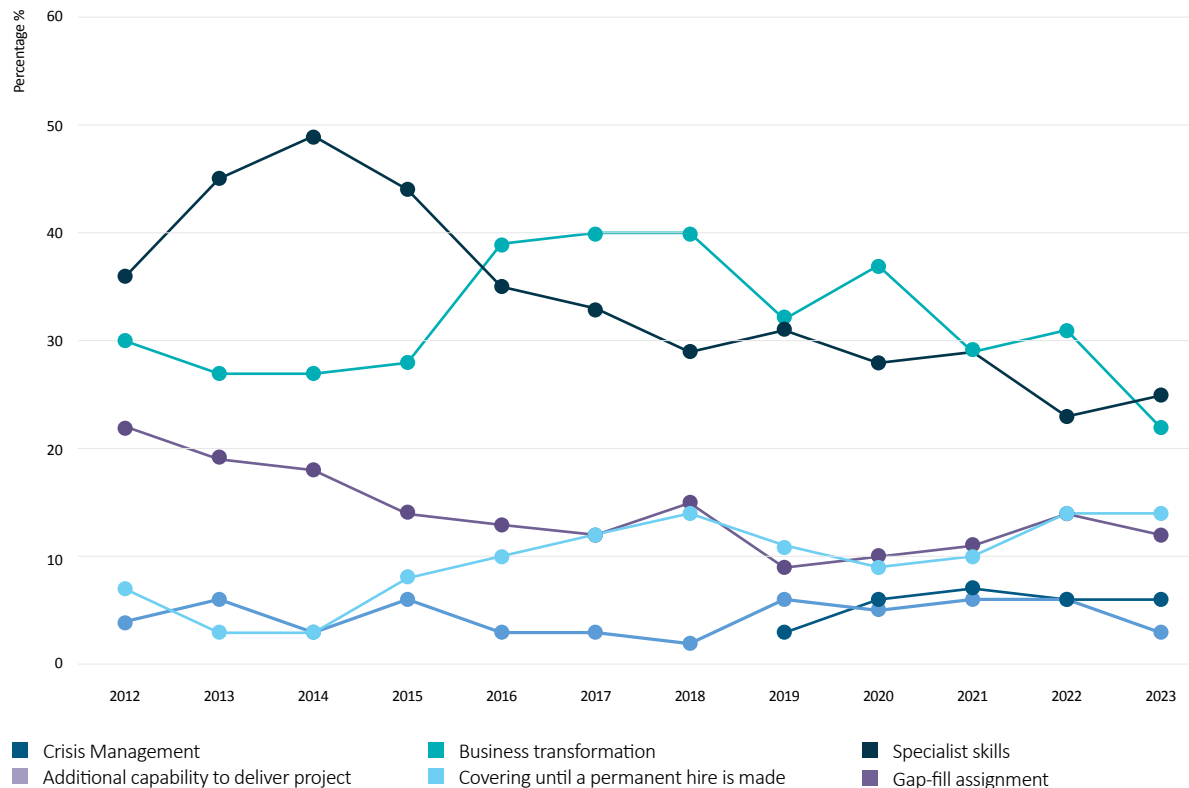


Four in ten (42%) Interim Executives have a gap of between 1–5 months between assignments and 10% have 12 months between assignments. This reflects the conversations we have with people about a portfolio of other work or interests that make up this way of working. Many of the professionals we talk to at Watermark actively choose how busy they wish to be. They say their ideal scenario is to work six months of the year and combine that with other interests and activities.

### Breaks between Interim Executive assignments



## Organisations need help with business transformation and access to specialist skills



Two key reasons for peoples' most recent assignment are organisations borrowing specialist skills not available in-house (28%) or a business transformation / change management assignment (25%). The need to backfill until a permanent hire can be found accounted for 16% of assignments which is up 2% point from last year.

### Top 5 reasons for latest assignment



The Experience Survey Results 2023 continued

## Why businesses access talent



**14%** functional transformation and upgrade



**12%** cultural change / transformation



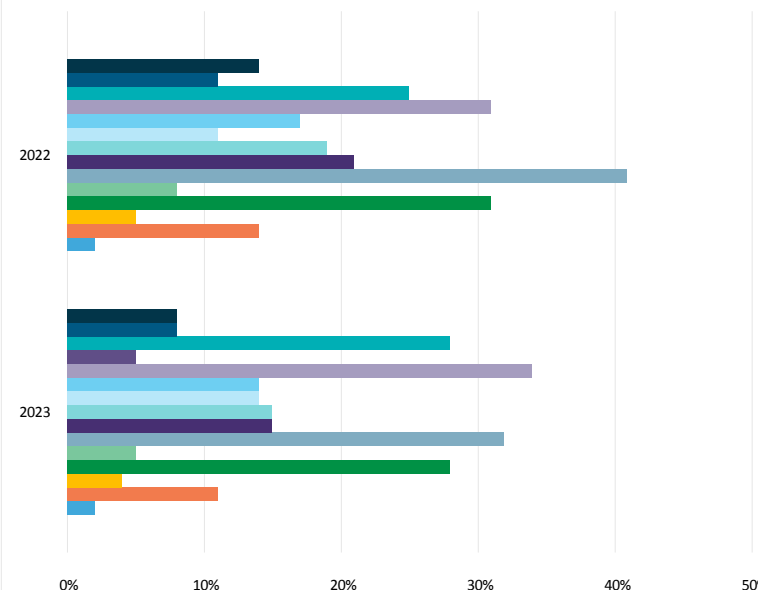
**14%** turnaround of business unit / cost reduction



**11%** change in operating model



## Every seat at the executive leadership table can be supported by an Interim Executive



- Chief Customer Officer
- Chief Data Officer
- Chief Executive Officer
- Chief Experience Officer
- Chief Financial Officer
- Chief Information Officer
- Chief Information Security Officer
- Chief People Officer / Human Resources Executive
- Chief Technology Officer / Chief Digital Officer
- Chief Transformation Officer / Change Director
- Chief Longevity Officer
- Chief Marketing Officer
- Chief Operating Officer
- Chief Procurement Officer
- Chief Risk Officer
- General Counsel

At the time of this survey in mid-2023 the number one functional role accessed on an Interim basis was a CFO at 34%, which is up slightly from 31% last year. We attribute this to the business trend of cost focus as organisations right size and prepare to potentially front into economic headwinds. CFO has always been a skill set accessed for Interim roles and this has been a core skill over the 13 years of this survey.

Chief transformation officer / change director was a close second functional skill requirement at 32%, which is down 9% from last year (41%) which we attribute to the focus over the last years of organisations transforming and redesigning their businesses to be more digitally enabled to meet the customer move to all things online. For example, retail, services, etc.

The equal third functional role accessed on an interim basis is COO (28%) and CEO (28%) with the swing of CEO up 3% and COO down 3% offsetting.

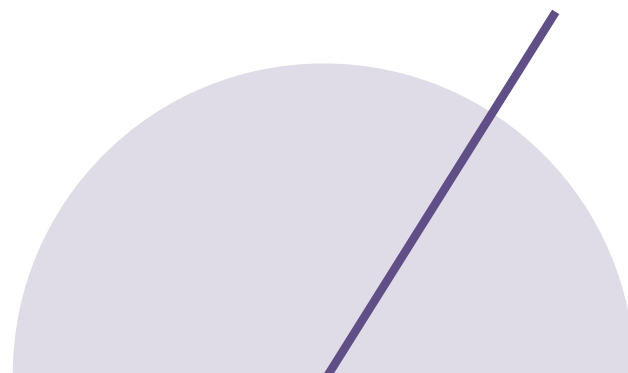
## The Experience Survey Results 2023 continued

### The “great realignment” continues to play out

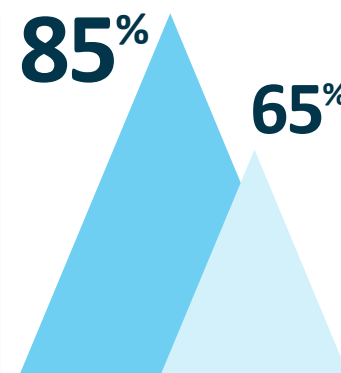
Nearly three quarters (71%) of all respondents have re-evaluated their career and made changes during the past 12 months, with another 10% having re-evaluated their careers but not made any changes.

Interestingly, we then split this data by gender and 85% of women have reconsidered their career and had made changes compared to 65% of men. This could be linked to other popular commentary which suggests women made changes due to increased caring demands during the pandemic.

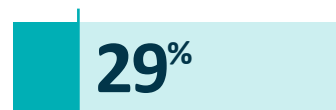
We also note a fifth of people (18%) did not re-evaluate or change anything about their career over the past 12 months. This is down from 36% last year and could suggest people had already set their ideal way of working prior to that last 12 months or saw no reason to change how they work.



**71%** Over three quarters of respondents re-evaluated their careers



Compared to 65% of men, 85% of women have reevaluated their careers and made changes



Changed the type of work



Moved from permanent to interim work



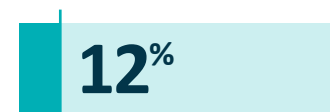
Moved from interim to permanent work



More flexible on salary level / daily rate



Hybrid working is important



The pandemic has not caused me to re-evaluate my career

### How to win and keep great talent

Interim Executives get to work across multiple organisations and so asking them which tools are being used to attract and retain talent provides real-time data for other firms.

This year we see a suite of levers that organisations are accessing with hybrid work as the leader. More than half of all firms (51%) are working hybrid which is up slightly from 49% last year. This suggests it has been normalised and wasn't a Covid-only plan. Business is making it a long-term way of working.

The other talent attraction levers organisations are leaning on all relate to Employee Value Proposition. They are the elements employees have been demanding as key reasons why they join (or leave) an organisation and they are:

**40%** Clear values

**40%** Culture focus

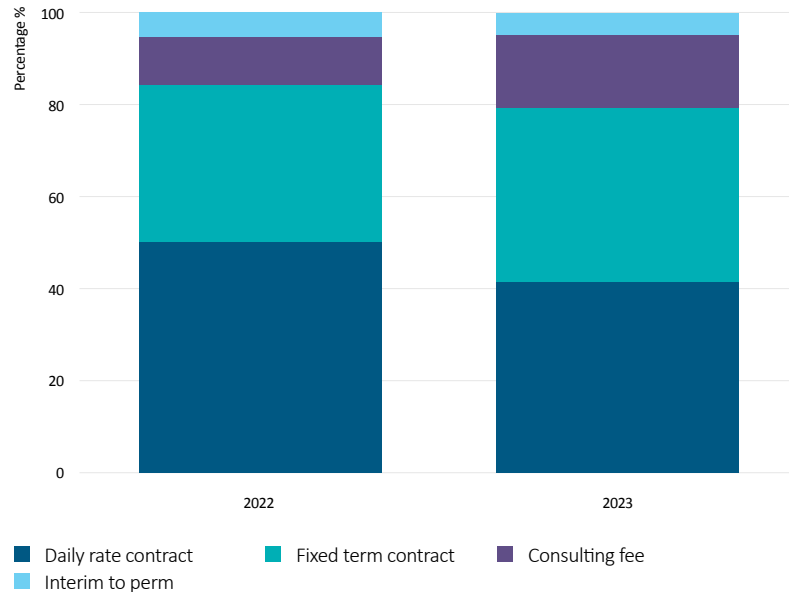
**37%** Interesting and meaningful work

**39%** Work life / flexibility

As the employment market remains tight employees will continue to demand organisations provide clear and compelling reasons why they should align you a company.

**The Experience Survey Results 2023** continued

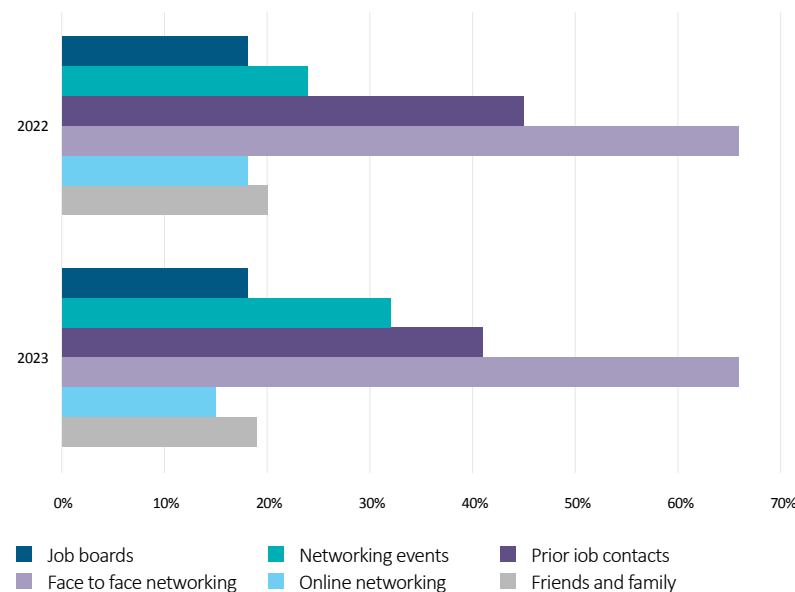
## The preferred ways to engage with an Interim



The two main ways of engaging an Interim Executive are daily rate contract (34%) and fixed term contract (31%). We saw a shift of daily rate slightly down by 4%, which was reflected in fixed term contract being up by 5% year on year.

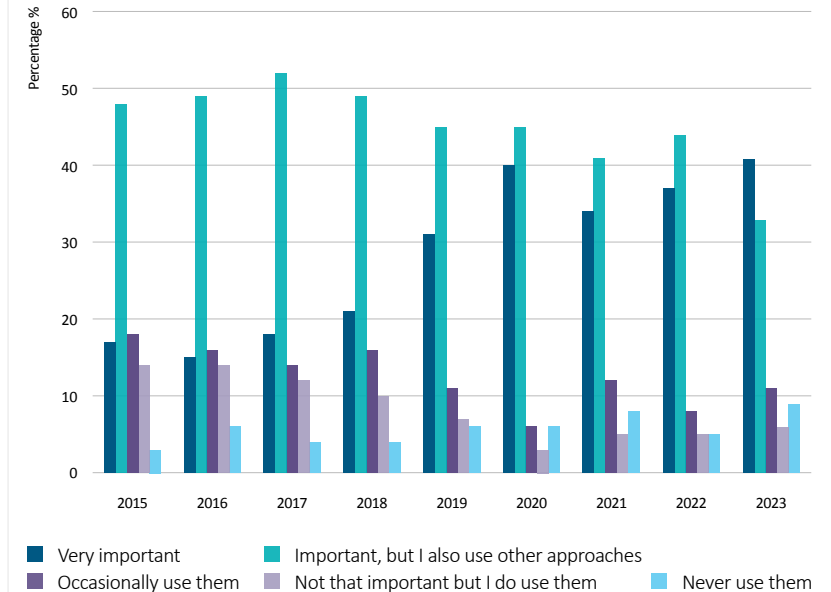
We note certain functional roles such as CFO and CEO, which our survey shows are the most in demand, are often the roles where the organisation prefers a fixed term contract. This is mostly due to the delegation of duties and authorities required in those positions.

## Online or face to face



Your professional network is mostly made up of ex-colleagues and 66% of respondents reported meeting them face to face is the main way people connect. This number has remained consistent since last year, while in 2023 we have seen a decline in online networking at 24%, down from 32% last year. This represents the ability to meet in person again and online not being the only option available.

## Are brokers preferred?



A combined 80% of respondents find brokers either very important (41%) or quite important, but not the only place they source their work (33%). In a sign that people are using their networks, the number of people who work as an Interim Executive but never use brokers has increased to 9%, up from 5% last year.

We encourage people to actively engage with finding work through various channels, particularly through their own networks.



## The Experience Survey Results 2023 continued

### Questions for clients to consider

- 1 Which executive position could be supported by accessing a senior experienced Interim professional?
- 2 Could a short-term fix of talent that overhits the mark fast track your business outcomes?
- 3 What EVP tools or levers are you utilising to win the war for talent? What do your employees value?
- 4 How are you thinking about the talent and skills re-alignment needed to deliver your business goals? Do you have a plan to access the skills you need to have in real time?
- 5 To what extent does your employee value proposition, policies and initiatives attract the 50-65 workforce demographic? Is now the time to review?

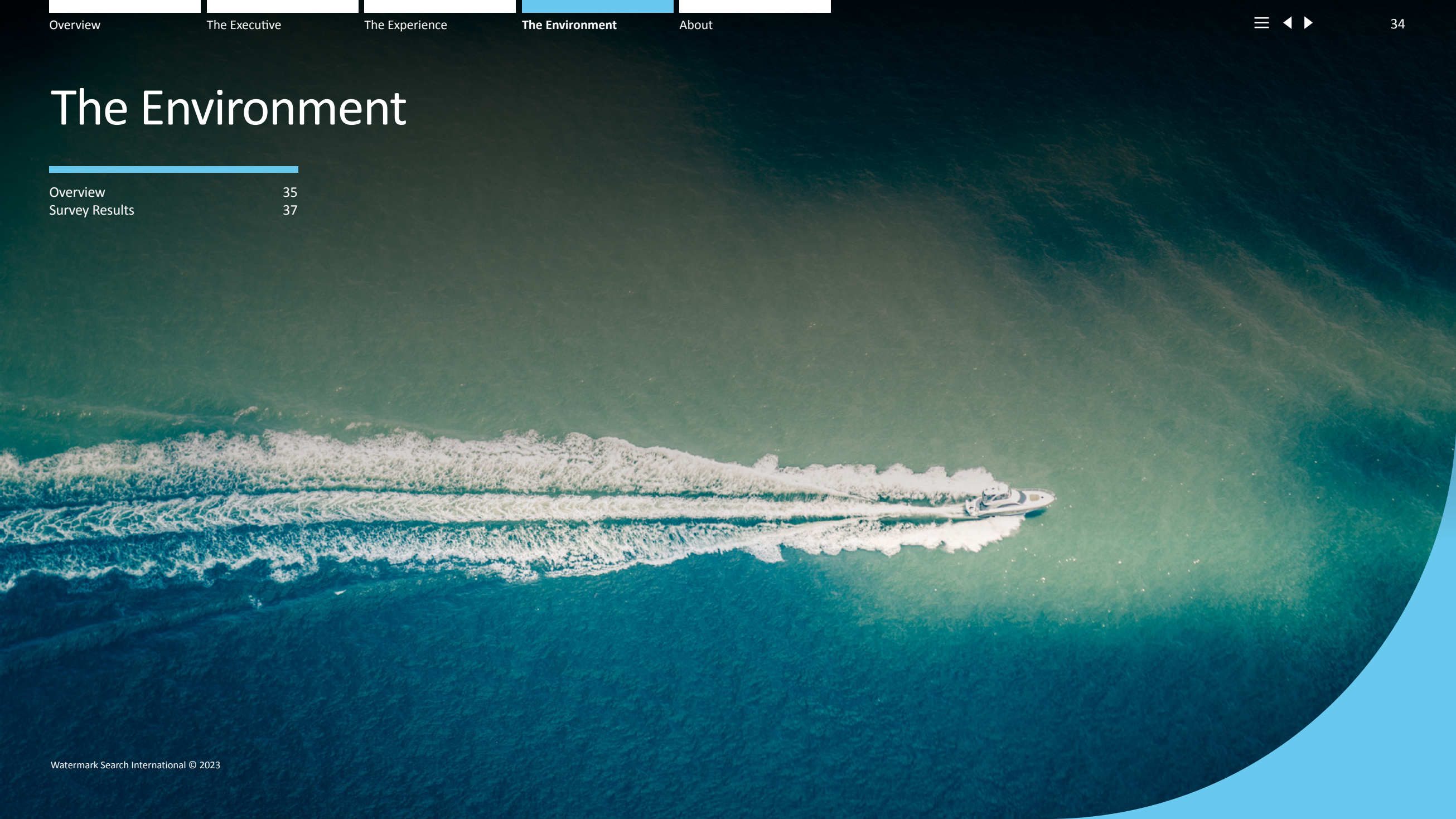
### Questions for candidates to consider

- 1 Can you succinctly demonstrate your experience in transformation (as it relates to your functional expertise)?
- 2 To what extent have you evaluated the EVP levers that are important to you in working with an organisation?
- 3 Do you have a current market view of rates appropriate for your experience and expertise?
- 4 Have you considered the “BIG” issues impacting the sectors you wish to work with and how your experience may assist in solving their problems?

# The Environment

---

Overview	35
Survey Results	37



# Overview

## Boom or bust?

Casting our thoughts back to this time last year we are only just beginning to see a positive post-Covid shift re-set.



The pandemic forced organisations to adopt new ways of working strategies such as rolling out hybrid arrangements. They were still grappling with a War for Talent and the effects of “The Great Resignation” or “The Great Reflection”.

As we head into the second half of 2023, the challenges have shifted to an uncertain economy, combined with the need to restructure organisations for optimised future fitness.

The risks cited last year of geopolitical conflict, cyber-attacks and supply chain disruption still very much feature. However, it’s the ambiguous economy, “recession or no recession”, keeping people up at night.

The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) forecasts GDP growth to drop from around 3% in 2022 to 1.5% during 2023. While 2022 saw relatively strong economic growth, experts suggest we can expect growth to slow in 2023 as higher consumer prices, a drop in house prices, and rising interest rates and inflation take effect.



# 1.5%

**The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) predicts a decline in GDP growth from approximately 3% in 2022 to 1.5% in 2023.**

“We’d just about got used to being in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world when a new acronym popped up – BANI (brittle, anxious, nonlinear, and incomprehensible) to describe the current macro environment. A global pandemic, new ways of working, war, and recessionary pressures have combined to challenge how businesses not just survive but thrive.”

**Amanda Fajak**, President of North America and global head of product at culture transformation advisory firm Walking The Talk

Although many organisations sang a song of growth in 2022, the tune is rapidly changing to one of efficiency and productivity for 2023. It appears global markets are expecting a recession in some countries, but we anticipate that one is unlikely to play out in Australia. However rising costs and wage pressures may still result in tightening budgets, caution in making expensive hiring decisions, and short-term downsizing of workforces.

Our advice to clients right now is you don’t have to put plans on hold while you hope these challenges will pass, and things will “all go back to normal” at some stage. We advise to scenario plan now – there is only one certainty in life and that is nothing is certain – so bring in the talent you need in your organisation, right now, to strategise, plan and be ready to deliver and execute as the world continuously evolves.

We’ve always maintained the Interim Executive resource works well in a growth market, but really comes into its own in a crisis or uncertain market. The skills, experience and traits of an Interim Executive are the antidote to this ambiguous environment. If your organisation isn’t leveraging the talent in this plentiful pool then you are missing at least half of the market right now.

## The Environment Overview continued

### Executive search firms fast diversifying their service offerings globally

The “war for talent” continues across the world and as the competition intensifies the top executive talent, search firms are increasingly experiencing heightened pressure to provide an array of comprehensive services that go beyond pure retained search.

Numerous firms are diversifying to encompass supplementary offerings including Interim Executive solutions, professional development and coaching programs, rigorous assessment methodologies, and other cutting-edge tools, all in conjunction with their search services.

Of note is the acquisition of Interim Executive firms by two global search firms, integrating this service offering overnight to remain relevant to their clients’ needs right now.

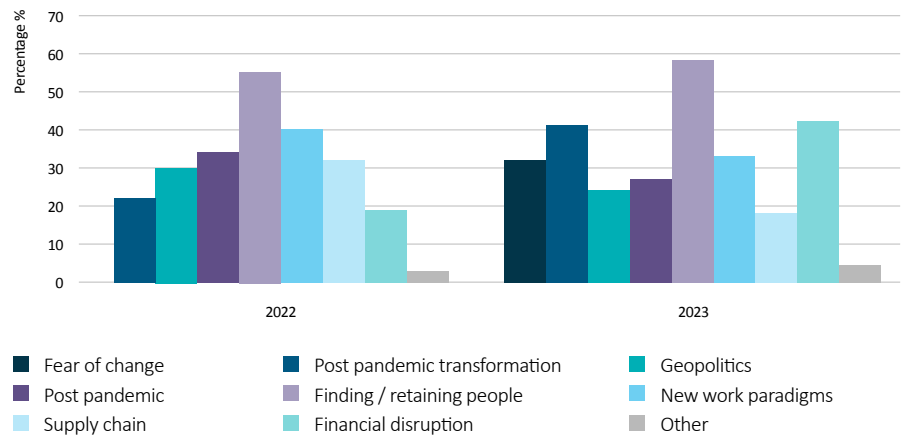
Watermark in Australia has led the way in this strategic thinking and our Interim Executive practice has been established for more than 13 years. You could say we have “the jump” on our competitors and are in pole position to leverage our track record in this service offering.

Interim Executives are flexible and agile in their approach to addressing immediate leadership needs: they step into critical roles during periods of transition, such as mergers, acquisitions, or sudden departures, ensuring business continuity and providing stability while a permanent executive is identified. They are ahead of the curve and an antidote service solution to the current uncertain environment.



# The Environment Survey Results 2023

## Scenario plan to thrive rather than merely survive in this volatile environment



Our respondents identified external and financial market disruption, plus internal post pandemic organisational redesign / transformation coupled with change resistant leaders and add in a sprinkle of AI as the top factors that will disrupt / influence business strategy in the coming 12 months.

“Finding / retaining the best people” continues to be the number one external disrupter / influence to business strategy according to more than half of respondents (58%). “Financial / market disruption” ranked second (42%) – up a significant 23% on same time last year and “Post pandemic organisational transformations” ranked third (41%). Interestingly, a new answer featured this year “Fear of change” and “old ways of thinking” by leaders raced into the top 4 (32%).

### Top 3 reasons organisations don't engage Interim Executives

**31%**

**Cost**  
The cost is perceived as expensive

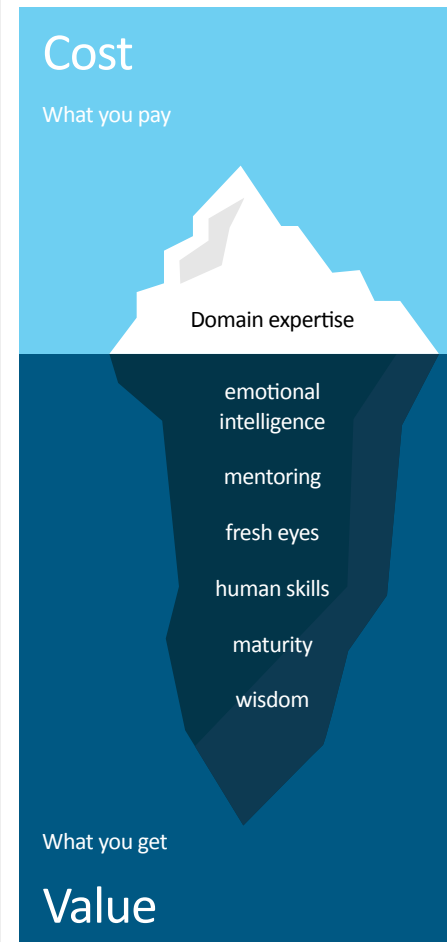
**28%**

**Education**  
Organisations do not understand the benefits of an Interim Executive

**13%**

**Engagement**  
Believe teams won't engage because the Interim is only there for a short time

## Cost is what you pay, value is what you get



Many organisations believe engaging an Interim leader is out of their financial reach. However, there are different pricing options available. An experienced Interim leader can be well worth the investment in organisational stability and resiliency during what is typically a challenging transition.

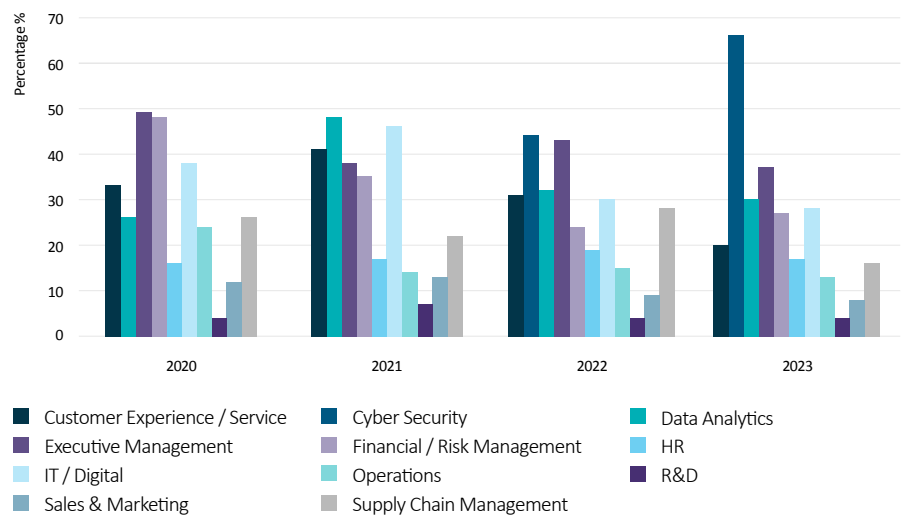
Interim Executives most often will have held significant roles and experiences in their careers. They may have been CEOs or held the position of the hiring manager at some point in their careers. Often the hiring manager can be intimidated by a good Interim Executive for fear it will expose them, put their job at risk, or they will have difficulty managing them. This results in this insecure hiring manager and the organisation missing out on the coaching, mentoring and independent advice on offer. Interim Executives are there to help and are not interested in permanent position pro-regression in that organisation – they want to get in, deliver and move on.

“A lot of employers don't think about using the Interim workforce, they are transfixed on finding the permanent person they want to love and hold onto, but they just aren't there”.

Comment from a participant in our Interim Executive Survey

The Environment Survey Results 2023 continued

## Cyber security – You probably have a fire drill, but do you have a cyber drill?



This year’s respondents cited cyber security (66%) as the number one skills risk area for the second year – a huge leap from 44% to 66%. This is unsurprising given the number of widely publicised cyber-attacks we have experienced in Australia and around the world in the past 12 months. Followed very closely by executive management (37%) and IT / digital and financial / risk a joint third place at 28% and 27% respectively.

In the first half of 2022 alone, the Notifiable Data Breaches (NDB) scheme was notified<sup>13</sup> of 396 data breaches, with “malicious or criminal attack” accounting for 63%. However, as Australian businesses strive to increase their cyber security capabilities they are met with a severe shortage of job-ready cyber security workers.

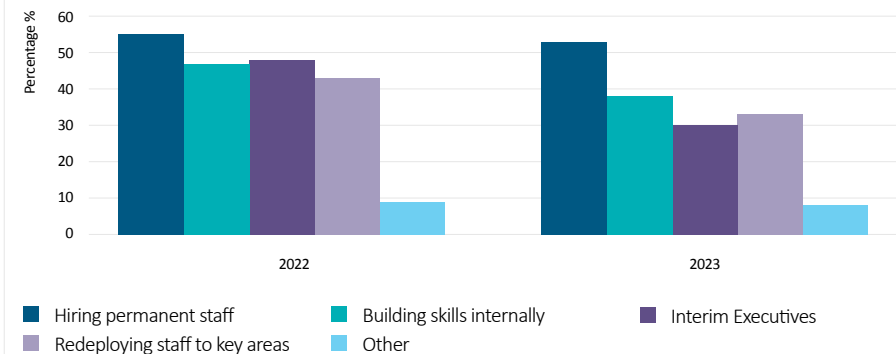
“This need for qualified cyber security specialists has been further intensified by the recent effects of Covid-19 which drove Australian businesses to shift their operations to online and their workforces to remote. With increasing cyber threats and a growing amount of sensitive information circulating online, Australia needs to move quickly to close the cyber security skills gap.”

### “Australia’s Cyber Security: Sector Competitiveness Plan” by AustCyber<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> “Notifiable Data Breaches Report: January to June 2022”, Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, 10 November 2022

<sup>14</sup> “Australia’s Cyber Security: Sector Competitiveness Plan”, AustCyber, 2023

## Keep an open mind – It’s the only way new things can get in



Organisations appear to be still using old models (buying staff – 53%) to solve new and old problems. The view from the Interim Executive cohort is the use of Interims declined 18% to 30% during the past 12 months. In discussion with clients, the Interim Executive solution always seems to make sense to fill skills gaps in the short to medium term, however this tells us we need to double our efforts in educating our clients and also address any perceived blockers to their use of this talent pool. At Watermark we look to educate the market on the positives of accessing different work models brings to an organisation.

Building skills internally and redeployment (all internally focused) were rated at a whopping 71% – we understand why organisations may wish to retain great people by re-skilling and redeployment, but we do question how businesses solve new challenges without “outside in” thinking to support. A strong workforce strategy will, and rightly, have an internal focus. It should also include the ability to access skills needed in real time to deliver on business goals.

The Environment Survey Results 2023 continued

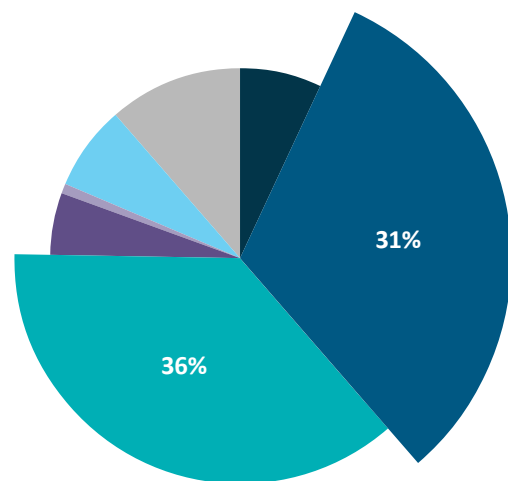
“Still trying traditional employment methods in the main but more recently seeing more discussion about more flexible methods.”

Comment from a participant in our Interim Executive Survey

“The job market needs to move to using Interim Executives but there is a need for education and recruiters need to ensure cross Industry experience is understood by clients. Skilled people have worked across different industries.”

Comment from a participant in our Interim Executive Survey

## Every problem has a solution: it may sometimes just need a different perspective

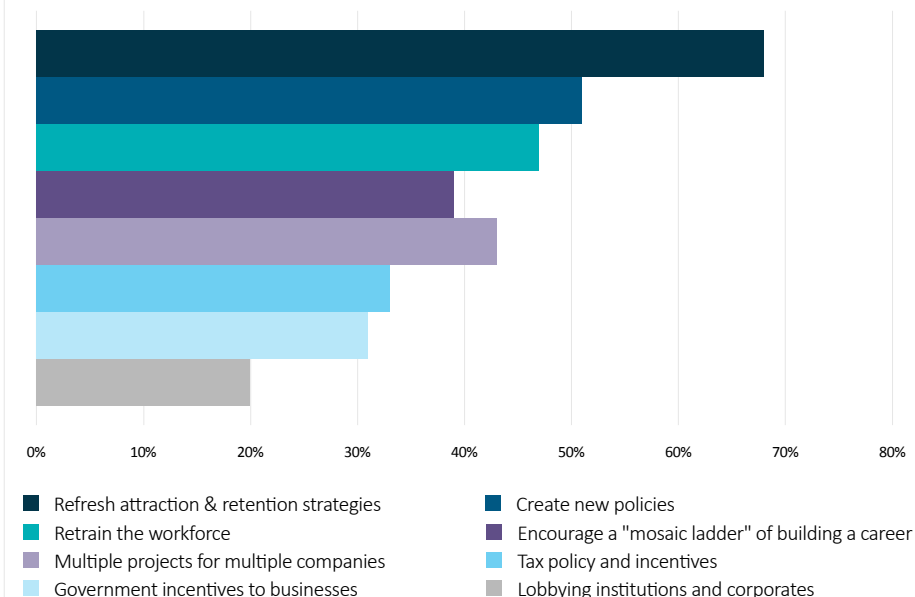


- Recover and return to pre-pandemic levels
- Continue to be unstable with uncertainty
- Continue to normalise remote and flexible working
- Shift towards interim work
- Shift towards permanent work
- Candidates be conservative in moving roles
- Encourage candidates for new opportunities

Slightly more than a third (36%) of participants believe the job market will continue to normalise remote and hybrid working conditions and a further 31% think the job market will continue to be unstable with high levels of uncertainty.

The normalisation of remote and hybrid working has brought with it another set of challenges for organisations including: a focus on productivity and a loss of trust with employees, a blurring of work / life boundaries and the threat to wellness, and of burn out. Another area for concern is the loss of networking and relationship building face to face, which are critical issues that can be addressed by bringing in creative, innovative talent now rather than later.

## Is longevity the antidote to ageism?



More than two thirds (68%) of our survey participants highlighted the number one way to change the concept of Longevity on our workplaces is to: “refresh attraction and retention strategies (for example, built in sabbaticals to encourage breaks within a loyal workforce) and dedicated attraction strategies targeting age brackets previously not considered (for example, mature workers).

Meanwhile, half (51%) of participants highlighted: “create new policies to accommodate multiple generations in the workforce (for example, it is conceivable to think company benefit will not only include childcare, but also eldercare options”. And nearly half (47%) highlighted: “the embedding of lifelong learning initiatives that retrain the workforce as demand for skills shift”.

## The Environment Survey Results 2023 continued

### To sustain longevity, you must evolve

Our respondents believe the most important ways (69%) to build your longevity plan are building a strong professional network and maintaining positive relationships with former colleagues, followed by demonstrating a results-driven approach and adding value to each assignment (61%) and continuing to develop new skills and keep up to date with industry trends and innovations (49%).

69%

49%

61%



### Key questions for clients

- 1 Do you use scenario planning as part of your approach to organisational strategy?
- 2 Do you have a strategy in place with the right financial, governance, risk, cyber processes in place to be able to respond to a change in market conditions?
- 3 Do you have a cyber security drill and does everyone in your team know that drill?
- 4 Do you use the Interim Executive talent pool to draw all the expertise you require?
- 5 Do you have a workforce plan that is geared to future hiring methods and is optimising?
- 6 Do you have a longevity strategy in place for your workforce?



# About

---

Interim Partner Profiles	42
Watermark Capabilities	44



# Interim Partner Profiles

## Caroline McAuliffe



A senior partner with Watermark Search, Caroline co-founded the Watermark Interim Executive practice in 2011. Caroline leads the Interim Executive team in Sydney, deploying numerous C-suite Interim Executives, with deep functional and leadership experience into a diversity of organisations, across multiple industry sectors. Caroline's teammates describe her as a visionary pioneer of Interim Executive in Australia whose superpower is being a prolific networker and connector. She excels and is relentless in her pursuit of identifying exceptional people to solve client's problems. She brings fun, energy and drive to the business. Caroline is co-author of *The Rise of the Interim Executive* and to buy a copy visit [theinterimexecutive.com.au](http://theinterimexecutive.com.au)

## Jacinta Whelan



A partner with Watermark Executive Search, Jacinta is an author, thought leader and popular speaker on the concept of Interim Executives, Portfolio Careers, and future ways of working. She leads the Melbourne office of Watermark and has over 25 years' experience starting and leading Interim businesses in Hong Kong, New York, and Australia. Jacinta has a BA Bus, is an GAICD (2008) and a Harvard Business School Alumni (2018). The superpowers the Interim Team thinks she brings to her role are, a passionate advocate for Interim and a force of nature. She has a vision of what Interim can and will be in Australia.

## Donna Burr



A partner with Watermark Executive Search, Donna's background combines a career of 25 years in chartered accounting, assurance, advisory and executive human resources. Donna is a qualified chartered accountant and is passionate about health, fitness, and wellbeing. She enjoys challenging herself with trail running, HIIT workouts and this year participating in HYROX. Her superpower is the deep trust and problem solving she brings to our clients, and the passionate support of the career journeys of our talented executive candidates. She is a whiz at bringing data to life and lends her credibility to our team and industry.



Interim Partner Team 2023

Clockwise; Alex Brown, Jacinta Whelan, Donna Burr, Alicia Wilson, Suzanne Mulvihill and Caroline McAuliffe.

## Interim Partner Profiles continued

### Alex Brown



Alex, otherwise known as AJB, is a recent addition to the team and is focussing on the broader health, community services and travel sectors. Alex brings a 20-year career in talent to the table having run talent management functions in many industries and across multiple geographies. Like Donna, Alex prioritises her fitness and is never happier than when dragging some muddy tree trunk across a wet field at a military style bootcamp somewhere or multi-day trekking in Cornwall. Her colleagues describe her superpower as being a trusted adviser and she can assess a situation from everyone's viewpoint and navigate the best way forward. Originally a client of Watermark's Interim practise, Alex is a passionate advocate for this talent pool and can be relied upon to bring humour to the team and her clients whenever possible.

### Suzanne Mulvihill



Suzanne is our operations manager she has been with Watermark for over nine years. Suzanne is the calm, composed glue that holds our team together. We would be lost without her methodical approach and attention to detail. Outside of work, Suzanne loves comedy, podcasts and can often be found on the side of a sporting field – thanks to her children ...

### Alicia Wilson



Ali is Watermark's marketing executive who brings an artistic and modern approach to all branding and marketing projects. She always goes the extra mile to drive all things Watermark and has the company's best interests at heart. The Interim team describe her as creative and big hearted who is a new breed of up-and-coming executive. They say the future is in safe hands with her responsiveness and digital knowledge. Outside of work you will find Ali anywhere near water, especially paddle boarding the beautiful turquoise ocean off the coast of Perth, or on the touch footy field.

### Yashoo Dutt



Yashoo is an executive assistant at Watermark who has a passion for administration. She is a professional individual who displays the ability to multi-task and prioritise tasks, provide professional discretion and has well-developed time management skills. Away from work, Yash enjoys spending time with her family and reading romance and crime novels. On sunny days Yash enjoys long drives and likes relaxing at the beach.

### Madeleine Stuart-Wright



Madeleine is the assignment 'glue' running an end-to-end project management approach to every executive search assignment. Madeleine manages the administrative support for Melbourne assignments and ensures all aspects of the search run smoothly. Madeleine joined the Watermark Melbourne team in 2019 and has worked on Search and Interim Executive assignments in both the public and private sectors.

# Watermark Capabilities

## Executive Search

Founded in 1979, we are one of the longest established Australian Executive Search firms. Even though we are above all else an Australian-based firm, we have an established track record in attracting (and then securing) overseas candidates. We have considerable expertise in senior executive appointments across a broad range of public and private sector organisations. Our firm has been built on a substantial body of work undertaken for publicly listed companies, private companies, state owned corporations, government agencies, departments and advisory boards.

## Interim Executive

We provide immediate and high-level specialist executives with the experience to provide stability and guardianship for a company during a period of change, executive absence or performance turnaround. We also provide executives who deliver on projects, programs or specialist reviews. When clients are ready to appoint an executive, we complete the assignment within one week.

## Board Search

We believe strong boards make for better organisations and improved business performance. In conducting a Board Search, we do not simply look for “a name” but rather search for candidates with the relevant skills to add real value to a board. We often start our Board Search by working with the client to produce a Board Skills Matrix, which then informs the specific brief. Our experiences ensures familiarity with the specific, and often sensitive, challenges involved in appointing Non-Executive Directors and Chairs with the right skill, personal and cultural fit.

## Diversity

We pride ourselves on delivering the best candidates in the marketplace for consideration by our clients. We go further than most executive search organisations in ensuring our clients have a gender diverse range of candidates as part of the process. In the past three years, nearly 50% of all successful candidates introduced by Watermark were female. This is a significantly higher representation of women executives as successful candidates than any levels indicated by recent third party studies. In addition to our focus on gender diversity, we have also helped several Indigenous organisations secure high-quality candidates through well targeted executive search.

## Tailored and Unbundled Solutions

Watermark Search is very comfortable with adapting or tailoring our service offering to fit an individual client’s needs. We can unbundle the search process to provide only the parts of an Executive Search or value-added recruitment services you require. Tailored services we have provided include market mapping, managing advertised response (reviewing, culling and recommending), reference checking, selection panel attendance and scribing. These services can also be scaled-down to better suit budgets or supplement existing internal resources.

## Market Insights

We have a unique window into both the commercial and government worlds and are available to provide informal market insights to our clients on topics such as salary packaging, hiring trends and executive onboarding. As thought leaders, we undertake research and market analysis to form our CFO Report, Interim Executive Survey and Board Diversity Index.

**Sydney**

Level 32, 200 George Street  
Sydney, NSW, 2000  
+61 2 9233 1200

**Melbourne**

Level 11, 385 Bourke Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000  
+61 3 8629 1333

[watermarksearch.com.au](http://watermarksearch.com.au)