



Interim Managers, “Ninjas” and a Road-Map in a Downsized World*

By Dr Alf Oldman FCA

It is undisputable that we live in a time of rapid change, technologically, as well as socially. Old theories that held true under production-led economies have led to the world's second economy, Japan, to falter and stall. Yet in the past, it was in Japan that Shoguns regularly recruited temporary soldiers called 'Ronin' to bolster their troops and 'Ninjas' to provide specialist services.

Communication has vastly improved, driving globalisation as location economies (proximity to markets) are diminished. Yet cost advantage location economies continue unabated, causing further structural change. Globalisation has introduced challenges of successfully combining people's inputs in semi-virtual workplaces spanning the globe.

Moves towards single systems such as currency, but also fundamentals like ICT and the internet rely upon common standards. The consequence has been though, rapid evolution towards forms of intermediation, and unique re-combinations of different technologies; the blend of computers and communications being one of the fundamentals. This burst is on a parallel with the evolution of the spoken word in the Stone Age, and the written word during the Renaissance.

Social factors have also played an important role. It is reported that an increasing number of professionals are seeking a better work/life balance. This translates to working from home, early retirement, higher staff turnovers so 'the workplace' isn't what it used to be.

Corporate requirements under these circumstances become less and less predictable. Reacting to and fulfilling those requirements inevitably creates additional costs. Moreover, European employment law places restriction and real costs in expanding and contracting work forces. Moreover paternal as well as maternal leave is now enshrined in law, adding a temporary shortage of resources. Downsizing and paring costs to the bone results in reduced flexibility and slack resources within the organisation. Intense competition generally forces all players within an industry to follow competitors downsizing.

I believe Interim Management is the most effective way of understanding, managing and implementing change. As someone who has spent many years as an interim manager, even before the term became popular, I have seen first hand the value that bringing in the right interim manager can create. For example, in the late Eighties Stoves brought me in as interim Group Finance Director at time of their Management Buy-In/ Buy-Out. Over the next ten years, they turned to me many times to implement radical change. It is important to recognise that at that time, Stoves were a leading Best Practice organisation.

*** NOTICE:** This document may only be copied or reproduced with the following acknowledgement



Interim Managers, "Ninjas" and a Road-Map in a Downsized World*

By Dr Alf Oldman FCA

The traditional adage in choosing an interim is to go for somebody a couple of sizes too large. The popular expression is "been there, done that and got the t/shirt" but increasingly that is not enough. Recruiters will match profiles by job title, industry, qualifications etc., and providing the candidate's heavy-weight enough, his/her personality should win out at an interview. It may still be a numbers game at the lower end of the market, but at the top-end, it is getting much more sophisticated.

I have found that I am less and less targeted as an FD, CIO or CEO. These days, people are using the interim management market to source external Change Agents. Increasingly, in recent years, my work has straddled finance, IT and implementing change. Most interim managers are tactical, rather than strategic. However, some specialists, like myself, are now helping organisations at the strategic level too. This includes applying leading edge diagnostics and deploying a whole team of specialist interims (let's call them my "Ninjas"). For example, as an Executive Interim Manager, I specialise in the Financial Performance Improvement Programme (FPIP). This has been successfully deployed in some of the World's most complex organisations. Based upon research and successful deployment, I have developed a simple questionnaire to see whether, for example, FPIP is appropriate to your organisation:

1. Has there been a pan-functional or pan-organisational record of failure?
2. Have ten of millions of Dollars been invested without benefit realisation?
3. Have major consultancies been deployed and failed?
4. Is the situation potentially embarrassing to senior management?
5. Are reputations at risk?
6. Are there multiple stakeholders to satisfy?
7. Do line executives have conflicting views on solutions?
8. Is the issue multi-functional?
9. Is there a strong financial dimension?
10. Is there a critical IT or systems involvement?
11. Is there a need for change at the house-wide level?
12. Do other options not stack up?

If you have scored a yes to eight or more questions, you definitely need to contact me via <http://www.alfoldman.com/>

Also, I am always on the look out for "Ninjas", too!.

*** NOTICE:** This document may only be copied or reproduced with the following acknowledgement