



THE RISE OF SEASONED FIXED-TERMERS, INTERIMS, CONTRACTORS AND FRACTIONAL CAREERS IN HR

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Abstract

Conventional permanent employment and career progression in HR/People & Culture roles is giving way to a more dynamic landscape characterised by a diverse range of non-permanent, (fixed-term, interim, contractor and fractional), professionals. This growing community - often overlooked - represents a significant portion of seasoned, decision-making HR expertise, with a significant proportion comprising women returning to non-permanent work in HR leadership roles following family commitments.

Whilst the rise of non-permanent HR and People & Culture professionals represents a transformative shift in the workforce landscape; despite their valuable contributions, non-permanent professionals face obstacles in accessing opportunities, developing their careers, and (re)establishing their economic position.

By acknowledging their unique 'non-permanent' challenges, embracing their diverse talents, and fostering a supportive community ecosystem, we can unlock their full potential and drive innovation in the HR community. More so, through collective action and collaboration, we can pave the way for a more inclusive, dynamic, and empowered future community.

This paper studies specific opportunities and challenges encountered within the non-permanent HR community - accelerated by the growing impact of AI - and outlines potential pathways to leverage and address them. We also briefly identify opportunities to 'pay forward'; leveraging non-permanent skills, expertise, and networks to make a positive impact and opportunities for broader community collaboration.



Interest in the professional non-permanent (fixed-term, interim, contractor and fractional) community

As an ex HR Director, international talent life-cycle consultancy owner, executive coach, and occasional interim and fractional portfolio careerist over the past 20 years, I interact daily with senior HR professionals who have chosen a non-permanent 'gig' career path; including e.g.:

- Clients or prospects who are interims, fixed-term contractors, or fractional HR leaders; the latter working 2 or 3 days per week in significant decision-making roles
- Associates who may be e.g. OD practitioners, change practitioners, facilitators, coaches and/or assessment experts, who deliver services both on my business's behalf, on behalf of other organisations, or independently
- Associate coaches and facilitators who are also fractional HR Directors, working in part-time senior HR leadership roles, 2 or 3 days per week
- Associates who deliver services on ImaginativeHR's behalf, who were previously coincidentally clients or prospects, but who have since morphed into trusted colleagues
- Professional non-permanent network contacts who may collaborate directly or indirectly with me on opportunities; including assisting me to develop projects or engaging me to develop projects; notably contacts in a number of informal professional collaborative online WhatsApp communities

'Swiss Army Knives': tackling HR challenges with precision and adaptability

My fascination in this 'non-permanent' HR community stems from what I've learned about:

- the depth and breadth of talent and professional versatility within this community
- its commitment to continuous professional development, ongoing learning and creative career adaptation – 'Swiss Army Knives', to coin a metaphorical phrase, tackling complex HR-related challenges with precision and adaptability
- its tendency to collaborate and willingness to share learnings
- its relationship-shifting, supply vs demand utility; shifting seamlessly between collaboration, partnership, buying, selling, advocating, mentoring, coaching, etc.

Introduction

Technological, industrial, socio-economic, post-COVID developments, personal choice and family commitments, (particularly in the case of women who make up 53% of UK HR interims, per the 2024 Interim Management Survey Report), translate to the ongoing splintering of permanent HR and People & Culture roles.

Amidst this transformation, a growing community of seasoned non-permanent workers is emerging, amongst senior decision makers comprising a high proportion of women re-establishing themselves professionally after successfully raising and taking care of their families.

This is not to mention the ranks of ex or current HR professionals who have added an accredited coaching qualification to their personal 'people practice repertoires', with the ICF's 2023 Global Coaching Study indicating the growth of the global coaching population by 54%+ since 2019. Many of the world's circa 99,000 'practicing' accredited coaches of course come from an HR, People & Culture or related background.

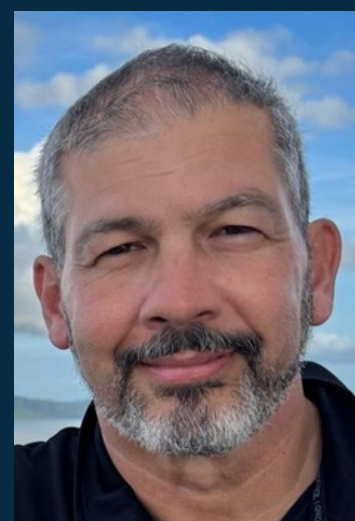
This community faces unique challenges and opportunities. We will next briefly explore these challenges, highlight potential opportunities, and suggests community-driven solutions to support their professional development and economic empowerment.

More about the author

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Clayton is a senior HR project leader, ILM Level 7 executive coach, Lumina assessor & the Owner of ImaginativeHR. Driven by a 20+ year passion for developing & engaging people in business, Clayton has held senior HR / L&D leadership roles in the UK, the USA, continental Europe & in Southern Africa across a broad range of industries. See more on his LinkedIn profile [here](#).



Changing HR career paths

Over the past 10-15 years, several key developments in HR have significantly impacted career path diversity and led to the emergence of increasingly specialist, sometimes-obscure, job titles. As a result, beyond the traditional means of staying up to date with the latest developments, further adaptation is required to stay relevant, as Tania Hummel explains.

Tania Hummel

Director of People & Engagement (Part-time) for Whizz Kids, Executive Coach, Trainer & Facilitator

“I’ve had to develop new skills and learn about different sectors, even using my previous experience of leadership to make inroads into areas I’d never considered.”



Let’s take a look at what some of these developments may include:

HR Technology and Automation

The widespread adoption of HR technology platforms, e.g. applicant tracking systems (ATS), human capital management (HCM) software, and employee engagement tools, has transformed HR processes and workflows. This has led to the emergence of increasingly specialist job titles such as: HR Technologist, HR Systems Analyst, etc.

Data Analytics and People Analytics

The growing importance of data-driven decision-making in HR has led to increased demand for professionals with expertise in data analytics and people analytics. Specialist job titles in this area include e.g.: People Analytics Manager, Workforce Planning Specialist etc.

Employee Experience (EX) and Engagement

Organisations are increasingly focused on enhancing the employee experience and driving higher levels of engagement and satisfaction among their workforce. This has resulted in the emergence of specialist job titles such as: Employee Experience Manager, Diversity, DEI Specialist, etc.

Talent Acquisition and Employer Branding

With the perennial, ongoing war for generational talent, organisations are increasingly investing in employer branding and innovative talent acquisition strategies to attract and retain top talent. Specialist job titles in this area include: EVP Manager, Talent Acquisition Strategist, etc.

Remote Work and Virtual Collaboration

The shift towards remote work and virtual collaboration, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to the emergence of specialist roles focused on managing remote teams, facilitating virtual communication, and supporting employee well-being. Specialist job titles in this area include e.g.: Remote Work Manager, Employee Well-being Coordinator, etc.

Agile HR and Organisational Agility

HR functions are adopting agile methodologies and practices to increase responsiveness, adaptability, and innovation within organisations. This has led to the emergence of specialist roles focused on agile HR, including, e.g.: Agile HR Coach, HR Transformation Consultant, etc.

Continued diversification of career paths in HR and People & Culture functions presents both permanent and non-permanent professionals with promising prospects to contribute meaningfully to organisational success. However, non-permanent resources stand to benefit uniquely from their exposure to diverse experiences and environments, allowing them to bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to the table.

In essence, the changing HR landscape not only offers an array of specialised career paths but also underscores the invaluable contributions that non-permanent HR professionals can make in driving organisational excellence and adaptation in an ever-evolving business landscape.

Tania Hummel

Director of People & Engagement (Part-time) for Whizz Kids, Executive Coach, Trainer & Facilitator

“HR professionals have surfed the wave of a VUCA environment where volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity have been our constant companions... We’ve had to think laterally about our careers, embracing new paths, new sectors, exploring consultancy work and taking on short-term assignments. Nothing quite compares to the direct experience of change and transformation, and for many of us who have experienced several waves of it, have come out the other side, more resilient, and more adaptable and ready to embrace this new era. Having had my last role in one of the largest Publishers in the world, I’ve had to develop new skills and learn about different sectors, even using my previous experience of leadership to make inroads into areas I’d never considered.”



Image: Tania leading the facilitation of an ImaginativeHR team development event utilising Lumina Spark, for a client in the Pharmaceutical sector.

Why might non-permanent HR careers be attractive?

Within the context of continued diversification of career paths in HR and People & Culture functions, and related market 'squeeze', seasoned professionals may choose to embark on interim, fractional, or other non-permanent careers for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons include:

Flexibility

Non-permanent roles offer greater flexibility in terms of work hours, location, and duration of assignments. This flexibility allows seasoned HR professionals to better balance work and personal commitments, such as caregiving responsibilities or pursuing further education.

Work-Life Balance

Many seasoned HR professionals prioritise work-life balance and seek opportunities that allow them to maintain a healthy equilibrium between their professional and personal lives. Non-permanent roles can offer more control over one's schedule and workload, enabling individuals to prioritise their well-being and pursue other interests outside of work.

Desire for Variety and Challenge

After years of working in permanent roles, seasoned HR professionals may seek out new challenges and experiences. Non-permanent roles often provide opportunities to work on diverse projects, tackle different or novel issues, and interact with a variety of organisations and teams, keeping work interesting and stimulating.

Professional Growth and Development

Non-permanent roles can offer opportunities for continuous learning and skill enhancement, driven by professional curiosity. Seasoned HR professionals may use interim or fractional positions to gain exposure to new industries, technologies, or methodologies, allowing them to expand their expertise and remain relevant in a rapidly evolving field.

Entrepreneurial Spirit

Some seasoned HR professionals may have an entrepreneurial spirit and a desire to build their own consulting or advisory businesses. Non-permanent roles allow them to leverage their skills, experiences, and networks to provide specialised HR and related services, e.g. coaching and facilitation, to clients on a flexible basis.

Transitioning into Retirement

For those approaching retirement age, non-permanent roles can serve as a bridge between full-time employment and retirement. Seasoned HR professionals may choose to gradually reduce their work commitments while still staying active and engaged in their field through interim or fractional positions. As Rebecca Knight writes in *6 Questions to Ask at the Midpoint of Your Career*, (February 02, 2024), this may also be a time to ask “What mastery or gift have I developed that I can offer to the world?”, leading to an interest in working across a broader range of organisations.

Financial Considerations

While not the primary motivator for everyone, non-permanent roles can offer attractive financial opportunities; notwithstanding recent IR-35 and related tax disincentives. Seasoned HR professionals may command higher hourly rates or project fees as experienced consultants or contractors, allowing them to maintain or even increase their income compared to traditional permanent roles.

Autonomy and Independence

Non-permanent roles often provide greater autonomy and independence compared to traditional corporate positions. Seasoned HR professionals may value the freedom to choose their projects, clients, and working arrangements, enabling them to align their work with their personal values and priorities.

Overall, seasoned HR professionals, may choose to embark on interim, fractional, or other non-permanent careers for a combination of personal, professional, and lifestyle reasons. These roles offer flexibility, variety, and opportunities for growth and fulfilment that may be lacking in traditional permanent positions. They also tend to offer greater professional ‘licence’ and fewer constraints than do permanent roles.

Mental health and lifestyle benefits of 'going it alone'

Transitioning to interim or fractional roles in HR can arguably offer numerous mental health and lifestyle benefits, including:

Reduced Stress and Burnout

Interim or fractional HR professionals often have more control over their workload and schedule compared to permanent employees. They can choose projects that align with their interests and expertise, avoid overcommitting themselves, and set boundaries to prevent burnout and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Flexibility

One of the most significant benefits of working as an interim or fractional HR professional is the flexibility it offers. Professionals can tailor their work hours, location, and project commitments to fit their personal preferences, family responsibilities, or other life priorities. This flexibility allows them to manage their time effectively, reduce commuter stress, and pursue other interests outside of work.

Autonomy and Independence

Interim or fractional HR professionals may have greater autonomy and independence in their work compared to permanent employees. They have the freedom to choose their clients, projects, and working arrangements, allowing them to align their work with their values, interests, and career goals. This autonomy fosters a sense of control and empowerment, leading arguably to increased job satisfaction and overall well-being.

Variety and Challenge

Working as an interim or fractional HR professional often involves taking on diverse projects and working with a variety of organisations, industries, and teams. This variety keeps work interesting and stimulating, providing opportunities for continuous learning, skill development, and professional growth. It also allows professionals to apply their expertise to different contexts and challenges, enhancing their sense of accomplishment and fulfilment.

Networking and Collaboration

Interim or fractional HR professionals have the opportunity to build a wide network of contacts and collaborators across different organisations and sectors. This network can provide support, mentorship, and career opportunities, as well as opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing. Interacting with diverse professionals and perspectives can also stimulate creativity and innovation, contributing to overall mental well-being and satisfaction.

Sense of Purpose

Many interim or fractional HR professionals derive a sense of purpose and fulfilment from their work, knowing that they are making a meaningful impact on organisations, teams, and individuals. Whether it's helping organisations navigate change, improve employee engagement, or optimise talent management strategies, non-permanent professionals play a crucial role in driving positive outcomes and contributing to organisational success. This sense of purpose can enhance job satisfaction, motivation, and overall happiness in their work.

Overall, transitioning to interim or fractional roles in HR can offer significant mental health and lifestyle benefits, including reduced stress, increased flexibility, autonomy, and independence, opportunities for variety and challenge, networking and collaboration, and a sense of purpose and fulfilment. These benefits ultimately contribute to overall well-being and personal satisfaction, allowing professionals to thrive in their careers while maintaining a healthy work-life balance.



The non-permanent differential

Seasoned non-permanent HR professionals bring a unique set of skills, experiences, and perspectives to organisations and projects that may present challenges for permanent HR employees. Some of these contributions may include:

Fresh Perspectives

Non-permanent HR professionals often bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to organisations. They come from diverse backgrounds and have worked across various industries and sectors, allowing them to offer unique insights and approaches to HR challenges.

Sharon Green

Interim Consultant, Engagement & Communication Specialist and Interim HR Networks Coordinator

“When we go into an organisation, our presence makes an impact - we need to ensure it's positive. As interims/fractional resources we can do a lot to ease the friction that might occur when we land in organisations...”



Specialised Expertise

Many non-permanent HR professionals have specialised in niche areas of HR, such as talent acquisition, change management, HR project leadership or diversity and inclusion. Their specialised expertise allows them to quickly assess organisational needs and implement tailored solutions that may be beyond the scope of a permanent HR generalist.

Flexibility and Adaptability

Non-permanent HR professionals are accustomed to working in dynamic environments and adapting to changing priorities and demands. They are often able to exercise more flexibility in their approach to delivery and hence quickly pivot to address emerging issues or support new initiatives.

Sheraz Anwar

Seasoned Specialist HR and Transformation
Recruitment Leader, Configured Recruitment

“The skillset of being able to get up to speed very quickly and provide an impact on delivering on projects is invaluable.”



Efficiency and Results-Orientation

With a focus on delivering results within a specific timeframe, non-permanent HR professionals are often highly efficient and results-oriented. They prioritise tasks based on organisational objectives and work diligently to achieve measurable outcomes.

Objective Evaluation

As external consultants or contractors, non-permanent HR professionals can provide an objective perspective on organisational challenges and opportunities. They are not as entrenched in internal politics or biases, allowing them to offer unbiased assessments and recommendations.

Networks and Resources

Non-permanent HR professionals often bring with them extensive networks and resources built over years of experience in the field. They can leverage these networks to access talent pools, industry best practices, and specialised tools and technologies to support organisational goals.

Chris Pestell

Director at TalentEdge, HR and Interim Recruitment Specialist



“They can also offer invaluable support/mentoring and coaching to managers and leaders who need extra guidance through change... There is so much untapped knowledge within the HR interim community that businesses can have access to.”

Change Management Expertise

Many non-permanent HR professionals specialise in change management, helping organisations navigate transitions such as mergers and acquisitions, restructuring, or technology implementations. Their expertise in managing change can be invaluable during times of organisational transformation.

Overall, seasoned HR fixed-termers, interims, contractors, and fractionals bring a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experiences that complement the capabilities of permanent HR employees. Their ability to offer fresh perspectives, specialised expertise, flexibility, and efficiency makes them valuable assets to organisations seeking to address complex HR challenges and drive strategic initiatives.



Key challenges for the fractional community

Challenges facing non-permanent HR professionals may include:

Limited access to opportunities

Non-permanent professionals often struggle to secure consistent employment opportunities or projects, leading to periods of ('on the beach/bench') downtime between assignments, particularly when they are in the early stages of establishing a project history/portfolio.

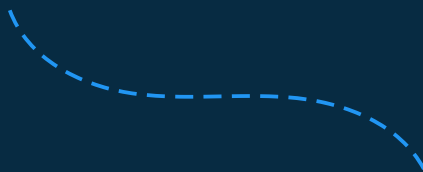


EXAMPLE

Jane, a seasoned HR consultant, finds herself between projects after completing a six-month contract with a company. Despite her qualifications and experience, she struggles to find her next assignment, resulting in cyclical financial strain and anxiety.

Career development barriers

The transient nature of their roles can impede their ability to advance their careers, build professional networks, and access continuous learning and development opportunities.



EXAMPLE

Sarah, an interim HR manager, desires to advance her career but finds it challenging to participate in long-term training programmes or attend networking events due to her project commitments. As a result, she feels stagnant in her career progression.

Economic instability

Fluctuating income streams and lack of financial security pose significant challenges for non-permanent professionals, particularly those re-entering the workforce after family commitments. As quoted in IIM's Steps to Building a successful Interim Career (14 February 2024): "You're moving away from the comfort and security of a permanent role and you need to understand that there will be times when the phone doesn't ring ... this can be difficult at first, but with time and experience you learn not to panic and instead use that time wisely."



EXAMPLE

Emily, a fractional HR consultant, and mother, returning to work after a career break, faces uncertainty about her financial stability due to the irregular nature of project-based work. Balancing her financial responsibilities with the demands of her career becomes a constant source of stress.

Under recognition of expertise

Despite their wealth of experience, versatility, creative 'can do' and expertise, non-permanent professionals may potentially face low expectations or scepticism regarding their abilities and value within specific industries.



EXAMPLE

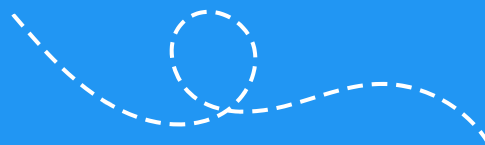
Lisa, a seasoned HR contractor, encounters scepticism from client stakeholders who perceive her as less organisationally-committed or less competent until proven, compared to permanent employees. Despite her track record of successful projects, she is challenged to overcome these biases.

Key opportunities for the fractional community

On the other hand, once they've taken the plunge, opportunities benefiting non-permanent HR professionals may include:

Leveraging flexible work arrangements

Non-permanent professionals can capitalise on the flexibility of their roles to pursue diverse projects, gain exposure to various industries, and expand their skill sets.



EXAMPLE

John, a freelance HR consultant, embraces the flexibility of his role to work on projects across different sectors, from tech startups to nonprofit organisations. This diversity enriches his experience and ultimately enhances his marketability.

Embracing portfolio careers

Adopting a portfolio career approach enables non-permanent professionals to diversify their income streams, maximise their talents, and pursue a mix of short-term projects and long-term goals.



EXAMPLE

Maria, a fractional HR leader, strategically manages multiple consulting projects while also investing time in pursuing her passion for writing HR-related articles and delivering workshops. This diversified approach not only enhances her income but also fulfils her professional aspirations.

Harnessing technology for advancement

Utilising AI solutions, online learning platforms, and virtual communities can empower non-permanent professionals to enhance their skills, stay updated on industry trends, and connect with peers and mentors.



EXAMPLE

Michael, an interim HR specialist, leverages online courses and webinars to stay abreast of the latest HR technologies and best practices. Additionally, he participates in virtual HR communities where he exchanges insights and collaborates with other professionals.

Building collaborative networks

Establishing collaborative networks and referral systems within the community facilitates knowledge sharing, peer support, and access to project opportunities.



EXAMPLE

Sarah, an interim HR manager, joins a collaborative network of non-permanent HR professionals where she shares her experiences, seeks advice, and collaborates on projects with peers. Through this network, she expands her opportunities and builds lasting professional relationships.

Balancing challenges and opportunities - embracing AI

During the current window of rapid technological advancement and evolving workplace dynamics, the role of HR and People & Culture professionals remains indispensable; not least the role of seasoned non-permanent professionals who may be in unique positions of trust and influence to leverage the benefits that AI offers.

At the same time; despite the increasing influence and impact of AI, seasoned HR and People & Culture management expertise remains more valuable than ever, in respect of the following:

Human-Centric Approach

While AI can streamline processes and provide data-driven insights, it (still currently) lacks the 'human touch' necessary for managing complex human relationships and emotions in the workplace. Seasoned HR professionals bring empathy, understanding, and interpersonal skills to navigate sensitive issues such as conflict resolution, employee morale, and diversity and inclusion.

Strategic Decision-Making

AI can analyse vast amounts of data and generate recommendations, but it requires human interpretation and judgment to make strategic decisions that align with organisational goals and values. HR professionals leverage their expertise to interpret AI insights, assess their implications, and make informed decisions that drive organisational success.

Cultural Leadership

HR professionals play a crucial role in shaping organisational culture and fostering a positive work environment. They are instrumental in aligning company culture with business objectives, promoting employee engagement and satisfaction, and fostering a sense of belonging and purpose among employees.

Talent Management

While AI can assist in talent acquisition and management processes, HR/People & Culture professionals excel in understanding the nuances of talent dynamics, identifying the right cultural fit, and nurturing employee growth and development. They design and implement strategies for recruitment, onboarding, performance management, and succession planning that optimise organisational performance.

Change Management

In an era of rapid change and disruption, HR professionals are instrumental in facilitating organisational change initiatives, managing resistance, and fostering employee resilience. They leverage their communication skills, stakeholder management expertise, and change management frameworks to ensure smooth transitions and positive outcomes.

Ethical and Legal Compliance

AI systems must adhere to ethical standards and legal regulations, but it is HR professionals who ensure that AI technologies are deployed ethically and responsibly in the workplace. They uphold principles of fairness, equity, and transparency in AI-driven decision-making processes and mitigate potential risks of bias and discrimination.

In summary, while AI technologies offer tremendous potential to optimise HR processes and enhance decision-making, the role of HR professionals remains essential in driving organisational success and fostering a thriving workplace culture.

Non-permanent HR and People & Culture professionals, with their diverse experiences and adaptive expertise, are arguably at an advantage with potential 'licence' to maximise the benefits of AI across a range of project ecosystems while maintaining the essential human element crucial for organisational success in the digital era.



Impact of AI on the rise of non-permanent HR careers

By many accounts, over the next five years, the impact of AI on the growth of non-permanent careers in HR and People & Culture is anticipated to be significant. AI technologies have the potential to streamline HR processes, automate repetitive tasks, and augment decision-making, potentially leading to increased demand for skilled HR professionals in interim or fractional roles which benefit from seasoned project leadership. Likely impacts include e.g.:

Increased Efficiency

AI-powered tools will increasingly automate routine HR tasks such as CV screening, scheduling interviews, and processing payroll. This increased efficiency allows HR professionals to focus their time and energy on strategic initiatives and high-value activities, creating opportunities for interim/fractional roles focused on specialised expertise and project management.

Data-Driven Decision Making

AI analytics can analyse vast amounts of HR data to identify trends, predict workforce needs, and optimise talent management strategies. Non-permanent HR professionals with expertise in data analysis and interpretation will be in high demand to help organisations leverage AI insights to make informed decisions and drive business outcomes.

Customised Employee Experiences

AI-powered HR systems can personalise employee experiences by providing tailored learning and development opportunities, performance feedback, and career path recommendations. Interim/fractional HR professionals can play a crucial role in designing and implementing these customised experiences to enhance employee engagement and retention, particularly where permanent team expertise may be limited by role accountability or project bandwidth limits.

Strategic Talent Acquisition

AI algorithms can identify and assess candidates based on skills, experience, and cultural fit, streamlining the recruitment process for organisations. Interim/fractional HR professionals with expertise in talent acquisition and employer branding can leverage AI tools to attract top talent and build diverse, high-performing teams, again, particularly where permanent teams may be limited by role accountability 'fences' or project bandwidth limits.

Remote Work Enablement

The rise of remote work accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for HR professionals skilled in managing virtual teams, facilitating remote onboarding, and fostering a culture of collaboration and inclusion in distributed work environments. Non-permanent HR professionals can provide specialised expertise in remote work strategies and technology adoption to support organisational success in the digital age, again, particularly where permanent teams may be limited by role accountability or project bandwidth limits.

Is the security of a permanent role a façade?

Despite the largest proportion of HR and People & Culture professionals at all levels continuing to thrive in their permanent careers, there could be risks associated with not considering an eventual/inevitable shift from permanent to fractional working in the face of AI advancements:

Skill Obsolescence

As AI technology continues to evolve, HR professionals who do not adapt to new tools and methodologies may risk becoming obsolete in the job market. HR talent will require up-to-date skills in AI, data analysis, and digital HR practices to remain competitive and relevant, and non-permanent professionals may have greater incentive to build these skills quicker, hence may have established a head start.

Juliett Bohanna

Portfolio Consultant, Assessor, Coach and Author

“I would say ... not to think purely analytics ... one of the hurdles that is not often mentioned is that the global population have a low fluency with regards to reading, creating, analysing and forming arguments/telling stories with data...if we don't invest in our own education we not only run the risk of being left behind but worst still being over dependent on what AI is telling us.”



Limited Career Growth

Organisations may prioritise hiring interim HR professionals with specialised AI and technology skills for strategic projects, limiting career advancement opportunities for those who do not possess these competencies. Without adapting to the changing landscape, permanent HR professionals may find themselves stuck in roles with increasingly limited growth potential.

Loss of Competitive Advantage

Companies that embrace AI-powered HR solutions may gain a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining top talent, optimising workforce productivity, and driving innovation. HR professionals who do not embrace non-permanent roles and/or leverage AI tools risk falling behind their peers and losing relevance in the industry.

Increased Workload and Stress

As AI automates routine HR tasks, organisations may expect permanent HR professionals to take on additional responsibilities related to strategic decision-making, change management, and workforce planning. Without transitioning to interim/fractional roles, where they can better 'manage the load' HR professionals may ultimately experience increased workload and stress, leading to burnout and decreased job satisfaction.

In summary, the likely impact of AI over the next five years is significant, creating opportunities for specialised expertise, strategic decision-making, and innovation. At the same time, there are risks associated with not shifting from permanent to non-permanent working, in the face of AI impacts; including skill obsolescence, limited career growth, loss of competitive advantage, and increased workload and stress, particularly where permanent roles may be limited by role accountability or project bandwidth limits.

To thrive in the AI-driven future of HR, professionals must adapt to new technologies, and continuously develop their skills to remain relevant and competitive in the job market; potentially embracing the utility that interim/fractional roles may provide in a faster-moving, project-based future.

Giving back and paying forward

Non-permanent HR and People & Culture professionals can 'give back' and pay forward in various ways, leveraging their skills, expertise, and networks to make a positive impact on the profession, on organisations and on the broader community, whilst building their specialist skill-sets and experience portfolio; including via, e.g.:

Pro Bono Work

Offering pro bono HR consulting services to nonprofit organisations, startups, or small businesses that may not have the resources to afford professional HR support. This could involve e.g. assisting with recruitment, employee relations, policy development, or HR strategy to help these organisations build stronger, more resilient teams and achieve their missions.

Mentorship and Coaching

Mentoring aspiring HR professionals, students, or individuals transitioning into HR careers by sharing insights, advice, and guidance based on their own experiences. Offering coaching sessions, CV reviews, mock interviews, or career development workshops to help them navigate their career paths and achieve their goals in the HR field.

Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteering time and expertise to HR-related initiatives, events, or organisations in their communities. This could involve serving on advisory boards, participating in industry conferences or panels, or organising networking events and professional development opportunities for HR professionals in their area.



Knowledge Sharing

Sharing expertise, best practices, and lessons learned with the broader HR community through blogs, articles, webinars, or social media platforms, or contributing to HR forums, discussion groups, or online communities where professionals can exchange ideas, seek advice, and learn from each other's experiences.

Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

Advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the HR profession and beyond; participating in DEI initiatives, workshops, or training programmes to raise awareness, foster inclusivity, and promote equitable practices in hiring, talent management, and organisational culture.

Community Engagement

Getting involved in community service projects or philanthropic activities aligned with personal values and interests. Whether it's volunteering at a local shelter, participating in environmental conservation efforts, or supporting initiatives to address social justice issues, finding ways to give back to causes that matter, whilst making a positive impact on the lives of others.

By giving back and paying forward, non-permanent HR and People & Culture professionals can contribute to the growth and advancement of the HR profession, supporting the development of future HR leaders, and making meaningful contributions to their communities and society at large. At the same time, discretionary activity develops individual skills and enhances reputations.

Collaboration, diversity, and inclusion

The growth of the experienced non-permanent HR community signifies a transformative shift; i.e. akin to Swiss Army Knives, to re-use the previously-mentioned analogy, they are versatile experts equipped to tackle complex HR challenges with precision and adaptability. By fostering collaborative networks, promoting age and gender diversity, and providing opportunities for continuous learning and development, this community drives innovation, collaboration, and excellence in HR practices.

However, being non-permanent remains a lonely way to make a living for many, with challenging periods between assignments and career progression constraints; e.g. as quoted in IIM's Steps to Building a successful Interim Career, (14 February 2024), "[Be careful of what work you accept because you're only as good as your last role.](#)"

Given the supply and demand challenges noted previously; where experienced non-permanent HR and People & Culture professionals may experience fluctuating income streams and lack of financial security; connecting non-permanent HR/People & Culture professionals to specific 'bridging'/continuity projects, solutions or community development initiatives during periods of anticipated availability/availability (when they are "on the beach/bench") will add value to the community.

Potential collaborative initiatives which may benefit the community include:

- Project platforms
- Skill-based matchmaking
- Collaborative networks
- Resource-sharing platforms
- Referral networks
- Continuous learning and development

These collaborative initiatives will be explored in further detail in later research.

[“In today's interconnected world, collaboration is key to success. By building strong networks and partnerships, we can leverage collective wisdom and drive meaningful change.”](#) (Attributed to Sheryl Sandberg, ex COO of Facebook/Meta Platforms)



Concluding points

The rise of HR and People & Culture fixed-termers, interims, contractors, and fractional careerists is worth ongoing reflection, further encouragement and further investment in 'bridging' projects, solutions or community development initiatives. These versatile professionals, which we have likened to 'Swiss Army Knives' for their adaptability and expertise, are helping to write new rules of engagement in the HR and People & Culture space.

Embracing collaborative networks, promoting age and gender diversity, and prioritising continuous learning and development, they are assisting the drives for innovation, collaboration, and excellence in HR practices. By leveraging their unique blend of skills, experiences, and perspectives, seasoned HR and People & Culture fixed-termers, interims, contractors and fractional careerists are not just filling gaps in organisations; they are assisting organisations to shape the future of work, during their brief/truncated tenures.

As Sharon Green, Interim Consultant, Engagement and Communication Specialist and Interim HR Networks Co-ordinator shares:

“...we might see a continuation of the current trends around career paths, diversification and 'squiggly careers', probably at a greater speed. Maximising the unique perspectives any new person brings to an organisation on joining, (and interims join companies more frequently than others), can help if organisations are open and if interims are cognizant of what they have learned previously and the relevance to the current context”.

By asking probing questions, tapping into purpose, and making conscious trade-offs, these professionals can chart a course that aligns with their values, aspirations, and personal fulfilment, with the personal agency to curate their careers, drive positive change, and leave a lasting impact on the organisations and communities they serve.

From the perspective of a developing demand for fractional expertise, in particular, Chris Pestell adds:

“With changes to AI, hybrid working, and the growing skills gap, fractional hiring will only increase as companies look for different ways to fill gaps and support businesses through change. A portfolio career in which you work with 3-4 different clients but focus on your niche (key skill) will become more mainstream.”

Expanding on this vision for the potential future expansion of fractional and interim career in the HR space, Sheraz Anwar adds:

“Fractional Interims provide the ability to assess and review a certain situation / business scenario which would allow for either a permanent member of staff to deliver on the findings or it would lead to an interim being employed for the entirety of the project length. Perhaps Fractional and Interim working together in tandem is the future...”

Inspiration acknowledgements

- Harvard Business Review (HBR): Questions to Ask at the Midpoint of your Career, Rebecca Knight, February 2024 – more [here](#).
- HR Interim Networking Community – more on LinkedIn [here](#).
- ImaginativeHR’s associate team – more [here](#).
- Institute of Interim Management (IIM): IIM’s Steps to Building a successful Interim Career, February 2024 – more [here](#).
- Institute of Interim Management (IIM): Interim Management Survey Report 2024 V15.0 – more [here](#).
- International Coaching Federation (ICF): ICF’s 2023 Global Coaching Study – more [here](#).

Community quotes

- Chris Pestell, Specialist HR Recruiter
- Juliett Bohanna, Portfolio Consultant, Assessor and Coach, Author of What is Holding You Back?
- Sharon Green, Interim Consultant, Engagement & Communication Specialist and Coordinator of Interim HR Networks - more on LinkedIn [here](#).
- Sheraz Anwar, Specialist HR & Transformation Recruiter
- Tania Hummel, Director of People and Engagement (Part-Time), Executive Coach, Trainer, Facilitator

Inspiring non-permanent HR/People & Culture community colleagues that I have been pleased to collaborate with and learn from include:

- T and L – ex clients of mine, who have since become trusted and hugely valued associate colleagues, delivering assignments on ImaginativeHR's behalf across Europe and North America
- J – an ex client of mine, who I've supported with (her) independent consulting activities across the Middle East, Asia and Africa
- S – who runs a number of interim community networks, where I've contributed occasional support and ideas and more often directly benefited from collaboration and direct or indirect business opportunities
- M – a seasoned interim, who engaged me on a specialist interim assignment during the course of her own interim assignment, when I was reflecting on next steps
- D – a client and friend, who has drifted from permanent career progression on a very strong trajectory into a series of very intentional fixed-term or interim HR leadership assignments, between which he participates in equally intentional continuous professional development
- ... the list goes on

More about ImaginativeHR

ImaginativeHR is a UK-based strategic HR consultancy specialising in innovative and people-focused talent lifecycle solutions. We partner with organisations of all sizes to drive meaningful strategic and operational change.

- **Comprehensive Assessments and 360s:** We conduct thorough evaluations of individuals and teams, utilising a range of assessment tools and methodologies to identify strengths, areas for improvement, and developmental needs.
- **Leadership/Team Diagnostics:** Our diagnostic processes delve deep into the dynamics of leadership and team structures, uncovering insights to enhance effectiveness, communication, and collaboration.
- **Individual and Team Coaching:** Tailored coaching programmes are designed to support personal and professional growth, addressing specific challenges and goals identified through assessments and diagnostics.
- **Career Management and Transition Services:** We offer strategic guidance and support for career advancement and transitions, helping individuals navigate complex career paths with confidence and clarity.
- **Diversity and Talent Pipeline Consultancy:** Our consultancy services focus on creating diverse and inclusive workplaces, providing expertise in talent acquisition, retention, and development strategies that reflect the organisation's values and goals.
- **Platform Connections:** We leverage technology to deliver seamless and scalable solutions, integrating assessment, coaching, and consultancy services into user-friendly platforms that facilitate collaboration and engagement.

ImaginativeHR

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If you're an HR professional already working on an interim basis or you're thinking about exploring interim opportunities, we would love to learn more about your situation and how we might be able to add value. Get in contact today.

Partnering creatively to align individual, team and organisational objectives.