

Bridging the Leadership Gap

Solving Today's Leadership Capacity and Capability Gaps



BlackBridge

Caroline McAuliffe
& Adam Neyenhuis

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This report is authored by practitioners with more than four decades of combined experience in interim leadership, executive search and strategic talent advisory. All views expressed are those of the authors.

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Summary

Organisations rarely struggle because they lack talent...

They struggle when their leadership **capacity** and **capability** no longer matches the moment's complexity, urgency or risk.

This report reframes the leadership challenge facing modern organisations, positioning interim executive leadership as a proven way to bridge critical **capability** and **capacity** gaps when it matters most.

About the Authors



Caroline McAuliffe
Chief Executive

A recognised authority in interim executive deployment, executive coach, and co-author of "The Rise of the Interim Executive".

[Connect](#) 



Adam Neyenhuys
Chief Executive

A recognised global search leader that has been advising executive leadership team's over the past 25 years across all industries.

[Connect](#) 



Caroline and **Adam** are co-founders of **BlackBridge Executives**, with 45+ years' combined experience trusted by VC, PE, ASX-listed, multinational and private organisations across APAC.

Introduction

For more than two decades, we've partnered with boards, CEOs and investors at pivotal strategic inflection points when leadership is critical and time allows little margin for error.

Our experience is clear: organisations aren't short of talent, but of the right leadership at the moment it counts.

Today, two forces are widening what we now recognise as a single, critical leadership gap.

The pace of disruption has outstripped the bandwidth of existing leaders — a **capacity gap**. At the same time, the complexity of modern challenges has outstripped the skillsets required to navigate them — a **capability gap**.

When pressures converge, even the strongest organisations can lose clarity, direction and momentum,

Interim executive leadership, when deployed with discipline and intent, has become one of the most effective ways to bridge this gap.

It provides the immediate capacity, specialised capability and stabilising influence required to protect value, maintain momentum and make the best strategic decisions.

The Leadership Gap



Today's organisations operate under relentless pressure – constant change, compressed timelines and unforgiving performance expectations.

Yet at critical moments – sudden executive exits, stalled transformation, investor-driven change or rapid growth – many organisations still rely on resourcing models not built for complexity, urgency or risk. What often looks like a talent shortage is usually a deeper structural issue that reveals either a:

- Leadership capacity gap: when teams lack the bandwidth for the scale, speed or intensity required.
- Leadership capability gap: when challenges demand specialised expertise (transformation, turnaround, regulatory, digital, cultural or growth) that the current team doesn't have.

Permanent recruitment is essential for long-term continuity, but it is inherently slow and high-risk when decisions must be made under pressure.

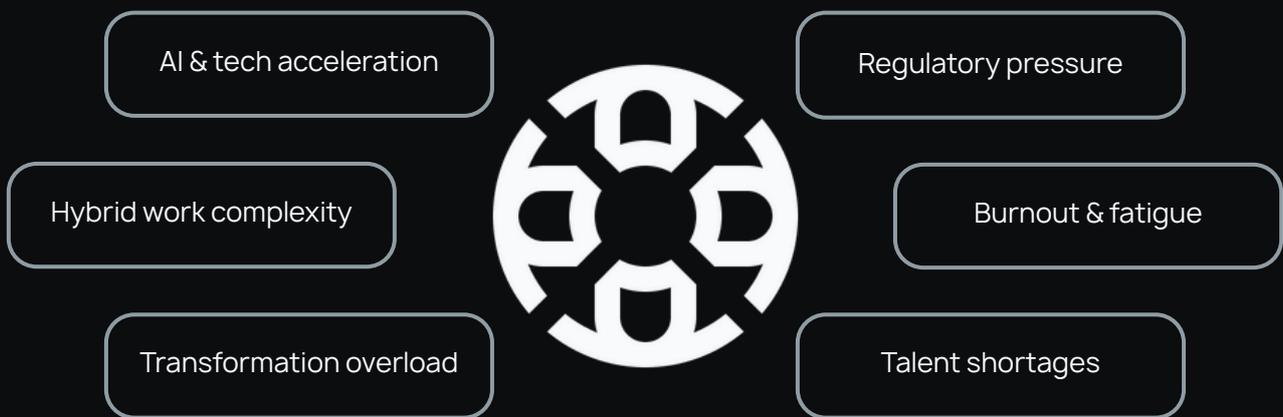
Consulting support provides insight, but execution accountability typically falls back onto already-stretched leaders. Internal stretch appointments may buy time, but often introduce burnout, delivery risk and unintended cultural consequences.

The result is a widening leadership gap – one traditional solutions rarely close – between what the organisation needs now and what its leadership structure can realistically deliver.



Winning organisations are those that close the leadership gap faster than their competitors.

Forces Widening the Gap



The leadership gap is not a theoretical construct; it's widening in real time.

Global research shows that leaders are under more strain than at any point in the last decade.

In a 2025 global forecast of nearly 11,000 leaders across more than 50 countries, 71% reported increased stress, and 40% of those most stressed have considered stepping out of leadership altogether – signalling a potential structural breakdown in leadership pipelines and a deepening capacity gap.

At the same time, leaders identify “setting strategy” and “managing change” as their biggest skill shortfalls, while only 22% of human resources teams prioritise these future-focused capabilities in development programs.

71%

Leaders reported rising stress

40%

Have considered leaving leadership

The Six Key Forces



AI & tech acceleration

The pace of AI and digital change is outstripping existing leadership bandwidth and capability.

Leaders are expected to drive productivity, innovation and AI adoption, while many feel underprepared and sceptical about the impact of these tools, particularly at frontline and mid-management levels.



Regulatory pressure

Multiple simultaneous initiatives Increasing scrutiny from regulators, boards and investors – across areas such as ESG, data, privacy, safety and conduct – raises the risk profile of every major decision.

Leaders must navigate unfamiliar, high-stakes regulatory environments without always having deep domain expertise.



Hybrid work complexity

Hybrid and distributed models have become normal, but leadership practices and operating rhythms have not caught up.

Leaders are managing fragmented cultures, uneven engagement and coordination challenges across locations and time zones, which demands more time/sophisticated people leadership capability.



Burnout & fatigue

Chronic overload, constant transformation and heightened stakeholder expectations are pushing leaders to their limits.

Persistent stress and "always-on" demands drive exhaustion, reduce decision quality and accelerate the intention to step away from leadership roles altogether.



Transformation overload

Multiple simultaneous initiatives – digital, structural, cultural, cost and growth – are competing for the same limited leadership attention.

Many leaders are running serial "first-time" transformations without prior experience or external specialist capability, increasing risk and widening the capacity and capability gaps.



Talent shortages

Many organisations can hire people, but not always the specific experience required for high-risk inflection points.

High-potential talent is also more willing to leave if their leadership experience does not support growth, further stretching capacity and creating capability gaps at critical layers of the organisation.

The Cost of Inaction

Interim executive leadership is not a stopgap, it's a strategic capability. When deployed with clarity and intent, it delivers speed, stability and accountability exactly when the organisation needs it.



Strategic drift

Without the right leadership at the right moment, decisions are delayed, diluted or deferred. Strategic clarity erodes, and execution loses pace.

Transformation fatigue

Multiple initiatives compete for limited attention, forcing leaders to run serial "first-time" transformations without prior experience or external support – increasing delivery risk and reducing impact.

Cultural instability

Burnout, disengagement and uneven leadership experiences create fragmentation across teams, geographies and functions. High-potential talent leaves. Trust declines. Alignment suffers.

Value erosion

Investor confidence weakens. Customers feel the impact. Growth slows. The organisation begins to lose ground – not because it lacks ambition, but because its leadership structure cannot absorb the risk.

The Limits of Traditional Hiring

Traditional hiring models were built for stability — not for the speed, complexity or risk organisations face today.

Permanent hiring is too slow for strategic inflection points.

Executive search is essential for long-term continuity, but it cannot move at the pace required when transformation stalls, a crisis emerges or a key leader exits unexpectedly.

Consultants diagnose — but they don't lead.

Consulting delivers insight and recommendations, but accountability sits with internal leaders, meaning without hands-on leadership to drive outcomes, even the best lose momentum.

Internal promotions and acting roles lack the situational experience required.

Stretching existing leaders may buy time, but rarely adds the specialised capability that complex, high-risk challenges require, deepening the capacity gap by overloading stretched leaders.

Leadership gaps create execution risk long before they become visible.

By the time decisions slow, milestones slip or culture deteriorates, the gap is already wide. Traditional hiring models are too slow, too narrow or too advisory-focused to close it.

Interim Executives: The Bridge

Global leadership research is unequivocal: organisations are facing the steepest leadership pressure in more than a decade.

The Global Leadership Forecast 2025 – the world’s largest leadership study – reports that leaders are experiencing record levels of stress, capability gaps in strategy and change leadership, and declining bench strength across all levels.

Gartner’s 2024 capability benchmarks reinforce the same pattern: organisations lack the specialised leadership capability required for transformation, complexity and accelerated change.

This widening gap between what organisations need and what their current leadership structure can deliver is exactly where interim executives create disproportionate value.

Why This Matters Now

- Leadership stress is at a decade-high
- Capability gaps in strategy, change and transformation are widening
- Bench strength is declining globally

Interim executives are uniquely positioned to bridge both sides of The Leadership Gap – capacity and capability – delivering stability, expertise and execution when it matters most.

Interim Executives: the Advantage

How IE's Close the Capacity Gap

Immediate bandwidth

Interim leaders step in immediately – relieving pressure on overloaded executives, stabilising critical workflows and restoring focus on strategic priorities.

Senior decision-making

Interim executives immediately lift efficiency and compliance discipline – using judgement and authority to solve bottlenecks and accelerate progress.

Stabilisation & momentum

When teams are fatigued or direction stalls, interim leaders restore structure, accountability and momentum – when organisations are most vulnerable to drift.

Fast deployment

Permanent hiring can take months, while interim deployment is measured in days, giving organisations immediate relief at critical inflection points.

How IE's Close the Capability Gap

Deep situational expertise

Interim leaders bring lived experience in the exact scenario the organisation is facing – transformation, regulatory pressure, restructuring, crisis, growth or integration.

Transformation, speed, crisis, growth

They've led done it all before – bringing depth to navigate traps, sequencing, stakeholders and execution risks, often outperforming acting internal leaders.

Proven playbooks & pattern recognition

Interim executives apply proven frameworks and repeatable methods – reducing risk, accelerating delivery and increasing the likelihood of success.

Precision capability

Capability gaps are widening faster than organisations can hire or build. Interim leaders close them with targeted, specialised expertise at the right time.

Interim Executives: Four Archetypes

01

Stabilisation Executive

Restores order, confidence and operational rhythm.

Common scenarios:

- ✓ Sudden executive exit
- ✓ Organisational disruption
- ✓ Loss of confidence or control

Expected outcomes:

- ✓ Decision clarity
- ✓ Stakeholder confidence
- ✓ Business continuity

02

Value-Creation Executive

Delivers measurable outcomes within defined timelines.

Common scenarios:

- ✓ PE/investor pressure
- ✓ High performance targets
- ✓ Time-bound value milestones

Expected outcomes:

- ✓ EBITDA improvement
- ✓ Cost reduction or growth execution
- ✓ Exit readiness

03

Transformation Executive

Leads and executes transformation with pace and discipline.

Common scenarios:

- ✓ Major change programmes stall
- ✓ Operating models no longer fit strategy
- ✓ Delivery risk escalates

Expected outcomes:

- ✓ Accelerated delivery
- ✓ Clear accountability
- ✓ Embedded change

04

Transition Executive

Ensures organisational continuity and smooth successor transition.

Common scenarios:

- ✓ Leadership handover
- ✓ Pre- and post-M&A
- ✓ Succession risk

Expected outcomes:

- ✓ Reduced transition risk
- ✓ Knowledge transfer
- ✓ Clean leadership handover

Interim Executives: When & Why

When leadership capacity and capability exceed safe limits, organisations stall, fracture and lose momentum. The cost is rarely immediate, but it's cumulative, compounding and often invisible.



Interim executive leadership is most effective when:

- ✓ Cost of delay is high
- ✓ Problem is complex but time-bound
- ✓ Leaders are at capacity
- ✓ Leaders are beyond capability
- ✓ Governance/delivery risk need oversight



Interim executive leadership is not intended to:

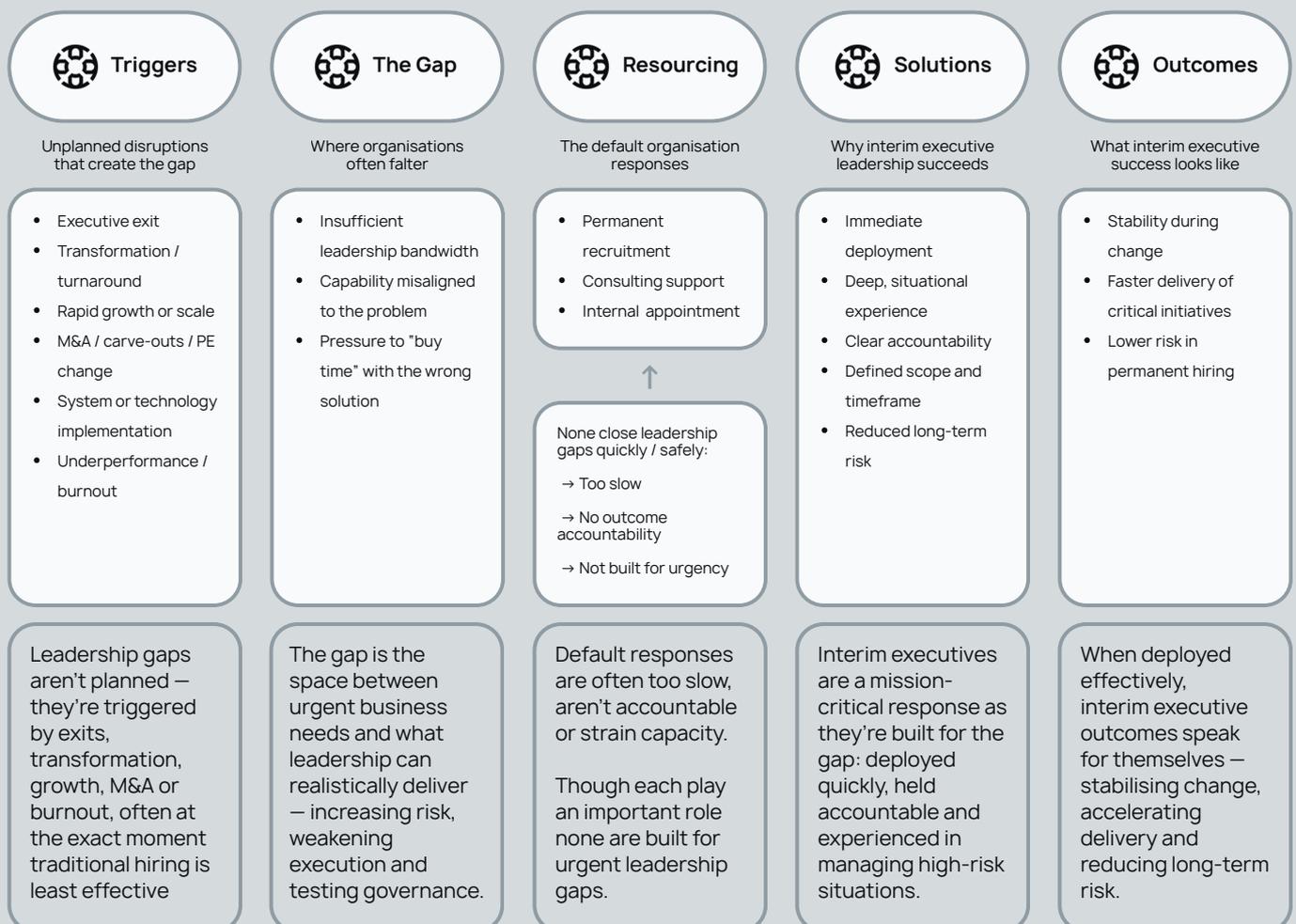
- ✗ Replace long-term succession planning
- ✗ Avoid difficult permanent hiring decisions
- ✗ Mask structural leadership issues indefinitely

Boards and CEOs should ask three questions:

- ? What outcomes must be delivered in the next 3–12 months?
- ? Do we have the leadership capacity and capability to deliver them without unacceptable risk?
- ? If not, what is the fastest, safest way to add that capacity and/or capability?

The Leadership Gap Framework

We reframe executive resourcing as a leadership continuity challenge – not a hiring problem – through the **Leadership Gap™** Framework, a simple, repeatable model built for speed, precision and accountability.



The message for organisations is simple: Don't wait for the gap to widen.

Make interim leadership a first response – not a last resort. Because when it matters most, speed and precision define strong leadership.

The BlackBridge Model

BlackBridge brings 45+ years' combined experience, delivering executive search, interim leadership and strategic talent advisory for boards, c-suite executives and investors across APAC.



Problem

- Urgent leadership gaps
- Execution pressure
- Heightened risk



Solution

- Rapid deployment
- Scope clarity
- Governance & accountability



Outcome

- Risk mitigation
- Knowledge transfer
- Stabilised performance

Our Philosophy and Value Proposition

Executive hiring today demands more than traditional processes. It requires speed, precision, alignment and execution.

Boards and C-suite leaders can't afford delays – and executives deserve a discreet, trusted partner.

BlackBridge delivers interim and on-demand leadership without delay, through confidential, tailored solutions built for lasting impact.

- **20+ years** pioneering interim leadership
- **Proven portfolio** of senior executives
- **Category-defining methodology**
- **Rapid, accountable deployment**
- High-trust advisory with boards, CEOs & investors
- Deep local market expertise
- Experience across all C-suite functions
- Support at critical strategic inflection points
- Solutions delivered across all ownership structures

Our Services

Interim Executive Search

Immediately available C-suite leaders on fixed-term, day-rate or fractional contracts.

- Fixed term / day rate / fractional
- 3–12 month assignments
- Option to transition to permanent

Executives on Demand

Proven leaders, matched to your culture and strategy, delivered in under 30 days.

- Immediate market conversations
- Candidate insights shape and inform the search
- Potential for contract-to-permanent transition.

Critical Executive Assurance

Highly discreet support for boards, CEOs and CPOs in executive transition or succession.

- Seamless external succession option
- Continuous market mapping of pre-qualified executives
- Exclusively retained per sector to protect your advantage

Executive Search Whispering

Independent advice on the right specialist search firm for your industry and function.

- Guidance on specialist search firms
- Industry and functional expertise
- Trusted partner in complex searches

What Next

You've seen the framework. You understand the exposure.

The choice is clear: lead with strategic readiness by treating leadership continuity as a core capability – not a crisis response.

The organisations that outperform don't just respond faster – they prepare earlier, anticipate pressure points, and ensure leadership is never the constraint.

We Invite You To:

- Assess your exposure to leadership capacity and capability gaps across critical roles and initiatives.
- Identify bandwidth, capability and timing risks early – before they become execution failures.
- Embed interim executive leadership into your operating model, enabling immediate response and forward-planning.
- Partner with us to map leadership risk, define critical roles and establish a rapid-deployment plan tailored to your organisation.

Sources

This report is informed by global research, industry data and our leadership expertise, with key sources referenced below.

If you'd like to access the sources or explore their relevance to your organisation, we welcome the conversation.

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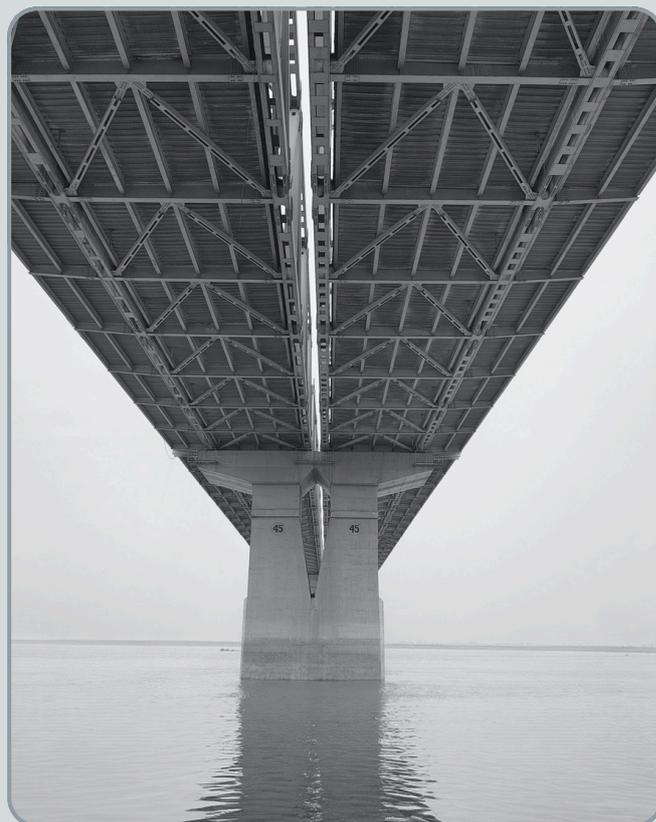
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— Thank you

Thank you for engaging with this report.

Our commitment is to ensure you're never caught off guard, delivering leadership solutions matched to the urgency and complexity of each critical moment.

Continue the conversation.



BlackBridge
EXECUTIVES

Caroline McAuliffe
+61 415 623 122

Adam Neyenhuis
+61 419 901 859

BlackBridge Executives: The Pillars, 11 Barrack Street Sydney NSW 2000

 www.blackbridgeexecutives.com

 contact@blackbridgeexecutives.com