BUSINESS MANAGERS MANAGEMENT

Be obsessed with the inter-contract period

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The inter-contract period is not a fatality: poorly managed, it destroys your profitability and weakens your consultants. Well anticipated and managed, it becomes a lever for conquest and loyalty.

If you think the inter-contract period is a fatality or a necessary evil, you're on the wrong track. Poorly managed, the inter-contract period is a financial and human hemorrhage. Well managed, it's a formidable tool for conquest. But for that, you must be obsessed with its management. Here's why and how.

The inter-contract period: a double-edged sword

Having consultants available immediately is a sine qua non condition to respond to clients who lack anticipation, but also to prospects who are reassured to have a consultant you already know.

But beware: too high a rate or excessive duration of the inter-contract period is not insignificant. Do your calculations: how many consultants on assignment are needed to compensate for a single consultant in the inter-contract period? Now multiply by the average duration. Do you understand why this subject should obsess you? And this is just one aspect of the problem.

"Inter-contract", a poorly chosen term?

Why do we use such an awkward term as "inter-contract"? Your consultants know only one contract, their employment contract. Why give them reasons to doubt. Many companies prefer other expressions:

"inter-projects", "internal projects", or even "back-office". It's not just a change of vocabulary: it's a clear signal to reassure your teams. Unless managerial practices do not evolve in concert with this other denomination.

Three destructive psychological phases

According to an HR study conducted over several months at one of my previous employers, a consultant in the inter-contract period goes through three phases:

1. **Phase 1 (1 to 2 first weeks)**: everything is fine. It's perceived as "free" holidays. The consultant takes advantage of this time to handle personal tasks, engage in activities they don't have time for during an intense project, while remaining available.
2. **Phase 2 (between the 3rd and 6th week)**: doubt sets in. The consultant starts to question the effectiveness of the business managers. "What are they doing? Why is nothing progressing? Have they abandoned my searches?" This questioning of the organization leads to frustration and loss of confidence in the company, especially if communication is insufficient.
3. **Phase 3 (from the 5th week onwards)**: self-deprecation. "What if the problem is me? Maybe my skills aren't up to par." This phase is the most critical. The consultant doubts their value, which affects their motivation and behavior towards potential clients when they are brought to meet them. Vicious circle!

These psychological consequences, often ignored, are just as devastating as the financial losses associated with the inter-contract period. Hence, again, the importance of proactive management.

Why does the inter-contract period explode?

The answer is simple: lack of anticipation. Too many companies recruit on a per-project basis, without a medium or long-term strategy. When the project ends, urgency becomes evident… but it's too late.

Add to this a classic bias: when a business manager is successful, they attribute it to themselves, but when things become difficult, they blame the market. What if we reversed this logic? When a business manager is successful, it's often thanks to a supportive market. But when it's blocked, it's up to them to question themselves. This may seem harsh, but this stance allows us to stop looking for exclusively external causes and to take responsibility for the necessary adjustments.

Anticipation: your only salvation

Adopt this motto: "Hope for the best and prepare for the worst!" Make anticipation of the inter-contract period a daily obsession. Regularly organize project follow-up meetings involving the business manager, consultant, and client. If the client does not wish to participate for any reason, do them anyway! Your stakes, as an employer, cover the short term, but especially the medium and long term. Clients often have a different logic and focus on their immediate needs. This divergence should not discourage you: follow-up and anticipation are your best weapons for ensuring the employability of your teams.

Engage your consultants

A consultant in the inter-contract period should not be a spectator. Make them an actor and give them an active role during this period:

1. **Development of the internal network**: Too often, consultants know little about their own company outside of their BU. Encourage them to meet other business managers and participate in internal events. Also ask your business managers to meet with consultants in the inter-contract period. A skills file, however complete it may be, is not the person.
2. **Ideas for targeted prospecting**: Contrary to a common belief among consultants, business managers generally know only a tiny part of their market. Consultants can contribute with leads, contacts, or ideas drawn from their experience and their own research (thanks to LinkedIn). This also allows them to influence actions they find interesting for an upcoming project.
3. **Proactive communication**: Establish two or three weekly points between the consultant and their manager. Even in the absence of news, these exchanges strengthen transparency and preserve the trust relationship. They also allow answering questions, dispelling doubts, and offering moral support.
4. **Participation in internal projects**: If repositioning takes time, suggest that the consultant get involved in internal initiatives, like R&D projects, training, or activities contributing to the company's strategy. This maintains their engagement and demonstrates that you value their time.

In conclusion: be obsessed

The inter-contract period is not an evil to endure, it's an opportunity to exploit. But this requires iron discipline and relentless obsession.

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