A Successful Private Equity Transformation and Exit Demands a Special Type of Interim

Interim Business Transformation Director | Finance & Operations Transformation
(Introduced by Holdsway)

CLIENT AT A GLANCE
Sector: Private equity fund administration | **Ownership:** PE-backed | **Growth: 20**% avg. annual revenue growth | **Workforce:** c.250 | **Clients:** 150+ | **Footprint:** 5 offices, 5 jurisdictions

The Situation

The client was a pioneer in specialist, outsourced fund administration for the European private equity market. Over two decades, it had grown entirely organically, with revenue rising by an average of 20% a year for eight successive years. Around 250 people served more than 150 clients from five offices across five jurisdictions. A mid-market private equity house had acquired the business with a typical five-year investment horizon and appointed a new CEO to continue the growth story; a new CFO followed.

Inefficiencies that are easy to tolerate in a small, fast-growing, profitable company come sharply into focus once it is medium-sized and heading for a sale. Because clients were billed quarterly, it took the new CFO around eight months to see the full picture: finance operations needed fundamental improvement if the business was to keep its momentum.

> *"Because we operated on a quarterly client billing cycle, it was only after about eight months that we began to see reality. It became clear we needed to make fundamental improvements in finance operations to keep up momentum in the business."* **— Chief Financial Officer, the client**

The Challenge

The CEO and CFO inherited overly complex, manual processes that could not scale and were no longer fit for purpose:

- A complex, time-consuming billing process, with client contracts drawn up inconsistently.
- Billable client work was not being captured and recorded in a way that supported accurate invoicing.
- Slowing cash flow and growing debt, as some clients withheld payment on invoices under query.
- Rising strain on client relationships, at exactly the point the business needed to look its best to buyers.

Fixing this meant reviewing everything from contract to cash, end to end across the business. That needed a senior figure who could devote 100% of their time to it, take command quickly, diagnose the problems in fine detail and act decisively. As a small company, the client had neither the people nor the in-house skill set. Both leaders had worked with interims before, and the CEO knew Nick Diprose at Holdsway. They gave him a detailed brief; Holdsway put forward two well-qualified candidates, and one stood out.

The Intervention

Diagnose in detail. The interim executive's analysis produced a thirteen-page list of issues, covering pricing policy, charge-out rates, time accounting, contract design, reporting and billing. A side project to clear the backlog of unpaid invoices and improve cash collection was added.

Rebuild from first principles. What began as a back-office fix became a company-wide transformation. Starting from what clients wanted and valued, and how the firm compared with competitors, she reset how work was priced, recorded, contracted and billed. This required significant changes in culture and behaviour.

Bring everyone with her. She began with dialogue at every level, listening to the people who would be instrumental to success so that every view was heard. She built implementation on what she learned, with regular communication and an approach designed to be engaging and enjoyable. No meeting or workshop took place without her secret ingredient.

> *"When I'm negotiating an assignment, I always request a specific budget for the team. It's a small thing, but I've found it makes a big difference with people. I always have 100 per cent attendance at my workshops!"* **— Interim Business Transformation Director**

Key Outcomes

Results Panel	
Financial	Unpaid invoice backlog virtually cleared within about seven months; much better visibility of cash flow.
Operational	Pricing, time accounting, contracts, reporting and billing reset end-to-end, giving a leaner, more efficient back office.
Strategic	Business sale-ready: acquired by one of the world's largest private equity fund administrators about a year after the interim started, with regulatory approval across five jurisdictions.
People & stakeholders	Client relationships repaired; employees across all five offices engaged and continuously improving how they work.

Legacy

In this case, the ultimate measure of success was unusual: an orderly exit not only for the interim but also for the CEO and CFO, as the business was rapidly integrated into its acquirer. The company and its brand were later absorbed into the acquirer, but the improvements she led live on in the operations the buyer inherited: scalable processes, sound contracts, reliable billing and a workforce used to continuous improvement.

> *"She is relentlessly enthusiastic and cheerful, personally engaging, and made a difficult project fun. She has a rare ability to get people on board, motivated and behind her. This was a short-term, back-office project, but every single employee, across all five offices, knew who she was — and nobody had a bad word to say about her."* **— Chief Financial Officer, the client**