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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Turning the Tide: Typology of Temporary Managers in Decision-Making During Crises

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Abstract In an increasingly volatile and uncertain business environment, organisations are increasingly confronted with complex crises and rapid change. In response, they increasingly rely on temporary leadership—particularly interim managers—to guide decision-making under time-sensitive and consequential conditions. This study focuses on crisis and turnaround assignments, a particularly demanding subset of interim management. By virtue of their external status and limited tenure, temporary managers can make impartial and, at times, radical decisions without the burden of long-term internal consequences. At the same time, they face distinct challenges in establishing authority, legitimacy, and trust within the organisation. This study explores the forms of human capital that temporary managers contribute in crisis contexts, focusing on their core tasks, decision-making patterns, and proficiency profiles. Drawing on a qualitative research design involving in-depth interviews with 20 temporary managers across Europe, the analysis identifies three distinct types: *The Realiser, The Decider,* and *The Advisor.* The typology captures context-specific configurations of human capital shaped by the demands of crisis and turnaround situations, illustrating how interim managers stabilise organisations, enable recovery, and drive renewal. Each type embodies a unique approach—from operational execution and strategic foresight to social mediation—reflecting how temporary leaders mobilise expertise, authority, and decision-making to navigate organisational crises. By uncovering these patterns, the study advances understanding of interim management effectiveness and offers insights for aligning leadership approaches with the demands of crisis and turnaround contexts. It contributes to a broader understanding

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of how human capital shapes managerial performance and organisational resilience in times of disruption.

Keywords Temporary Managers · Interim Management · Human Capital · Decision-making process · Organisational Crisis · Turnaround Management · Organisational Resilience

JEL-Classification H12 Crisis Management · L25 Firm Performance: Size · Diversification · And Scope · M50 General Personnel Economics

1 Motivation

Interim management has attracted increasing attention in academic literature over the past decades (e.g. Fisher et al. 2024; Flatøy 2024; Woods et al. 2020; Mooney et al. 2017; Jas 2013; Inkson et al. 2001; Goss and Bridson 1998; Farquhar 1991), reflecting its growing practical significance for organisations. This development is also evident in the European interim management market, which has expanded by 14% over the past four years (Selby 2021, 2024).

The literature reveals a broad field of application for interim managers, which can be divided into three disciplines: (a) gap management and critical vacancies, (b) change and transition management, and (c) crisis management and turnaround (Woods et al. 2020; Bruns and Kabst 2005). Among these, the latter represents a particularly relevant field of application, as organisations often seek external knowledge and expertise to support their crisis response and recovery efforts (Jibril et al. 2023; Rosenthal and Hart 1991) in these situations of greater urgency and reduced routinisation (Wu et al. 2021; Mulder et al. 1971). Although interim management is often associated with crisis situations, existing research clearly distinguishes crisis-driven assignments from gap management and planned change contexts. This study deliberately focuses on crisis and turnaround assignments as an analytically distinct subset of interim management to examine how extreme contextual conditions shape interim managers' decision-making and human capital mobilisation. Crises in this context can emerge, for example, as a result of financial distress, strategic missteps or restructuring, operational disruptions, and external shocks (Bundy et al. 2017) and can evolve over time (Robbins and Pearce 1992). Interim managers in particular can leverage their external perspective and neutrality to restore stability (Jas 2013). At the same time, interim executives face unique "on-the-job" challenges, such as gaining authority, acting under time pressure, and communicating contract status and contract duration (Flatøy 2024).

While interim management is studied from various theoretical angles, there remains little empirical evidence on how interim managers mobilise their human capital in crisis contexts. Woods et al. (2020) discuss potential individual antecedents of interim effectiveness across the four stages of the interim management cycle. Yet they do not distinguish among the three application disciplines in their review. We argue that such differentiation is crucial, as the dynamics, requirements, and success factors of crisis and turnaround assignments differ fundamentally from

those of gap management and planned change contexts, particularly with regard to time pressure, decision irreversibility, and performance expectations. Gap management focuses primarily on operational continuity and change management for planned transformations. In contrast, crises pose an enormous challenge for managers (Förster et al. 2022; Wu et al. 2021), as they require rapid problem identification, organisational stabilisation, and the restoration of stakeholder confidence (Bundy et al. 2017; Wooten and James 2008). Given the complexity of interim assignments, a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the human capital that interim managers bring to organisations promises to provide a broader picture of the value they create and the effectiveness they achieve (Woods et al. 2020). In this context, their core tasks, decision-making patterns, and proficiency profiles collectively provide a comprehensive picture of how interim managers act under pressure. In this study, human capital refers to the bundle of knowledge, experience, analytical abilities, leadership capabilities, and interpersonal competences that interim managers bring to crisis assignments. Empirically, we therefore examine how this human capital becomes visible through these three analytical dimensions of core tasks, decision-making patterns, and proficiency profiles in crisis and turnaround contexts. Treating interim management contexts as homogeneous risks overlooking the unique individual antecedents and contextual factors that determine interim effectiveness in crisis situations. Accordingly, we pose the following research question:

RQ1 How do temporary managers mobilise their human capital in organisational crises, as reflected in their core tasks, decision-making patterns, and proficiency profiles?

While the first research question focuses on how interim managers mobilise their human capital to navigate decision-making during crises, it is equally important to recognise that crises are not static phenomena. The crisis and turnaround literature distinguishes between two main phases—retrenchment and recovery—each posing distinct challenges and requiring different strategies (Robbins and Pearce 1992). Understanding how interim managers adapt their proficiency, core tasks, and decision-making patterns across these phases provides deeper insight into their overall effectiveness and contribution to organisational renewal:

RQ2 Which specific forms of interim managers' human capital are critical during the retrenchment and recovery phases of an organisational crisis?

To address this gap, our study empirically examines externally hired, temporary managers who operate in crisis scenarios and hold managerial positions. We draw on qualitative interviews with 20 experienced interim managers from across Europe who have completed multiple crisis-related mandates over many years. This empirical material allows us to identify recurring patterns in the proficiency profiles, core tasks, and decision-making practices of interim managers. The analysis resulted in three ideal-typical interim manager types—*The Realiser, The Decider,* and The *Advisor*—and, in a second step, enabled us to explore how these types relate to the retrenchment and recovery phases of organisational crises.

Our study provides a twofold contribution to the literature on interim management. First, it responds to calls for more nuanced and empirically grounded insights

into interim management (Mooney et al. 2017) and aligns with Fisher et al. (2024), who call for more empirical studies of interim managers' experiences in natural and real-world contexts. Against this background, we identify three ideal-typical interim manager types—*The Realiser, The Decider,* and *The Advisor*—and show how they differ in their proficiency profiles, core tasks, and decision-making under crisis conditions. While our study does not examine interim manager selection directly, this typology may support more informed selection decisions in practice.

Second, building on Woods et al. (2020), the study contributes to research on crisis-related interim management by linking these three types to the retrenchment and recovery phases of organisational crises. Consequently, our findings indirectly advance understanding of the factors that drive interim management effectiveness and offer practical guidance for achieving an optimal manager-organisation fit.

Our paper is organised as follows. In the next section, we present the current state of the literature on the theoretical background of our study. Section 3 explains the method and analytical steps used. The following sections present (Section 4) and discuss (Section 5) our results. We conclude with reflections on the limitations of our study and potential avenues for future research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Human Capital as a Multidimensional Construct

Human capital is a foundational construct in management and organisational research, central to understanding how organisations develop and leverage individual capabilities to enhance performance and decision quality. Originating from Becker (1964) notion of human capital as a stock of individual attributes that enhance productivity, this perspective emphasises the role of deliberate investments in employees' productive capacity as a basis for organisational capability and managerial effectiveness. Crook et al. (2011) confirm, in their meta-analytic study, that human capital positively influences organisational performance, reinforcing its strategic relevance. Extending Becker's work, Ployhart and Moliterno (2011) define human capital as "a unit-level resource that is created from the emergence of individuals' knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs)" (p. 128). Complementing this view, Lepak and Snell (2002, 1999) argue that the strategic value and uniqueness of human capital determine how organisations should develop and deploy their resource architectures, emphasising the importance of aligning human capital configurations with the organisation's strategic objectives. Grounded in the KSAO framework, this study analyses the specific human capital attributes that interim managers bring to crisis management.

Building on this perspective, we conceptualise interim managers' human capital as the bundle of knowledge, skills, abilities, experience, and interpersonal capabilities that they bring to temporary crisis assignments. Importantly, this study does not treat observable managerial activities themselves as human capital. Instead, we examine how human capital becomes visible in practice through three analytical dimensions: (1) core tasks, which indicate where interim managers apply their exper-

tise; (2) decision-making patterns, which show how they use judgment and authority under crisis conditions; and (3) proficiency profiles, which capture the underlying knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal qualities that support effective action.

Further, this study conceptualises human capital as a composite of interrelated KSAO clusters that reflect the multifaceted nature of managerial competence. Crook et al. (2011) summarise this diversity by showing that components such as experience, expertise, cognitive ability, and interpersonal competence are consistently linked to organisational performance. Their findings highlight that effectiveness arises from the interplay of complementary attributes rather than any single capability. Prior research underscores the importance of domain-specific knowledge and experience (Hmieleski and Baron 2009; Haber and Reichel 2007; Huselid et al. 1997), analytical and problem-solving abilities (Thompson and Heron 2005; Simonin 1997), as well as communication and leadership skills that foster collaboration and trust (Frese et al. 2007; Menguc and Barker 2005; Keller 2004; Park et al. 2003). Moreover, values, integrity, and resilience serve as personal resources that guide responsible judgment in the face of uncertainty (De Carolis 2003; Bae and Lawler 2000). Existing studies often address isolated facets—such as expertise, leadership, or analytical skill—without providing an integrated view of how these elements jointly shape managerial effectiveness. Accordingly, managerial effectiveness depends on the multidimensional configuration of these interrelated knowledge, skills, abilities, and role-related competencies, whose combined deployment determines individual performance and organisational outcomes. In crisis situations, this multidimensionality becomes particularly salient, as interim managers are required to mobilise different elements of their human capital simultaneously to interpret uncertainty, make decisions under pressure, and enact organisational change.

While human capital manifests across diverse managerial activities, its relevance is particularly pronounced in areas involving critical decisions about people and organisational structures. Staffing, performance evaluation, and training, as well as restructuring and talent redeployment, require managers to interpret complex information, balance competing objectives, and make judgments that affect both individuals and organisational outcomes (Trunk and Birkel 2022). Furthermore, Holcomb et al. (2009) show that managerial ability directly influences the productivity of organisational resources, with this effect moderated by the quality and composition of human resources.

Taken together, prior research suggests that organisational adaptability and performance depend on how managers mobilise their human capital in decision-making contexts. Based on this theoretical foundation, the following section presents crisis and turnaround contexts in which the mobilisation of managerial human capital becomes particularly critical.

2.2 Navigating Organisational Crisis Through Retrenchment and Recovery

Many organisations experience periods of substantial performance decline at some stage of their life cycle, necessitating strategies to address the resulting challenges (Gotteiner et al. 2019; Bundy et al. 2017; Trahms et al. 2013; Pretorius 2008; Miller and Friesen 1984; Hofer 1980). The phenomenon of corporate decline and

turnaround has been studied in management research for several decades, introducing broad conceptual frameworks that still form the basis of turnaround research today (Schoenberg et al. 2013; Hambrick and Schecter 1983; Hofer 1980; Schendel et al. 1976; Gordon 1971; Altman 1968). The terms crisis, decline, and turnaround are used throughout this study within the overarching context of crisis management.

Robbins and Pearce (1992) propose one of the most enduring frameworks for explaining the temporal dynamics of turnaround processes, distinguishing between a retrenchment phase—characterised by cost and asset reduction—and a recovery phase, focused on strategic repositioning and the rebuilding of organisational capability. The objectives of the retrenchment phase are characterised by survival and the creation of positive cash flow, achieved through strategies such as divestitures, operational efficiency improvements, or downsizing (Robbins and Pearce 1992). In contrast, the recovery phase focuses on securing long-term profitability and therefore includes strategies such as changes to market and product policies (Robbins and Pearce 1992). This temporal logic underscores the centrality of time in understanding how organisations and managers respond to crisis conditions. Turnaround and crisis management is, therefore, not a static sequence of actions but an evolving process in which the nature and focus of managerial decisions change as conditions shift from decline to renewal. From a human capital perspective, these phase-based dynamics imply that the skills, competencies, and decision-making capabilities required of managers vary systematically across retrenchment and recovery. What constitutes effective managerial action in early crisis stages may therefore differ fundamentally from what is required during phases of organisational renewal. Empirical research highlights that leadership behaviour and managerial decision-making are critical drivers of successful turnaround processes. Barker and Mone (1994) show that retrenchment can stabilise short-term performance, whereas sustained recovery requires renewal-oriented actions that rebuild motivation and capability. Similarly, Förster et al. (2022) and Gotteiner et al. (2019) emphasise that effective turnarounds depend on strategic decision-making and adaptive leadership, particularly in navigating uncertainty, communicating effectively, and building. Jibril et al. (2023) highlight that organisations often seek external advice during the retrenchment and recovery phases.

From a crisis perspective, there are compelling reasons to study managerial decision-making more closely. Even when situations do not escalate into full-scale turnarounds, strategic and operational decisions remain crucial for managing organisational challenges (Trunk and Birkel 2022). Organisations experiencing declining performance often introduce changes across multiple domains, including structures, processes, and people management practices, to restore efficiency and competitiveness (Kim et al. 2013). Prior research suggests that managerial decision-making plays a central role in shaping how organisations respond to crises, particularly with regard to the deployment and reconfiguration of resources (Malik and Sanders 2021; Edvardsson and Durst 2021). Such decisions are shaped by the quality of managerial human capital, which directly influences how organisational resources—human and otherwise—are mobilised and aligned with recovery objectives (Holcomb et al. 2009).

The restructuring of roles and responsibilities, leadership succession, and the redesign of incentive and evaluation systems represent core mechanisms for organisational recovery (Liou and Smith 2007; Smith and Graves 2005). As Gotteiner et al. (2019) and Förster et al. (2022) note, this dynamic interaction between structural redesign and leadership capability is central to rebuilding organisational performance. Under such conditions, the ability to rapidly inject external expertise and adaptive management skills becomes a decisive factor in restoring stability and driving renewal. Understanding these dynamics provides a clear conceptual transition to the following discussion on temporary and interim management as a targeted response to the managerial challenges that arise during organisational crises. These phase-specific demands provide an important analytical lens for examining interim managers, whose temporary engagement often places them at the centre of organisational retrenchment and recovery efforts.

2.3 Temporary Professionals and the Dynamics of Interim Management

Building on the human capital perspective and the phase-based understanding of crisis and turnaround, this section focuses on interim management as a specific organisational context in which these dynamics become particularly visible. Interim managers are typically appointed under conditions of heightened uncertainty, time pressure, and organisational disruption, making their deployment of human capital especially consequential for organisational outcomes. Current research indicates that most corporate failures are due to poor or inappropriate management practices (Zambrano Farias et al. 2021; Dubrovski 2009; Ahn et al. 2000), with estimates suggesting that around 80% of failures are due to management incompetence (Scherrer 2003). The challenges managers face during an organisational turnaround differ from those encountered when improving performance in a stable environment (Trahms et al. 2013; Carmeli and Sheaffer 2009). In this context, Boyne and Meier (2009) argue that appointing professional executives to temporarily take charge of an organisation and bridge a management function is more effective for turnarounds than relying solely on external consultants. Their findings suggest that insiders, with their contextual expertise, are more likely to implement successful survival strategies than outsiders (Bronnenmayer et al. 2016; Boyne and Meier 2009).

In both research and practice, various labels are used to describe externally and temporarily contracted executives. For example, the terms Temporary Leaders (e.g. Bae and Joo 2021; Browning and McNamee 2012; Farquhar 1995), Interim Managers (e.g. Flatøy 2024; Jas 2013; Inkson et al. 2001; Goss and Bridson 1998), Interim CEOs (e.g. Bae et al. 2022; Mooney et al. 2017; Intintoli et al. 2014; Ballinger and Marcel 2010) or Interim Leaders (e.g. Fisher et al. 2024; Woods et al. 2020) are frequently used. Inkson et al. (2001) provide a comprehensive definition, describing the profession as "a management professional, usually with a specific area of expertise, who contracts, often through an agency, to provide a client company with short-term cover, troubleshooting in an area of expertise, or completion of a pre-defined project" (Inkson et al. 2001, p. 260), while Goss and Bridson (1998) particularly emphasise that interim managers are explicitly limited to temporary and short-term bases. On the one hand, interim managers benefit from an outsider perspective and

a degree of independence that can provide fresh insights and enhance objectivity in decision-making (Jas 2013). On the other hand, Flatøy (2024) finds evidence that acting quickly, gaining authority, and communicating contract status and contract duration are the most significant "on-the-job" challenges for temporary actors. The literature identifies three broad areas of application for interim managers: gap management and critical vacancies; change and transition management; and crisis management and turnaround (Woods et al. 2020; Bruns and Kabst 2005). Although these areas differ substantially in terms of context, challenges, and success criteria, existing studies often treat them as relatively homogeneous categories. More fine-grained perspectives suggest that interim roles can vary considerably within these broad areas. For example, Mooney et al. (2012) identify six distinct ways in which organisations deploy interim CEOs, reflecting different strategic intents and organisational needs. This distinction highlights that interim management assignments are not uniform but encompass diverse role configurations that may coexist within the same overarching area of application. Fisher et al. (2024) recently reviewed the peer-reviewed literature. They highlighted their findings on the theories and influencing factors at the stages of interim management assignments: selection, socialisation, success, and succession. Fisher et al. (2024) call for additional empirical studies exploring interim managers' experiences in authentic contexts and suggest conducting interviews to better understand the personal and social complexities involved.

Despite growing attention to interim management, existing research has rarely examined interim managers' effectiveness (Mooney et al. 2017), especially the human capital configurations that underpin it. Although Woods et al. (2020) provide a valuable synthesis that explores interim assignment performance and its individual psychological antecedents, their review integrates insights from various disciplines of interim management without distinguishing between crisis-driven appointments. In sum, openness to experiences, conscientiousness, and extraversion seem to be the most important personality traits for interim manager effectiveness. The most prominent competencies identified by Woods et al. (2020) are planning, communication, emotional intelligence, team building, stakeholder management, and customer and business focus, while transformational leadership is cited most frequently in the literature as promising for success. Finally, Woods et al. (2020) conclude that, to date, the literature on the personal characteristics of interims remains quite limited. Taken together, these literatures suggest that interim managers' effectiveness in crisis contexts depends on how they deploy human capital in response to phase-specific demands, directly motivating the research questions of this study.

Existing research has not yet examined how interim managers mobilise their human capital in crisis contexts. In particular, examining their core tasks, decision-making patterns, and proficiency profiles provides a more differentiated understanding of these dynamics. Interim managers' capacity to make rapid decisions in unfamiliar environments suggests that their effectiveness depends on distinct bundles of human capital.

3 Methodology

A qualitative research design was selected for its potential to generate in-depth insights into the everyday activities and decision-making processes of temporary practitioners, thereby enabling a nuanced understanding of their professional practices and the contextual conditions in which they operate. This approach aligns with the study's exploratory nature, which seeks to develop new theoretical perspectives (Wickert and de Bakker 2018). In this context, qualitative interviews are the most appropriate method for capturing the complexity of the research subject and addressing the research questions comprehensively (Patton 2015). Building on previous interpretive studies, the in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to facilitate the emergence of sense-making narratives, understood as interview accounts through which participants retrospectively interpret and structure their experiences in complex organisational situations (e.g. Brown et al. 2008) while allowing the collection of diverse information, including personal perspectives and experiences. Additionally, critical incident questions, focused on specific events and occurrences, were incorporated to anchor the discussions in the lived experiences of temporary managers (see Flanagan 1954).

The interview guide used in this study was constructed around the current body of literature and in accordance with our research questions. The interview guide was pre-tested among researchers and practitioners in two pilot interviews and subsequently refined based on their feedback. The final interview guide included questions covering the following areas: concepts and organisations (e.g., "How would you describe the typical organisational situation when you are brought in as an interim manager?"), decision-making processes (e.g., "How do you approach important decisions during a crisis assignment?"), role perceptions (e.g., "How would you describe your role within the management team during such assignments?"), skills (e.g., "Which competencies or experiences are most critical for managing crisis situations effectively?"), and the impact of digitalisation (e.g., "How do digital tools or technologies influence your work as an interim manager?"). While the sequence of questions was occasionally adjusted during the interviews to accommodate the flow of conversation, and the interview guide was refined throughout the research process to incorporate emerging empirical insights, it nevertheless ensured the collection of a comparable and consistent dataset across all interviews. The interviews were supplemented with follow-up questions to further explore emerging themes and deepen the analysis. Consistent with the research strategy, open-ended questions were employed to allow flexibility and adapt to each interviewee's expertise and experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

To examine the roles and functions performed by experienced temporary managers, a purposive sampling strategy was employed, selecting interim managers based on predefined inclusion criteria, including prior experience in crisis or turnaround contexts, direct involvement in managerial decision-making during organisational crises, and current or recent interim management experience. In this study, interim managers are conceptualised and operationalised as illustrative and theoretically representative examples of temporary executives. Participants were selected based on clearly defined inclusion criteria, including prior experience in crisis or

Table 1 Participant characteristics

Code	Country	Current Position	Years of experience	Number of mandates	Average Duration of mandates in months	Average Company size (number of employees)	Interview length in minutes	Language
I01	Germany	Interim HR Director	10	15	6–9	200	66	German
I02	UK	Chief Restructuring Officer	25	100	5–15	6–1800	65	English
I03	Germany	Chief Restructuring Officer	10	15	6–24	10–50,000	48	German
I04	Romania	Chief Restructuring Officer	16	20	6–72	100–500	53	English
I05	Germany	Interim HR Director	13	21	3–30	50–30,000	60	German
I06	Sweden	Managing Director	6	2	16	3.000	49	English
I07	Germany	Interim HR Director	4	2	3–4	150	47	German
I08	Germany	Interim HR Director	20	30	24–36	500–8000	52	German
I09	France	Interim HR Director	32	75	3–24	200–2000	51	English
I10	Italy	Managing Director	5	4	12–24	100–500	70	English
I11	Austria	Chief Restructuring Officer	10	6	6–60	250–300	47	German
I12	Netherlands	Managing Director	20	500	6–18	20–100	66	English
I13	Netherlands	Interim HR Director	7	4	18	20–50	62	English
I14	Austria	Chief Restructuring Officer	19	100	6–24	50–500	54	German
I15	UK	Managing Director	12	10	3–18	100–220	40	English
I16	Swiss	Managing Director	35	25	4–30	500–2500	43	German
I17	UK	Chief Restructuring Officer	3	5	2–12	400–1200	28	English
I18	Italy	Managing Director	20	20	12	100	66	English
I19	UK	Managing Director	30	16	12	100–10,000	92	English
I20	France	Managing Director	10	13	9–12	200–2000	59	English

turnaround contexts, involvement in managerial decision-making, and current or recent interim management experience. To ensure that all participants possessed the necessary expertise and professional background, managers were recruited through targeted outreach via professional associations, LinkedIn, and snowball sampling, as well as through direct contact within professional networks. The primary objective in selecting the interview sample was to ensure diversity among temporary managers from various European countries, thereby enabling the study to capture insights beyond localised contexts, such as legal conditions and differences in local corporate structures. The interviewees had diverse professional backgrounds, having gained experience across organisations of varying sizes and across multiple sectors of the economy. Table 1 summarises participants' professional profiles, detailing country of origin, position, experience, mandates, company size, interview length and the language in which the interview was conducted.

The data collection comprised 20 semi-structured interviews with interim managers who had faced crises. Our empirical study focuses exclusively on mandates involving organisational crises that threaten the organisation's survival. We deliberately restricted our sample to crisis and turnaround assignments, recognising that interim managers are also employed in non-crisis contexts such as gap management and planned change. This focus allows us to examine decision-making and human capital mobilisation under particularly extreme and time-critical conditions. We conducted the interviews collaboratively between October 2024 and October 2025 in English or German. One author facilitated the interviews, while the other systematically documented observational notes. Interview durations ranged from 28 to 92 min, averaging approximately 56 min, yielding more than 18 h of dialogue. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. To protect anonymity, we removed all identifying information from the text (e.g. names of interviewees, firms, and places). Data collection continued until additional interviews largely confirmed existing analytical patterns rather than substantially extending them, consistent with a pragmatic understanding of information redundancy (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Our aim is not to capture all possible interim manager roles but to develop an analytically grounded typology of interim managers in crisis contexts.

Data analysis followed an abductive, thematic qualitative approach informed by interpretive research traditions. While elements of the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al. 2013) informed our analytical sensitivity, particularly its emphasis on systematic coding, iterative comparison, our study does not claim to follow the Gioia methodology as a full theory-building framework. Rather than aiming to develop a grounded theory or process model, the analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns and configurations of managerial tasks, decision-making practices, and competencies, which were subsequently synthesised into an empirically grounded typology. This analytical approach enabled systematic pattern identification and concept refinement while maintaining sensitivity to existing theoretical perspectives (Gehman et al. 2018). We pursued an iterative process of moving between data, emerging categories, and existing theoretical frameworks to develop a nuanced, empirically grounded typology of interim managers' decision-making practices in crisis contexts (Gehman et al. 2018; Maxwell 2013). This analytic cycling allowed emerging interpretations to be continuously refined in dialogue with both data and

theory. In this sense, our work aligns with qualitative studies that combine inductive coding with theoretical reflection (Scheve et al. 2024; Förster et al. 2022). During data analysis, we assigned descriptive labels to recurring concepts in the interview material. In adopting a process-oriented perspective, our analysis draws on a retrospective, phase-based understanding of processes. Rather than tracing organisational processes in real time, we rely on interim managers' accumulated experience across multiple crisis and turnaround assignments to reconstruct how managerial roles, decision-making patterns, and human capital demands vary between retrenchment and recovery phases.

First, the interview transcripts were coded inductively, line by line, to identify recurring expressions, actions, and decision-making patterns described by interim managers in crises (Charmaz 2014), using MAXQDA software (version 2024). All interviews were coded in the language in which they were conducted (English or German), with German-language interviews translated into English after coding. This close engagement with the data enabled us to observe how managers interpret, prioritise, and act in conditions of uncertainty. While the initial interview guide (covering core tasks, decision-making patterns, and competencies) informed data collection, these themes served as sensitising concepts that guided our interpretive focus without constraining the inductive identification of patterns. The coding grid was jointly developed by the research team and validated collectively; 2597 codes emerged. One author coded the interview, while the second author reviewed the coding. Disagreements regarding interpretation and thus coding were resolved through discussion.

The interviews revealed recurring similarities and systematic differences among interim managers, which informed the subsequent synthesis of the identified patterns. This typology is context-specific and reflects the demands of crisis-driven interim mandates rather than interim management assignments more broadly. During coding, recurring patterns emerged across the three analytical dimensions, indicating the existence of distinct types. In a subsequent analytical phase, conceptually similar observations were clustered using MAXQDA software and compared across cases to identify shared logics of action and decision-making (Wickert and de Bakker 2018). This iterative comparison revealed cross-cutting configurations across these dimensions. These patterns reflected distinct behavioural orientations in how interim managers approached crisis situations and were synthesised into three paradigmatic categories—*The Realiser, The Decider*, and *The Advisor*—representing distinct ways of mobilising human capital and navigating crisis-related decisions. Each interviewee was subsequently assigned to the type that best reflected the dominant configuration of core tasks, decision-making patterns, and proficiency profiles described in the interview material.

During the final stage of coding, the interview data were examined to uncover the temporal dimensions of the crises in which the interviewed interim managers are engaged. This process likewise brought to light recurring patterns concerning the typology of temporary managers. The situations and activities reported by the interim managers were systematically coded according to Robbins and Pearce (1992) conceptualisation of the retrenchment and recovery phases. The results presented in this article were illuminated by representative interview statements intended to

provide readers with a deeper understanding of the situations described and the thoughts presented (Patton 2015).

4 Results

First, the results for research question one are presented in detail, while section 4.4 highlights the results in relation to the phases of retrenchment and recovery from crises (research question two).

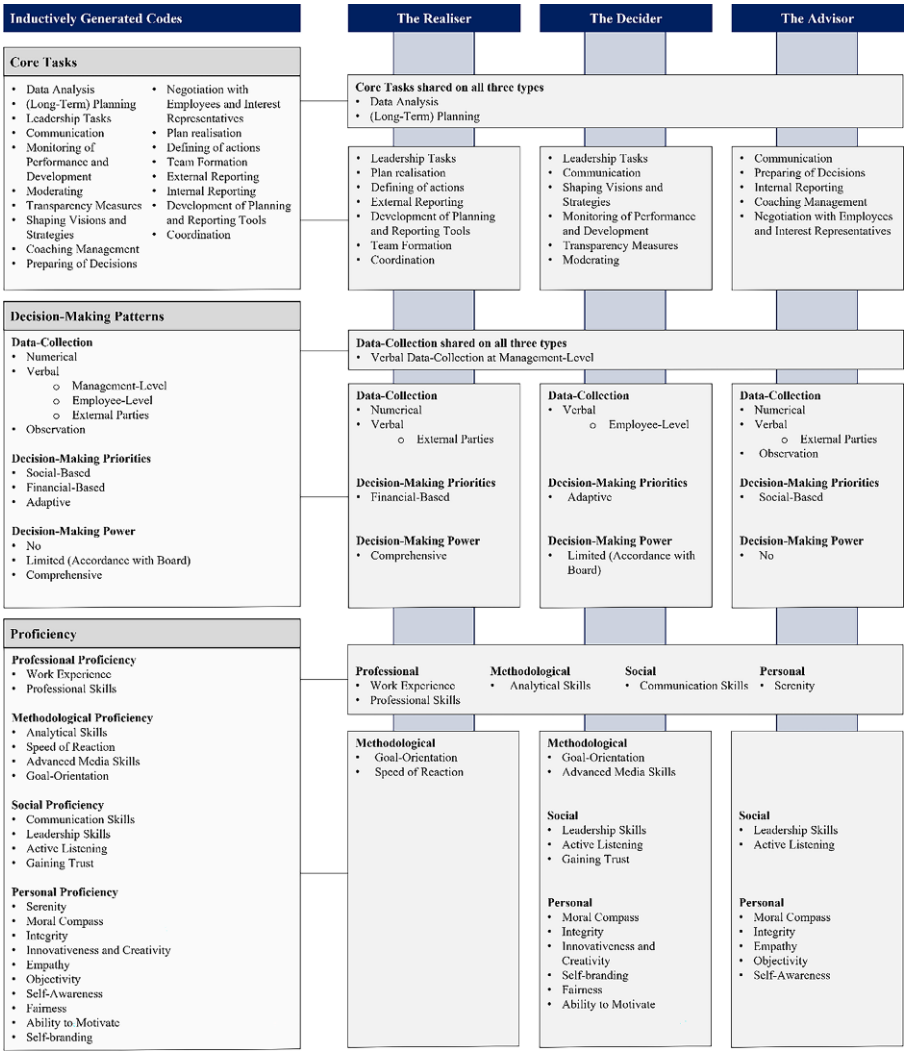

Fig. 1 Inductively generated codes for core tasks, decision-making patterns, and proficiency profiles, illustrating three types of interim managers

Figure 1 presents the inductively generated codes and their aggregation into the three analytical dimensions used in this study—core tasks, decision-making patterns, and proficiency profiles—on the left-hand side. As introduced in the literature review, these dimensions serve as the analytical framework through which interim managers' human capital becomes visible in practice. The right-hand side shows how the three interim manager types cluster according to the codes derived from these dimensions.

Across the interviews, data analysis and (long-term) planning emerged as core tasks shared by nearly all interim managers. Data collection is typically conducted through verbal interactions at the management level: "The one-on-one meetings [with management] provide figures to secure the basis for my decision-making" (I02, 64). In terms of proficiency, participants report extensive professional experience and a wealth of knowledge, which provides a strong foundation for managing complex organisational crises.

They also describe advanced analytical capabilities, allowing them to analyse information and systematically develop evidence-based decisions or recommendations: "The core skills are actually analysis. How do I interpret data, even if it is more complex" (I14, 80). Furthermore, all interim managers highlight their strong communication skills, facilitating effective interaction with all stakeholders: "I communicate effectively, internally and externally in the organisation" (I19, 62). In addition, all the interim managers interviewed agreed that their serenity enables them to remain calm in high-pressure situations and to manage organisational complexity effectively: "Patience first of all will sort out these big problems" (I18, 149).

The following section provides a detailed account of the typology, outlining its defining characteristics and contextual relevance. The three types represent empirically grounded paradigmatic patterns rather than mutually exclusive categories, capturing dominant behavioural orientations and configurations of human capital mobilisation observed across cases. Individual interim managers may therefore display behaviours associated with more than one type depending on the context of the assignment.

4.1 The Realiser

Type I, referred to as *The Realiser* ($n = 5$; I02, I03, I10, I14, I17), represents the most execution-oriented pattern of temporary managerial behaviour identified in our data. This type is distinguished by a pragmatic, structured approach to work, characterised by a strong focus on implementation, procedural discipline, and a pronounced sense of operational ownership. Its behaviour reflects a clear orientation toward operational management and the exercise of comprehensive executive authority, ensuring that strategic objectives are swiftly translated into concrete outcomes. *Realiser*s describe themselves as decisive, outcome-driven leaders who turn strategic intent into tangible results through structure, focus, and disciplined execution. As one interviewee noted, "you should be very disciplined and process-oriented" (I10, 74).

The Realiser's work is centred on operational management, ensuring that strategic objectives are effectively translated into practice and executed across organisational levels. They frequently refer to data analysis, plan realisation, and coordination as essential components of their daily work. One manager described this process suc-

cinctly: "I need to create restructuring concepts, setting priorities, measures, through to implementation monitoring and actual implementation" (I14, 22). These executives perceive themselves as accountable for defining actions, developing planning and reporting tools, and coordinating implementation across different organisational levels. Their leadership involves establishing clear structures, maintaining oversight, and enforcing accountability mechanisms, often supported by strong team formation and direct engagement with both internal and external stakeholders. For *The Realiser*, progress is defined not by planning itself but by the visible completion of results and milestones.

Decision-making among *Realiser*s is marked by comprehensive executive authority, a strong sense of ownership, and consistent reliance on data-informed judgment: "If necessary, I will use my authority and make a decision" (I14, 82). Interviewees primarily rely on verbal data collected at the management level, complemented by numerical information and input from external stakeholders. This suggests their preference for direct information exchange and data triangulation to ensure robust conclusions. Across interviews, *Realiser*s emphasised their financially grounded orientation and described themselves as holding full decision-making power once objectives were set. This autonomy is viewed not as hierarchical dominance but as a prerequisite for maintaining pace and accountability in critical assignments. This was illustrated by one participant who remarked, "at a certain point, I need a very clear, even authoritarian leadership style" (I14, 82). Such statements underscore their conviction that clarity, decisiveness, and control are essential to guide teams effectively under high-pressure conditions.

The Realiser's proficiency is defined by professional and methodological mastery, combining extensive experience with disciplined analytical control. Participants highlighted their professional background and well-developed analytical skills as the foundation of their credibility and effectiveness. Their methodological strengths are evident in their goal orientation and reaction time, which enable them to analyse complex data, make informed decisions, and sustain momentum during implementation. As one interviewee explained, "the core skills are actually analysis. How do I interpret data, even if it is more complex" (I14, 80). Another emphasised the extraordinary tempo at which *Realiser*s operate: "I'm working at a very fast pace that most people can't do" (I17, 40). This blend of analytical precision and executional speed allows them to deliver results under extreme time constraints. Their mastery also manifests in a balance of precision and pragmatism, characterised by a pragmatic, evidence-based, results-oriented approach focused on efficiency, clarity, and measurable outcomes. For *Realiser*s, speed is not haste but structured responsiveness, enabling rapid adaptation while maintaining accuracy. As one manager summarised, "it's turnaround, it's got to go fast" (I02, 100). This captures *The Realiser*'s defining mindset—combining depth, discipline, and an unwavering drive for rapid yet precise execution.

Overall, *The Realiser* embodies a disciplined, results-driven temporary executive whose strength lies in transforming strategic direction into operational reality through decisive execution and structured control. Guided by a financially grounded, data-informed logic and supported by strong personal resilience, they maintain momentum and stability even under extreme pressure (Pinkwart et al. 2022). In cri-

sis and turnaround contexts, this combination of precision, drive, and composure seems to enable them to deliver results with exceptional consistency. Taken together, *The Realiser*'s effectiveness is grounded in a configuration of human capital that combines analytical expertise, executional capability, and experiential knowledge, enabling rapid translation of strategic intent into operational action under crisis conditions.

4.2 The Decider

Type II—*The Decider* ($n = 7$; I01, I04, I12, I15, I16, I18, I19) represents a visionary, strategically oriented form of temporary managerial behaviour. In contrast to *The Realiser*'s executional rigour, *The Decider* embodies visionary and cultural leadership combined with decisive management and strategic alignment. This type is characterised by a strong focus on strategic transformation, decisive action, and a firmly anchored ethical compass. Operating on a meta-level, *Decider*s define and shape the organisation's future direction, translating strategic intent into cohesive structures and shared behaviours. Their leadership balances authority and inclusion, ensuring that decisions are grounded in purpose and ethics and aligned across organisational layers.

The Decider's core tasks centre on leadership, communication, and the shaping of vision and strategy. Their work reflects integrative and long-term thinking, connecting short-term interventions with sustainable organisational renewal. They view leadership as a communicative, value-based process—anchored in transparency, dialogue, and credibility—through which trust is built, and direction is established, e.g. "So you have to talk to people realistically about the progress you're making, things that you're doing, why you're doing them to salvage the business. And if you're reasonably open with people and you are, they want to see you as being authentic" (I19, 43). Another interviewee stated, "I always start by interviewing as many employees as possible—because you tend to find that the board doesn't actually give you the real story of what's going on" (I15, 24). This assertion reflects their belief that meaningful change begins with understanding the organisation's cultural and relational fabric. Through transparency measures, dialogue, and performance monitoring, *Decider*s provide stability while articulating a shared vision for renewal. In doing so, they help organisations regain orientation during moments of strategic drift, take decisive action where others hesitate, and uphold principles that sustain trust and alignment.

Their decision-making patterns reveal an adaptive, participatory style that contrasts with The *Realiser*'s autonomous, executional logic. *Decider*s emphasise contextual learning and stakeholder inclusion: "You cannot make decisions until you do not learn the environment and the people" (I04, 56). They prefer to rely on verbal data collection at the employee level, reflecting a deep interest in cultural and relational dynamics. Rather than exercising unilateral authority, *Decider*s operate within shared decision-making structures, "decisions are made collectively, typically in the senior management team" (I16, 38). They act in accordance with the board—"you can provide basis for decision, arguments, recommendations, analysis, pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages, experience, examples, illustrations,

but ultimately the decision stands with the board (I19, 83)"—while promoting co-creation and dialogue, "I don't want to tell people what to do. I want them to come up with ideas, to discuss them, to evaluate them interactively, then to implement them together" (I04, 168). This collaborative logic ensures that decisions are not only rational but also socially embedded, fostering ownership and commitment throughout the organisation.

The Decider's proficiency is grounded in multifaceted expertise that combines strategic, communicative, and moral dimensions. Methodologically, interviewees report strong goal orientation: "Normally the main goal is to make this company successful. [...] that lies at the heart of every company's goals." (I12, 22), integrating them within advanced communication skills: "Having a bigger plan for the company and a bigger plan starts always with questions and investigations" (I12, 26). Furthermore, *Deciders* report using media tools and Artificial Intelligence more frequently, underscoring their advanced media skills: "I use it [AI] every day for a wide variety of challenges" (I16, 55). Socially, they rely on leadership competence—"awaking their own motivation and giving them the purpose" (I12, 52)—active listening, and the ability to earn trust. One manager illustrated this dynamic metaphorically: "It's like having a piggy bank. Every time you put confidence in, you put a coin in. But if you lose character, you can just smash the piggy bank because you have to start from zero" (I18, 103). Personally, *Decider*s exhibit integrity, fairness, and moral intention—"awakening their own motivation and giving them the purpose. Allowing them to develop themselves in combination with the company" (I12, 52)—allowing employees to connect performance management with human development and to anchor leadership in authenticity and trust. Further, managers emphasise that creativity is quite essential: "You should never assume that you have seen everything and that you have a toolbox. You can't just follow a set pattern" (I01, 64). In essence, *The Decider* acts as a visionary strategist and cultural integrator, a leader who combines moral clarity with strategic acumen. They stabilise through communication, lead through conviction, and decide through collective reasoning. Their human capital unites comprehensive insight, adaptability, and ethical leadership, enabling them to guide organisations through transformation with both authority and empathy.

4.3 The Advisor

Among the three types identified, *The Advisor* ($n = 8$; I05, I06, I07, I08, I09, I11, I13, I20) stands out through a relational and facilitative approach to temporary managerial work. Rather than focusing on execution or strategic design, this type operates through communication and decision management, assuming an observational and social mediation role that bridges people and perspectives. *Advisor*s position themselves at the organisational interface, interpreting, translating, and connecting stakeholders across different levels. Their legitimacy stems not from authority but from trust, discretion, and their ability to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics. One interviewee described his role as "a trusted Advisor who cares" (I09, 74), while another one highlights himself "as a listener, Advisor, and coordinator" (I08, 76)—embodying *The Advisor*'s empathy and composure in turbulent contexts while

ensuring that dialogue and collaboration remain intact when structures are under pressure.

In the organisational practice of interim assignments, *The Advisor*'s core tasks centre on communication, decision preparation, internal reporting, management coaching, and negotiation with employees and interest representatives. Their everyday work is defined by attentive listening and translating differing viewpoints into shared understanding. *Advisor*s describe in detail that they prepare decision alternatives, clarify responsibilities, and ensure that the rationale behind actions is transparent to all parties involved. They also serve as reflective partners for management teams, providing guidance that helps balance emotional, social, and operational demands. As one expert reflected, "My role is to help people to go across such a big trauma, a big crisis, and to be able to recover after this crisis. That's frankly my social mission" (I20, 120). Through such engagement, their role extends beyond coordination to encompass human restoration and the rebuilding of collective confidence and meaning within the organisation.

Their decision-making patterns are shaped by numerical and verbal data collection with external parties, and by observation, combined with socially based decision-making in contexts in which they often possess no formal decision-making authority. One manager explained, "You can provide a basis for decision, arguments, recommendations, analysis, pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages, experience, examples, illustrations, but ultimately the decision stands with the board" (I09, 83). This statement captures *The Advisor*'s role as an enabler rather than a decision-maker—someone who creates clarity, prepares alternatives, and ensures well-informed choices. *Advisor*s base their contributions on empirical understanding but interpret data through the lens of human behaviour. As one participant remarked, "let's do it [...] the most human and logical and reasonable way. We're not dealing with numbers. We're dealing with people" (I09, 42), expressing the conviction that organisational renewal depends on empathy as much as analysis. Because they frequently lack formal authority, *Advisor*s rely on persuasion, consultation, and emotional intelligence to shape outcomes indirectly. They report transforming observations into guidance, using evidence and dialogue to help others make responsible, well-informed decisions.

The Advisor's proficiency can be described as social and personal excellence. Social proficiency includes integrated leadership skills and active listening, e.g., "don't tell them [...] it will be all right. Just listen to them" (I20, 41), while moral compass, integrity, empathy, objectivity, and self-awareness are cited as personal proficiency. These qualities define their credibility and stabilising effect. One interviewee stated, "one asset you want to keep [is the organisation's] reputation" (I09, 52). This observation captures their sensitivity to trust and integrity as central organisational assets. *Advisor*s describe approaching conflict and uncertainty with composure and fairness, promoting understanding rather than escalation. Their ability to empathise—"I believe the trick is to allow employees to retain a certain sense of honour (I07, 30)"—without losing objectivity seems to enable them to act as both confidants and catalysts, helping others regain balance and confidence during critical phases of transition.

Taken together, *The Advisor* embodies a mediator's logic, translating observation into understanding and communication into alignment. Their human capital is relational rather than positional, grounded in social and personal excellence that transforms empathy and insight into a stabilising influence. By fostering trust, moral awareness, and collective reflection, *The Advisor* seems to restore coherence and resilience within organisations navigating uncertainty and crisis.

4.4 From Retrenchment to Recovery: Mapping Interim Manager Types Across Temporal Dynamics

Beyond typological differentiation among interim managers, a temporal pattern emerged, linking the identified types to distinct dynamics of turnaround processes. This temporal perspective builds on interim managers' retrospective accounts across multiple crisis and turnaround assignments and identifies recurring analytical patterns that link managerial roles to different phases of organisational crises. The three identified types of temporary managers can be further differentiated when viewed through the temporal lens of organisational turnaround processes using the two-phase model developed by Robbins and Pearce (1992). When examining the duration, scope, and timing of assignments across cases, recurring patterns emerged that suggest a systematic association between the types and the turnaround phases of retrenchment and recovery.

The Realiser, typically engaged for comparatively short periods ranging from three to nine months, most frequently appears in the retrenchment phase. In this early and often critical stage, temporary actors are brought in to ensure liquidity, restore operational control, and stabilise immediate performance. As one interviewee explained, "to maintain liquidity and then to implement all the operational measures associated with it" (I14, 18), highlighting *The Realiser*'s focus on securing short-term survival through decisive and execution-oriented interventions. This pattern supports the interpretation that *The Realiser* acts as a crisis stabiliser—providing the methodological discipline, operational precision, and process control necessary for the retrenchment phase.

In contrast, *The Decider* and *The Advisor* are more frequently engaged for extended mandates, often lasting more than one year, and spanning both retrenchment and recovery. These types operate in more complex organisational contexts where stabilisation has already begun or is being carried forward in parallel with strategic renewal efforts. *The Decider*, for example, is often associated with defining or refining the strategic trajectory once the immediate crisis has been contained. One participant emphasised the importance of "having a bigger plan for the company" (I12, 26), indicating a shift from operational problem-solving to long-term direction setting. The same interviewee further noted that "it doesn't matter if a company can exist in six or twelve months, but if you don't know whether it can be successful in five years, then it's not worthwhile to spend attention and energy on it" (I12, 78). An *Advisor* expressed a comparable long-term orientation when describing the importance of organisational capability building, noting that managers must "in the long term, make sure that you have the right people with the right skills and the right job at the right time" (I06, 125). This statement illustrates the forward-look-

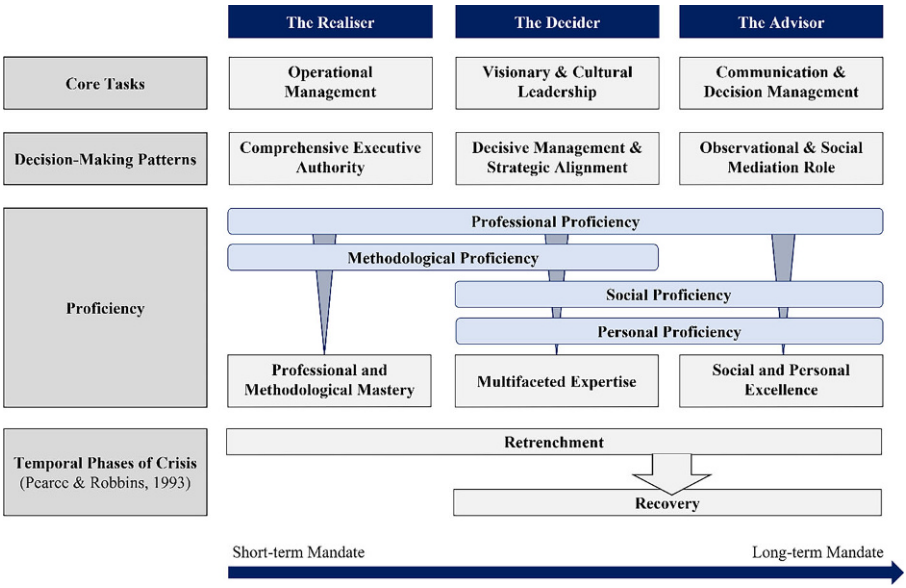

Fig. 2 Summary of Typology of Interim Management across Crisis Phases

ing orientation that characterises both *The Decider* and *The Advisor*, linking their leadership logic to the recovery phase.

From a comparative perspective, these findings suggest a sequential complementarity among the three types. *The Realiser* plays a critical role during the initial retrenchment, driving operational and financial stabilisation through methodological rigour and short-term implementation. *The Decider* and *The Advisor* then extend the turnaround process into recovery by integrating strategic foresight, relational coordination, and human capital renewal. This temporal distribution provides valuable insight into which type of interim manager is most effective at specific phases of the turnaround cycle and within particular organisational contexts.

Figure 2 synthesises the findings from Sections 4.1 to 4.4 by illustrating the three interim manager types and situates them within the broader context of the temporal phases of crisis—retrenchment and recovery. The descriptive labels shown in Fig. 2 (e.g., "Visionary and Cultural Leadership") are author-derived interpretive summary terms that synthesise the recurring patterns identified in the analysis and discussed in the preceding results sections. Importantly, the assignment of types to turnaround phases is not based solely on mandate duration. Instead, it reflects the dominant task focus, decision-making logic, and human capital deployment reported by interviewees when describing their roles within crisis and turnaround contexts. As such, interim managers with longer or overlapping mandates may contribute to multiple phases over time while still exhibiting a dominant orientation associated with a single type.

5 Discussion

Management research has long emphasised the importance of temporary leadership and managerial decision-making in facilitating organisational change (Bruns 2014; Smid et al. 2006). Recent contributions further highlight the centrality of interim leadership in contexts of uncertainty, transformation, and decline (Fisher et al. 2024; Flatøy 2024; Woods et al. 2020; Mooney et al. 2017). Our findings build on this perspective and extend it by examining interim management within crisis and turnaround contexts as analytically distinct situations. Rather than treating crisis as an inherent feature of interim management, our study shows how crisis conditions fundamentally reshape how interim managers mobilise their human capital, enact decision-making, and assume leadership roles. While much of the existing literature highlights the potential risks associated with temporary leadership (Ballinger and Marcel 2010; Inkson et al. 2001)—such as lack of commitment or weak organisational embeddedness—other studies suggest that temporariness can be a source of organisational renewal, particularly through objectivity and action orientation (Browning and McNamee 2012). We advance this discussion by uncovering the distinct approaches temporary managers employ to restore organisational stability, profitability, and strategic direction during crises. This observation aligns with prior research linking executive temporariness to organisational adaptability and strategic renewal (Flatøy 2024). Through a detailed analysis of core tasks, decision-making patterns, and proficiency, we demonstrate how interim managers mobilise their human capital to navigate through organisational decline. This finding complements the growing evidence that leadership during retrenchment and recovery phases differs fundamentally in its cognitive, emotional, and behavioural demands (Rivera-Prieto et al. 2022; Van Iperen et al. 2025; Bodolica and Spraggon 2021). Through a comprehensive qualitative-empirical analysis of 20 temporary managers in crises, we derived a typology comprising three distinct types—*The Realiser, The Decider*, and *The Advisor*—each embodying different bundles of human capital. *The Realiser* combines operational management capabilities with comprehensive executive authority and a pronounced level of professional and methodological mastery. *The Decider*, in contrast, is characterised by visionary, culturally attuned leadership, decisive management, and strategic alignment, supported by multifaceted expertise. *The Advisor* embodies a communication- and coaching-oriented logic, integrating social mediation and personal excellence to sustain collaboration and trust in periods of instability.

Overall, these types highlight that temporary managers do not form a homogeneous group. Rather than representing fixed types, the three categories capture dominant behavioural orientations and configurations of human capital mobilisation that interim managers draw upon when navigating crisis situations. Individual interim managers may therefore display behaviours associated with multiple types, although one orientation may dominate within a particular assignment. In this sense, interim managers enact plural leadership roles (Denis et al. 2012) by applying differentiated bundles of human capital to guide organisations through crises. This typological lens invites a reassessment of interim management beyond generic "change agent" per-

spectives (Jas 2013), highlighting the contextual, relational, and temporal diversity through which temporary leaders create value in crisis situations.

5.1 Implications for Theory and Practice

Two key theoretical contributions emerge from this research. On the one hand, we identify distinct configurations of interim managers' human capital that become visible in different combinations of core tasks, decision-making patterns, and proficiency profiles, particularly under high-pressure conditions such as crises. These bundles can be differentiated across the three analytical dimensions introduced above. Accordingly, our typology—*The Realiser, The Decider*, and *The Advisor*—captures distinct constellations of human capital that underpin temporary managerial effectiveness. This finding supports prior evidence that leadership effectiveness in crisis is contingent on the match between managerial cognition, social competence, and situational complexity (Bodolica and Spraggon 2021). By revealing the unique forms of human capital that interim managers contribute during crises, this typology provides a conceptual foundation for making these underlying configurations more transparent and comparable. In doing so, our work contributes to the literature by clarifying the different configurations of human capital that interim managers bring to crisis contexts. By identifying these configurations, the study offers insights that may inform future research on how organisations select and deploy interim managers. It also responds to the call by Fisher et al. (2024) for empirical investigations of interim managers' experiences in authentic organisational contexts, where qualitative approaches such as interviews can uncover the complex personal and social dimensions of temporary leadership. Moreover, it complements recent work by Budhwar et al. (2023), Malik and Sanders (2021), and Tabesh and Vera (2020), who highlight that managerial decision quality during a crisis hinges on the interaction between human capital, adaptive cognition, and contextual sensitivity. Through our analysis, we demonstrate how distinct types of interim managers navigate real-world crises by applying different decision-making logics and drawing on specific forms of human capital, thereby illustrating the mechanisms through which they operate and create value.

On the other hand, our study advances the literature by introducing a temporal dimension that connects the typology of interim managers to the phases of organisational crisis and turnaround. By linking the three types to the retrenchment and recovery phases, the study provides initial insights into the effective use of human capital bundles across crisis phases. This process-oriented perspective extends the work of Woods et al. (2020) on interim management effectiveness by showing that different interim manager types align with distinct temporal and strategic orientations. In doing so, our research integrates typological and temporal dimensions, offering a dynamic framework that deepens understanding of interim management effectiveness across retrenchment and recovery. Building on prior research on the temporal dynamics of organisational turnaround, this study extends the insights of Trahms et al. (2013) and Tangpong et al. (2015), who propose contingency-based models of retrenchment and recovery, while also resonating with findings by Schmitt and Raisch (2013) and Rico and Puig (2021), which emphasise that the

effectiveness of turnaround strategies depends on their sequencing and contextual alignment. Furthermore, it contributes to the discourse on managerial temporality (Bakker 2010) by illustrating how temporary leaders can exert sustainable strategic influence despite the transient nature of their roles.

Beyond theoretical implications, our study provides several practical contributions. From an organisational perspective, it provides actionable guidance through a typology of temporary managers—*The Realiser, The Decider*, and *The Advisor*—helping organisations better understand how different interim manager profiles may align with their strategic and temporal needs in crisis situations. Organisations facing acute crises benefit most from appointing *Realiser*s, who deliver rapid operational stabilisation and financial control. In contrast, medium- to long-term recovery requires *Decider*s and *Advisor*s, whose strengths lie in sustaining renewal, guiding strategy, and rebuilding organisational capability. In this sense, the typology offers a structured framework for aligning interim leadership profiles with the evolving demands of organisational crisis management.

By linking the three types of interim managers to the timeline of retrenchment and recovery, our findings also provide insight into how different interim manager profiles align with distinct organisational contexts. This perspective enables organisations to approach interim manager selection more strategically by highlighting how different interim manager types mobilise their human capital across crisis phases, responding to the research calls by Woods et al. (2020) and Mooney et al. (2017) for a deeper understanding of interim management practice.

From the perspective of temporary managers, our study provides value by illuminating their diverse human capital profiles and potential developmental gaps, thereby offering guidance on how they can enhance their effectiveness. By identifying specific areas for improvement—such as strengthening emotional intelligence and reflective communication—training and development needs become more transparent. Moreover, a clearer understanding of role-specific requirements and expectations enables interim managers to position themselves more strategically in the market and better meet client demands.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

It is essential to acknowledge several limitations of the current study, particularly those stemming from the research environment. Firstly, the classification of the different types is partly based on the subjective self-perception of the interviewed interim managers. While we made efforts to complement this categorisation with objective task, authority, and proficiency descriptions, inherent biases persist. In particular, qualitative data collection through interviews introduces the potential for distortion that cannot be eliminated but can be mitigated through various measures in data collection and analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994). A second limitation concerns the sample, which is European and focuses on German and British temporary managers. This geographic concentration may limit the generalisability of the findings to other contexts. At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge that the boundaries between the two types and their temporal dynamics may not be entirely absolute. In practice, considerable overlap occurs, which reflects the fluid nature of

organisational crises and the adaptive behaviour of interim managers. Certain managers may temporarily adopt behaviours or decision-making patterns characteristic of another type, depending on the specific demands of the situation or the evolving stage of the turnaround process. Likewise, the transition between retrenchment and recovery rarely unfolds in a linear sequence; instead, phases may intersect or recur. Consequently, not every interim manager can be unambiguously assigned to a single type or temporal stage. This overlap, however, should not be viewed as a weakness of the typology but as an inherent feature of dynamic organisational contexts, in which flexibility and situational adaptability are core components of managerial effectiveness. This view aligns with the argument of Tangpong et al. (2015) and Barker et al. (2001), who describe turnaround success as an iterative, nonlinear process of experimentation and adaptation.

Given these limitations, we encourage future research to investigate temporary management in crisis environments in greater depth. Examining the advantages and boundaries of the presented typology across different crisis types and causes represents a promising direction. Recent research by Stoiber et al. (2025) highlights that contextual moderators such as sectoral structure, ownership, and openness substantially shape turnaround dynamics — a point further reinforced by Rafferty (2025) and Forstner et al. (2025), suggesting that future studies should systematically examine how such contextual contingencies influence the effectiveness of interim management during crises. Future studies should also investigate organisation-specific contingencies in greater detail, identifying which interim manager types succeed under particular contextual and structural conditions. In addition, cross-cultural comparisons could provide valuable insights into how national business systems and leadership traditions shape the behaviour and effectiveness of temporary managers. Finally, we emphasise the importance of further research on the link between interim managers' involvement and the overall success of organisational crisis management, thereby advancing understanding of how temporary leadership contributes to organisational resilience and renewal.

6 Conclusion

This research enhances understanding of interim management effectiveness by integrating typological and temporal crisis dimensions, illustrating how different types of interim managers shape both organisational retrenchment and long-term recovery. Based on qualitative insights, we identify three distinct temporary manager types—*The Realiser, The Decider*, and *The Advisor*—each defined by distinct configurations of human capital that become visible across the three analytical dimensions identified in this study. Their differentiated core tasks, decision-making patterns, and proficiency profiles provide a nuanced framework for understanding the human capital that interim managers bring to the table in the context of crisis dynamics. The findings support temporary managers in recognising their human capital configurations and development needs, while helping organisations select targeted interim support during critical phases of transformation. By linking managers to their periods of highest activity, the study enables scholars and practitioners to better align

managerial selection with organisational needs, ensuring that the appropriate human capital is deployed at the right moment in a crisis.

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Author Contribution Both authors were involved in the study design and data collection, including conducting and transcribing the interviews. Svenja Hülter and Laura Packheiser jointly conducted the data analysis and collaboratively wrote and revised the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Availability of data and materials We did not use quantitative data. However, we have added a supplemental file containing additional data related to the first-order constructs of the analysis (see Table 3). We hope that this will provide more transparency for our methodical approach.

Declarations

Conflict of interest L.J. Packheiser and S.M. Pröpper declare that they have no competing interests.

Ethical standards Due to the specific nature of this study, approval from the ethics committees of the respective university was not required. Nonetheless, informed consent to participate was obtained from all participants prior to the commencement of the study. As all personal data were anonymised, no further consent for publication was necessary. Additionally, all participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, including the intention to publish the findings. By agreeing to take part, participants also provided their consent for publication.

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