



In India

A PULSATING GROWTH STORY

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From the
CBO's Desk

WHERE TALENT LEADS, TRANSFORMATION FOLLOWS: **THE RISE OF INDIA'S GCCs**

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In his book 'The Infinite Game,' author Simon Sinek writes, "The responsibility of business is not to drive profit. It is to advance something bigger, a just cause." That cause, in today's global economy, is no longer confined to markets or margins. It is centred around people, the talent that drives innovation, resilience, and reinvention in the face of relentless change.

Nowhere is this shift more visible than in India's Global Capability Centres (GCCs).

What began as an outsourcing experiment grounded in efficiency has now become a story of strategic transformation. India's GCCs are reshaping the global playbook. With over **1.9 million professionals** across **1700+ centres**, and a trajectory pointing towards **\$100+ billion in market value by 2030**, the narrative is no longer about support. It is about strategy, leadership, and scale.

And at the heart of it all is India's talent.

Recent data from the **Naukri JobSpeak Index** shows a 4% year-on-year growth in India's job market, with AI, data science, and machine learning roles leading the charge. Far from being reactive, GCCs in India are proactively reshaping their talent ecosystems, integrating emerging technologies and focusing on leadership development, inclusion, and adaptability.

Shalini Pillay, India Leader and Partner – GCC, Accenture, believes the sustainability of this transformation hinges on global sponsorship. "True global sponsorship, built on commitment, collaboration, and a shared vision, can make the difference between a thriving GCC and one that falters," she reflects. From ensuring leadership alignment to empowering local teams, her insights reveal what it truly takes to nurture a sustainable and future-ready GCC model.

As the landscape evolves, we are seeing a powerful decentralisation of opportunity. **Tier-II and Tier-III cities**—Coimbatore, Indore, and Ahmedabad are fast becoming new hubs for capability, talent, and innovation. This isn't just about geographic expansion; it is about creating access and embedding innovation closer to the grassroots of India's workforce.

Rajesh Bharatiya, CEO of Peoplefy, affirms this trend: "With saturation in Tier-I markets, companies are recognising the untapped potential of emerging cities. Talent in these regions is not only available, it is hungry to lead."

At the same time, leadership within GCCs is being reimaged to match the complexities of the global economy. The new era demands more than technical excellence; it calls for **adaptive, human-centred leaders** who can navigate ambiguity and build inclusive, responsive cultures.

Rency Mathew, MD and People Leader – South Asia, Sabre Bengaluru, shares: "Leadership is no longer reserved for the few at the top. With programmes like Sabre's Hyper Jump, we are accelerating readiness for new-age leaders—those who can think fast, act responsibly, and inspire with empathy."

As we explore the future of India's GCCs in this edition of **All Things Talent**, you will find rich insights from leaders across industries on the transformation of these centres, the broadening of their geographic footprint, and the elevation of talent as a strategic differentiator.

Ajay Anand, EY Global Vice Chair, GDS, adds: "We are not just supporting innovation, we are co-creating it. That requires embedding continuous learning, digital dexterity, and agile talent models into everything we do."

This moment in India's GCC journey is not a plateau, it is an inflection point. We are moving from capability to influence, from growth to stewardship. The GCCs of today are helping global enterprises become faster, more intelligent, and more human.

Indeed, the future is being built here. In India. Not just through technology or infrastructure, but through people, individuals who are learning faster, adapting better, and pushing boundaries that once seemed immovable.

Just as Sinek reminds us, **businesses that play the infinite game are not chasing success, they are building legacies**. And if talent is the currency of this era, India is emerging as its strongest bank of potential.

Let's explore the future together. Happy reading!

CONTENTS

Cover Story

06 |

2M Minds Transforming GCCs into Genius Centres



Special Feature

20 |

How Indian GCCs are Powering Global Strategy and Innovation



Niraj Seth, EVP – Go to Market and Business Analytics, Naukri.com

30 |

GCC Recruitment Trends for 2025: What HR Leaders Should Know



Janoo Motiani, CEO & Founder, Reed & Willow

Interview

13 |

How Are Indian GCCs Redefining Talent, Technology, and Transformation?



Ajay Anand, EY Global Vice-Chair, Global Delivery Services

17 |

Can Global Sponsorship Make or Break the Success of GCCs?



Shalini Pillay, Partner & India Leader - GCC, KPMG India

23 |

The Journey of Women Leaders in GCCs and Metro BSC's Mini CXO Program



Sreema Nallasivam, CEO, Metro BSC

27 |

Avalara's Strategy for Tapping into India's Growing Talent Pool



Anand Rao, Director- Talent Acquisition, Avalara

33 |

How Lowe's India is Redefining the GCC Culture



Vidya Munirathnam, VP- HR, Lowe's India

37 |

The Infrastructure Imperative: Can GCCs Thrive in India's Emerging Cities?



Rajesh Bharatiya, CEO, Peoplefy

Interview

44 |

The Rise of Smart GCCs in India



Seema Unni, Head of Human Resources at Fidelity Investments India

50 |

Sabre's Bold Talent Moves Powering India's GCC Evolution



Rency Mathew, People Leader - India and South Asia, and MD, Sabre Bengaluru

Special Feature

41 |

Infra.Market's Formula for Growth and Talent Excellence



Sheetal Bhanot Shetty, CHRO, Infra.Market

57 |

Bold Truths Behind Women's Success in Tech



Featuring:
Maheswari Sekhar, Markets Leader at EY Global Delivery Services
Roshini Nayar, Principal Structural Engineer, SBM Offshore India
Anita Domańska, IT Delivery Manager & Deputy of Business Unit Director & Coach at R Systems
Sree Niranjanaa Bose, Technical Lead - Healthcare, Bosch Global Software Technologies

53 |

What Makes People Stay at Finastra?



Raja Vasudevan, Global Head, Talent Acquisition & Head of India, People & Communications, Finastra

62 |

GCCs Beyond Metros: How Model N is Redefining Work Culture?



Gunjandeep Kaur, Director – HRBP, Model N

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Coverstory

INDIA'S \$100B INNOVATION ENGINE: 2 MILLION MINDS TRANSFORMING GCCs INTO GENIUS CENTRES

In the quiet hum of a Bengaluru workspace, a team of engineers fine-tunes an AI algorithm that will soon predict supply chain disruptions for a global retail giant. Meanwhile, in Hyderabad, data scientists design a cybersecurity framework to protect millions of digital transactions worldwide. These breakthroughs are not happening in Silicon Valley or Tokyo, they are unfolding within India's **Genius Centres**, more popularly known as 'Global Capability Centres.'

Once viewed as back-office support units, India's **Global Capability Centres (GCCs)** have undergone a remarkable transformation. No longer confined to routine tasks, they are now innovation hubs that drive strategy, design products, and solve global business challenges. In fact, **75% of GCCs in India now focus on next-gen technologies** such as AI, ML, cloud, and cybersecurity—with nearly **45% developing proprietary platforms or intellectual property** over the last two years.

Recent headlines further validate this momentum. RTX Corp, for instance, announced plans to hire 1,000 additional employees in India by 2027 – a 14% boost to its local presence. This expansion includes engineering roles at Pratt & Whitney and Collins Aerospace, underlining India's strategic talent advantage. Meanwhile, Carl Zeiss AG launched its first Global Capability Centre in Bengaluru, focused on cloud, cybersecurity, and network operations, with intentions to double its Indian workforce within three years. These developments reinforce India's positioning as the go-to hub for high-value, innovation-led capabilities.

The real question is not, 'What can India deliver?' but 'What can India invent?'

India's journey with GCCs began with modest roots. In the early 2000s, these centres were primarily seen as back-office support hubs, handling IT services, payroll, and data entry. But as digital transformation accelerated, global corporations discovered something remarkable – India's talent pool was not just efficient but also innovative.

From Operators to Orchestrators



India's GCCs By the Numbers



1700+

INDIA'S GCC LANDSCAPE HAS SURGED
TO INCLUDE OVER 1,700 CENTRES



\$64.6 BILLION

ANNUAL REVENUE GENERATED BY INDIA'S
GCC ECOSYSTEM IN FY2024



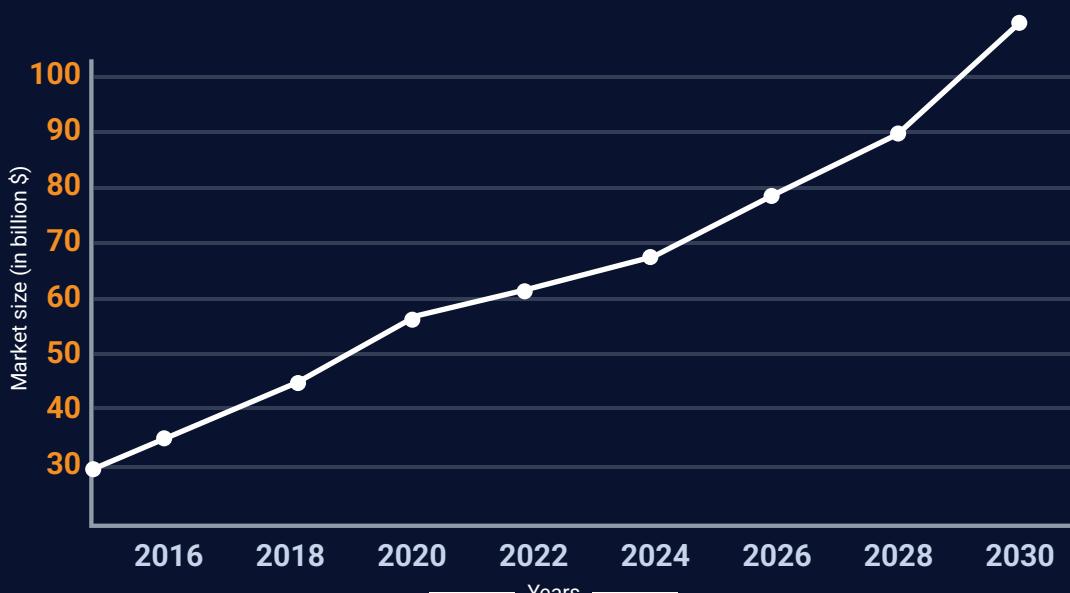
1.9 MILLION

DIRECTLY EMPLOYING OVER ACROSS A
DIVERSE ARRAY OF FUNCTIONS, FROM
NEXT-GEN TECH INNOVATION TO R&D

India's GCC ecosystem has surged from **\$30 billion in 2015** to a projected **\$105 billion by 2030**. The CAGR of GCCs from 2019 to 2023 was 11%, while that from 2023 to 2030 is projected to reach 14%. According to the reports by Nasscom, the GCC market in India is anticipated to beat \$100 billion by 2030 and to reach around \$110 billion.

Source: Nasscom

Growth of India's GCC Market (2015-2030)



India's GCC market size is projected to reach around \$110 billion

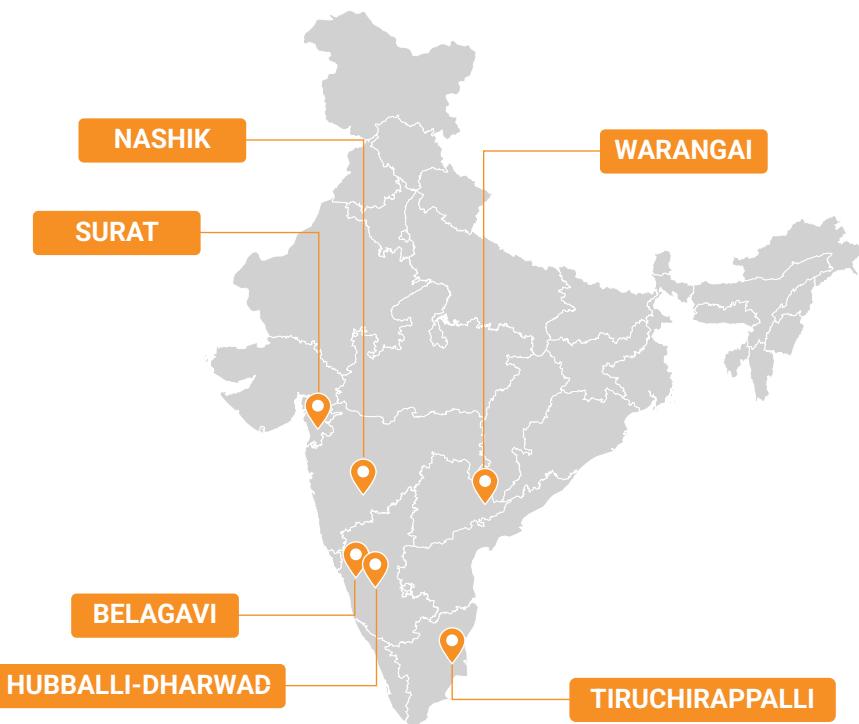
Emerging Tier-II Cities

The Tier-II and Emerging cities, which housed over 170 GCC units in FY 2021, have experienced a **CAGR of 11%**, matching the growth rate of Tier-I cities (Blr, Mum, Hyd) and now accommodate more than 215 units. The talent pool within the GCC sector in the emerging Tier-II locations has surged at a CAGR of 13%, rising from **56K+ to 71K+**. The Tier-II & Emerging Cities boast an impressive average talent pool exceeding **240K**, with senior leadership roles comprising more than **28%** of this demographic.

- Ahmedabad, Coimbatore, Kolkata and Thiruvananthapuram account for around 50% of the GCC units situated in India's 10 Tier-II cities
- Surat, Nashik, Belagavi, Hubballi-Dharwad, Warangal, Tiruchirappalli are the hot favourites as emerging cities.

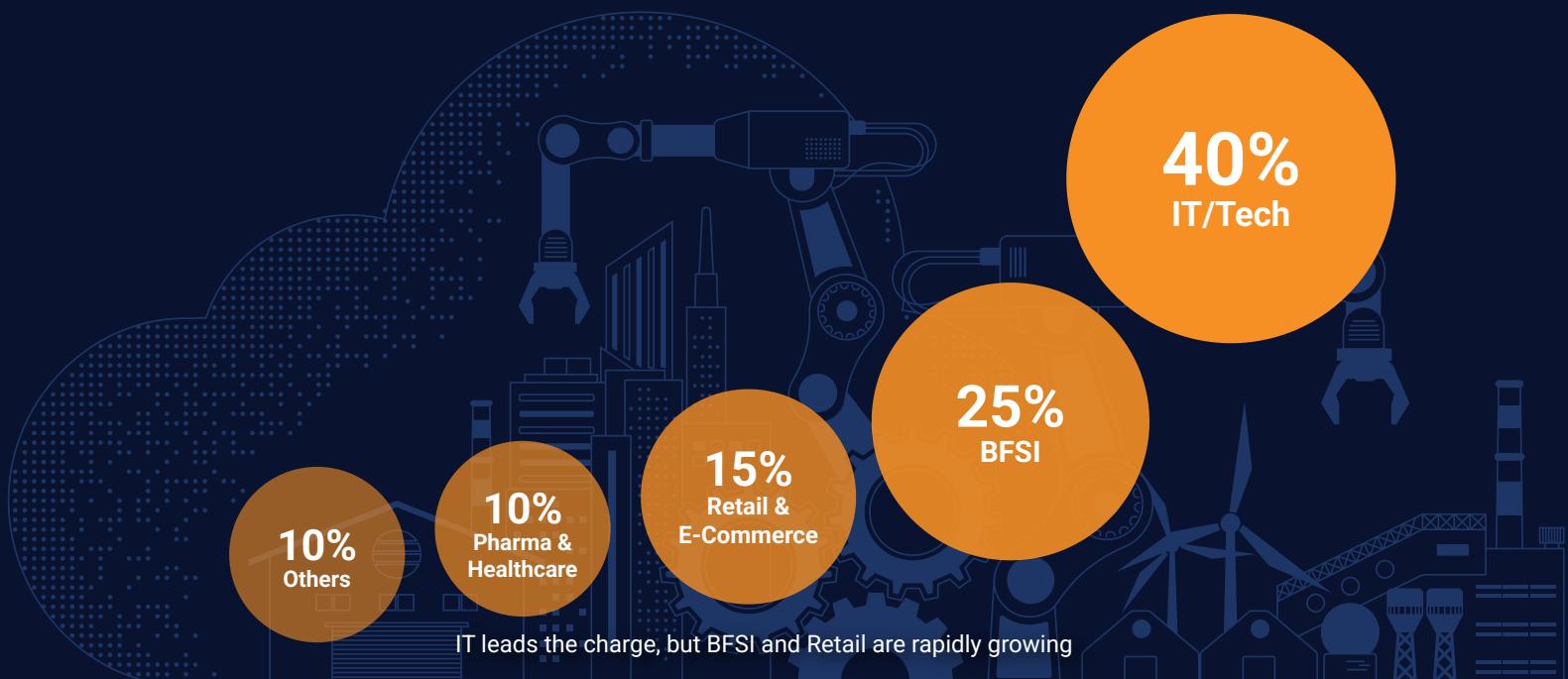
Source: Zinnov

6 Emerging Cities for GCCs in India



Note: Map not to scale

Industry-wise Distribution of GCCs in India



India's Talent Pool: The Secret Weapon of Indian GCCs

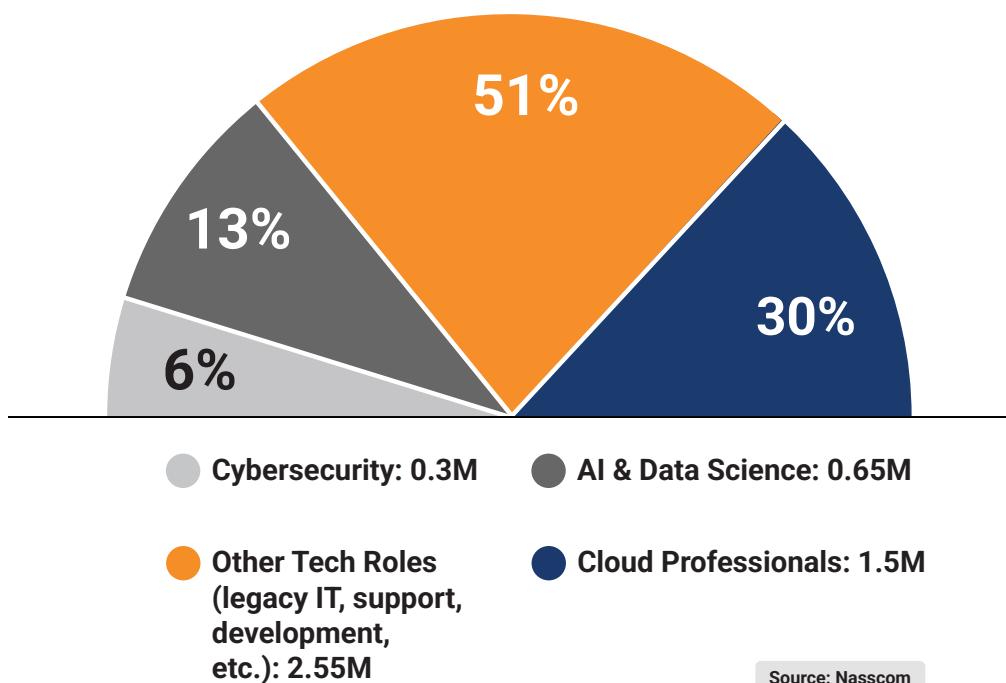
India's rise as the world's innovation hub is powered by its unmatched talent advantage. With over **5 million tech professionals**, India surpasses global hubs like the USA (4.4 million) and Europe (3.2 million).

But beyond sheer numbers, India's talent ecosystem offers something critical – a rich blend of **technical expertise, creative thinking, and problem-solving skills**.

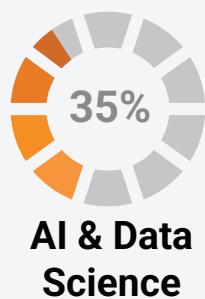
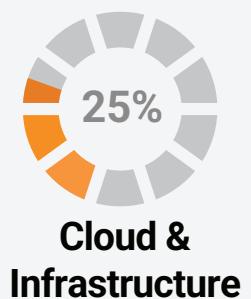
Leading GCCs are now investing heavily in talent trained in:

- AI & Data Science
- Cloud & Infrastructure
- Cybersecurity
- Sustainability Solutions

India's 5 Million Tech Talent Distribution (2024–2025)



Skill Distribution in GCCs in India



The GCCs in India are actively building niche skill clusters to enhance their innovation capabilities. This skill mix empowers them to build robust AI models, enhance cloud security, and innovate seamless customer engagement platforms.

Strategic Leadership Shifts: When India Leads the Table

The shift from **support centres** to **leadership hubs** is evident in how major global firms are empowering Indian GCC leaders with strategic responsibilities. Several Fortune 500 firms now have their **Global Heads of Data, Chief Innovation**

Officers, and even **CTOs** operating from Indian Genius Centres.

The number of global leadership roles within Indian GCCs has experienced significant growth, escalating from approximately 115 positions in 2015 to a projected 30,000 by 2030, according to Nasscom and Zinnov. These roles encompass critical areas such as engineering, operations, and finance,

highlighting the strategic importance of Indian centres in global operations.

Accenture's elevation of **Bhaskar Ghosh** as **Chief Strategy Officer**, **Senthil Ramani** as **Global Lead for Data & AI**, along with **IBM's appointment of Sudheesh Kairali to lead its Data and AI team from Kochi**, cements the building trust in Indian leaders' capability to spearhead critical technological advancements. Similar appointments at SAP, **Goldman Sachs** further highlight India's rising influence on the global stage.

Women Leaders at the Forefront of GCCs in India



**LALITHA
INDRAKANTI**

CEO, Jaguar Land Rover Technology & Business Services India



**SIRISHA
VORUGANTI**

CEO and Managing Director, Lloyds Technology Centre India



**UMA RATNAM
KRISHNAN**

Managing Director, Optum Global Solutions (India)



**MAMATHA
MADIREDDY**

Managing Director and Head, HSBC Global Service Centres India



**KALAVATHI
G.V.**

Executive Director and Head, Siemens Healthineers Development Centre India



**ANUPRITA D.
BHATTACHARYA**

Head, Merck IT Centre (MITC), India



**SREEMA
NALLASIVAM**

CEO, Metro Business Solution Center



**SINDHU
GANGADHARAN**

Senior Vice President and Managing Director, SAP Labs India; Chairperson, NASSCOM.



**DEBJANI
GHOSH**

Former President, NASSCOM; Distinguished Fellow, NITI Aayog

The Road Ahead: A Future Driven by Decision-Making

GCCs in India have reshaped the country's corporate landscape, shifting its global perception from a cost-saving destination to a hub of innovation and strategic value. By leveraging a skilled workforce, technolo-

logical expertise, and supportive policies, GCCs have fueled economic growth, job creation, and regional development. With continued innovation, collaboration, and investment, GCCs are poised to drive sustainable growth and propel India toward its US\$ 5 trillion economy goal.

As the lines between back-end support and front-end innovation blur, India's Genius Centres are proving one thing: when talent, technology, and ambition align, **India does not just deliver; it redefines**.

Crunching the Numbers

1,700+

Total Number of GCCs (FY2024)

1.9 million+

Total Installed GCC Talent (FY2024)

US \$64.6 billion

Annual Revenue of GCCs (FY2024)

2,975+

Total Number of GCC Units (FY2024)

82,000+

Total Installed GCC Talent in Tier-II and Tier-III Cities

US \$36.4 billion

GCC Revenue — ER&D (FY2024)

~4.6%

CAGR of Number of GCCs (FY2019–FY2024)

~6.3%

CAGR of Total Installed GCC Talent (FY2019–FY2024)

~9.8%

CAGR of GCC Revenue (FY2019–FY2024)

All figures pertain to Global Capability Centers (GCCs) operating in India.

Source: Zinnov

Interview

AJAY ANAND

BY MAMTA SHARMA

HOW ARE GLOBAL CAPABILITY CENTRES REDEFINING TALENT, TECHNOLOGY, AND TRANSFORMATION? AJAY ANAND, EY GLOBAL VICE-CHAIR, ANSWERS

GET TO KNOW...

AJAY ANAND

EY Global Vice Chair, Global Delivery Services

Ajay Anand, as Global Vice Chair of EY Global Delivery Services (GDS), is a driving force behind the growth and innovation at GDS, leading a diverse and talented team of over 74,000 professionals worldwide. His journey with EY began in 2003, and since then, he has immersed himself in various service lines and regions, including the US, EMEA and LATAM.



Global Capability Centres (GCCs) are undergoing a seismic transformation, evolving from cost centres to strategic innovation hubs that drive business resilience, sustainability, and digital transformation. In this exclusive interview with **All Things Talent, Ajay Anand, EY Global Vice Chair, Global Delivery Services**, shares insights into how GCCs are navigating global disruptions, embracing emerging technologies like generative AI and cloud solutions, and addressing talent challenges in areas like AI, data science, and cybersecurity.

From their pivotal role in advancing ESG objectives to scaling capabilities for global strategy alignment, the leader highlights how GCCs are reshaping the enterprise landscape, becoming indispensable partners in fostering innovation, creating value, and building a sustainable future.

How have GCCs evolved in recent years, particularly in response to global disruptions like the pandemic and geopolitical shifts?

Global Capability Centres (GCCs) have evolved into key drivers of transformation, central to enterprise strategy, resilience, and innovation. Once valued primarily for cost efficiency, they now shape global business ecosystems. Recent global disruptions have underscored their importance as they swiftly adopted flexible operational models, expanded remote work capabilities, and advanced digital transformation to enable uninterrupted business operations. The operational philosophies are evolving, leading to tighter integration between the enterprise and GCCs with a common definition of success. This adaptability has solidified their reputation as reliable partners across geographies and industries. Furthermore, mature GCCs are moving up

the value chain, becoming transformers and integrators, which leads to an evolution from delivery hubs to end-to-end ownership that contributes to revenue and growth. For example, EY GDS is already ahead in this journey, as evidenced by the multiple global roles housed within the organisation.

Geopolitical developments have further highlighted India as a strategic hub for GCCs due to its skilled talent pool, robust digital infrastructure, and supportive policies. GCCs have progressed from operational support roles to innovation leadership, pioneering advancements in AI, automation, and advanced analytics, and contributing as strategic partners in the global value chain. Beyond operational efficiency, they are integral to building adaptive technology-driven ecosystems, spearheading R&D initiatives, and co-creating value-driven solutions. Additionally, GCCs are strategically diversifying their location portfolio across the globe to mitigate risks amid global uncertainty.

How are GCCs evolving from being cost centres to innovation hubs and leveraging emerging technologies like generative AI, automation, and cloud solutions to drive transformation?

As we navigate this transformative age, characterised by the need for rapid value creation, tech-enabled service delivery has become paramount. GCCs are at the forefront, merging technological advancements with strategic mandates and a focus on innovation. This evolution is fueled by the unique advantages GCCs offer, such as economies of scale, access to diverse scenarios, data, market needs and high-quality talent, along with the ability to tailor global offerings to diverse market needs.

GCCs are investing significantly in upskilling and transformation to maintain their competitive edge, creating value for clients and employees alike. By blending technology with human ingenuity, they are driving innovation and shaping a future where progress and value creation go hand in hand.

At EY, GDS is leading innovation in partnership with our Global EY Service Line teams. Our commitment to leveraging technological advancements is about setting the pace, not just keeping up.

AI is transforming business across EY's service lines, and by mastering AI, quantum computing, and automation capabilities, we're enhancing our service delivery and empowering our people to engage in more meaningful work.

How are GCCs addressing the growing competition for skilled talent, especially in areas like AI, data science, and cybersecurity? What innovative approaches are they adopting for talent retention and upskilling? With the growing need for specialised talent, how do you see GCCs addressing the challenges of skill shortages while staying competitive globally?

GCCs have transformed talent strategy into a competitive advantage. The rising demand for expertise in AI, data science and cybersecurity has driven a shift toward proactive talent management. To bridge skill gaps, GCCs are investing in partnerships with academic institutions and ed-tech platforms, building robust talent pipelines.

Future-proofing the workforce hinges on

fostering an agile mindset, embedding continuous learning into the culture and building resilience to navigate uncertainty. Skills in AI integration, digital transformation, and cross-functional collaboration will complement creativity and critical thinking as key drivers of sustained success.

At EY GDS, we have learning and skilling programs designed to help our people stay ahead of business and market trends. Gamified learning modules engage employees in skill acquisition aligned with business goals. Our retention strategies focus on holistic employee value propositions, prioritising career growth, well-being, engagement and flexibility. Initiatives like hackathons, innovation challenges and rotational global assignments not only nurture talent but also embed a culture of innovation and purpose.

Such an approach enables GCCs to remain magnets for top-tier talent, simultaneously addressing skill shortages and fortifying their competitive edge on a global stage.

For example, EY Badges is our signature digital recognition program, which allows professionals to acquire skills in diverse areas such as data visualization, data science, AI, leadership, and inclusivity.

A couple of numbers on AI-related badges in FY24:

- Number of employees who have completed the AI Now Training - **62,157**
- Number of employees who have been awarded AI Badges - **25,163**
- Number of Tech MBAs who completed the training - **55**

Such commitment to upskilling not only empowers professionals but also positions GCCs as hubs of innovation and future-ready talent in an ever-evolving global landscape.

How are GCCs adapting to meet

the rising focus on sustainability and ESG objectives, and what are the key trends you foresee in this space?

GCCs are increasingly providing strong support to parent companies to advance ESG initiatives and move from "narrative to numbers." GCCs have primarily focused on reporting, disclosures, and regulatory compliance (a 2023 EY report found that 47% of GCCs were actively involved in supporting global sustainability and integrated reporting, a significant increase from 17% in 2021). However, the remit is expanding, and they are now integrated into almost every part of the business value chain from the level of plants/factories manufacturing products/services to the corporate performance KPIs. They are playing an important role as co-pilots to initiate the transformation agenda through a sustainability lens.

With a rising number of ESG regulations, reporting frameworks and standards globally, there is massive responsibility on global organisations to be compliant at the very least and go beyond regulations to transform their legacy business and accelerate their decarbonisation journey – in essence making them responsible corporate citizens. GCCs, by their global nature and spread, as well as the access they have, are indeed primed to be at the centre of driving this agenda for the organisation.

At EY, we are increasingly being approached by GCCs and parent companies seeking our expertise in ESG reporting, improving ESG performance, developing decarbonisation roadmaps, assessing climate risks, sustainable procurement and conducting product lifecycle assessments, to name a few. With the core of sustainability at this point being reporting and data collection,

we see an increase in investment in technology that enables continuous improvement and acceleration of the decarbonisation journey and more importantly allows for trustability, traceability and assurance.

To sum up, this is a place of rapid evolution and tremendous opportunities for GCCs.

What does the future hold for GCCs in terms of scaling up capabilities, embracing emerging technologies, and contributing to the global strategies of clients?

The GCC operating model is transitioning from the traditional 'back-office' functions to a more unified 'one-office' approach. This shift is fuelled by an influx of digital talent, technological advancements, and the development of transformative leadership skills. The GCC industry is evolving beyond transactional processing, focusing on transformation, innovation, and knowledge-intensive capabilities. With a growing emphasis on ESG, AI, data science, and leadership, GCCs aim to become Global Value Organisations. Surveys show a ~36% increase in capability enhancement, with enterprise-level digital transformation as a top priority.

GCCs are advancing as Centres of Excellence (COEs) by leveraging emerging technologies for innovation, efficiency, and product development. Key focus areas include Data & Analytics, AI, cybersecurity, RPA and cloud adoption, all pivotal to digital transformation and delivering value across business functions while aligning with global enterprise policies.

Amid growing pressures to manage Selling, General, and Administrative (SG&A) expenses and secure niche talent, GCCs are driving enterprise-wide transformation. Once a strategy for high-revenue clients,

GCCs are now central even for smaller organisations due to cost efficiency and talent availability. This trend will accelerate with rising mergers and acquisitions, and spin-offs across sectors. The next wave of

Global Business Services (GBS) will unlock value by enhancing user experience, expanding services to include sales, marketing, and legal functions, and driving

digital innovation. GCCs are also solidifying their reputation as prime sources of top talent, further advancing their role in global enterprise strategies.



Interview

SHALINI PILLAY

BY MAMTA SHARMA

CAN GLOBAL SPONSORSHIP MAKE OR BREAK THE SUCCESS OF GCCS? SHALINI PILLAY ANSWERS

GET TO KNOW...

SHALINI PILLAY

Partner & India Leader - GCC,
KPMG India

Shalini Pillay leads the Global Capability Centres (GCCs) segment at KPMG in India, advising global organisations on optimising service delivery models and leveraging the GCC framework for growth. With over 30 years in business consulting, I specialise in strategic cost management, post-merger integration, and people advisory.



Despite the rising success of Global Capability Centres (GCCs) as innovation hubs and strategic growth engines, not all of them achieve their envisioned potential. Why?

According to **Shalini Pillay, Partner & India Leader - Global Capability Centres (GCC) at KPMG India**, the answer lies in one fundamental element: global sponsorship. In an exclusive conversation with **All Things Talent**, she sheds light on how true global sponsorship – built on commitment, collaboration, and a shared vision – can make the difference between a thriving GCC and one that falters. From ensuring leadership alignment to empowering local teams, her insights reveal what it truly takes to nurture a sustainable and future-ready GCC model.

How do you define global sponsorship, and why do you believe it's the linchpin for the growth trajectory of a GCC?

In my view, Global Sponsorship is the strong conviction that defines the underlying purpose and vision of establishing a GCC. This represents the global organisation's belief in the model and the benefits to be accrued there from and is hence the single most critical influencing factor which defines the future roadmap and trajectory for the GCC.

Some key considerations that I would like to highlight:

- Organisational and Functional Sponsorship can define the tone and tenor of the model:

The nuances between a model sponsored by the CEO v/s the CFO v/s the CIO v/s the COO/GBS head, are evident in the vision, scope, scale and also the operating model that gets defined. As GCCs aspire to become the deep capability hubs, the

technology nerve centres driving the global transformation for the organisation, this critically hinges on this element of sponsorship and hence empowerment.

- Beyond one individual leader, backed by the global leadership team: Equally important is the need for this to go beyond the vision, ambition and whim of one individual sponsor but needs the commitment and support of the entire global leadership and business leaders. We have also witnessed the GCC vision and purpose buckle under the change of a leader and a perfectly promising model, suddenly losing its future propelling force. The GCC can empower, transform and drive efficiency, unlocking value across the business value chain, but only if the custodians of that very value chain see the opportunity and potential.
- Beyond the personal rapport between the global sponsor and GCC leader: We have also witnessed, the centre leader moving on and the sponsor quickly reducing footprint and/or losing interest in the development of the centre, albeit even if for a short duration that vacuum sometimes can be the death knell. Long-term success needs the vision and conviction to go way beyond the personal rapport and ambitions between these two individuals. The onus is as much on the GCC leadership to deliver continuous improvement, cost competitiveness and sustainable long-term impact to ensure sponsorship is only further fortified.
- Sponsorship for the long haul, going way beyond the 'here and now': This is a journey of evolution, one that goes beyond near-term investments and cost arbitrage benefits. It is meant to enable the longer-term strategic vision of the global organisation, helping it adapt to market trends, adopt and embrace future technology disruption, align to changes in consumer behaviours and with sustainability as the watermark. This can

only happen when there is holistic and complete sponsorship for the long haul.

As one evaluates the maturity of one's GCC model taking stock of this most critical dimension of sponsorship and global alignment is of paramount importance.

In your experience, what are the key signs that indicate a GCC is lacking sufficient global sponsorship, and how can this impact the GCC's ability to thrive?

Some signs of lacking global sponsorship would include:

- The GCC stagnating in terms of growth and scope of services, which makes it increasingly unsustainable to run successful and cost-effective operations.
- Limited process scope delivered v/s wider end to end process accountability, which limits the transformative role a GCC can play, reducing it to a mere offshore delivery centre.
- Limited to having no global roles run out of the GCC, and hence the ability to impact global operations is restrained.
- Service-level (SLA) driven, vendor-type relationship and governance between the headquarters and the GCC, which overall limits the power to innovate and embed a solution-based culture within the GCC.
- The GCC is constantly being challenged only on cost metrics.

All these significantly impact the GCC's ability to grow and unlock the true potential of the model, making a greater impact on the global organisation.

How can organisations ensure that the global sponsor is not just an external figurehead but an active champion for the

success of GCCs?

Ensuring that the global sponsor is truly an active champion of the GCCs success, requires the sponsor to have complete conviction of the GCC model, to take on total ownership of the business case and complete accountability from set up through defining the road map, being alongside every step of the way.

Some of the key considerations highlighted upfront, also are suggested pointers to ensure the global sponsor actively champions the GCCs success.

What strategies can leaders adopt to align global sponsorship with the vision, operations, and long-term goals of a GCC?

Leaders can adopt several strategies to effectively align global sponsorship with the vision, operations, and long-term goals of a GCC. Ensuring complete buy in on the model, the business case, the objectives and end outcomes to be achieved.

Alignment of individual KRAs and KPIs linked to the success of the GCC.

Ensure governance which allows for joint ownership with GCC leadership, and global mobilisation of resources across borders. Empower the GCC with global roles and responsibilities.

How do you balance local autonomy and global oversight to ensure that the GCC is driven by a global vision while maintaining agility and responsiveness to local needs?

Joint leadership and joint accountability, empowering the GCC leadership to have a seat and voice at the top table is the key to success.

While one has covered some of the considerations on global sponsorship, agility in the local market is equally critical to sustaining the model.

For example:

- The effectiveness of a well-balanced hybrid model is well understood and proven- one that leverages the scale, experience and effectiveness of the partner ecosystem.
- Reviewing and revisiting the operating model from time to time, taking advantage of the evolving vendor ecosystem and hence, ensuring that your model is truly fit-for-purpose is important.
- Taking advantage of emerging models as we are witnessing in the talent landscape, where GCCs have the option to evaluate between build v/s borrow v/s co-creating through dipping into the growing transient workforce pool. Hence embracing agile workforce models is another way to stay nimble, and ensure you are attuned to the mantra of 'doing more with less'.
- Partnering with the startup ecosystem, to also continuously infuse the GCC with the innovative, agile culture is yet another dimension of how GCCs are responding to local models and opportunities.



Special Feature

NIRAJ SETH

INNOVATING LOCALLY, IMPACTING GLOBALLY: **HOW INDIAN GCCS ARE POWERING GLOBAL STRATEGY AND INNOVATION**

GET TO KNOW...

NIRAJ SETH

Executive Vice President
at Naukri

Niraj Seth is a business leader with three decades of experience, including 14 years in CXO roles. He brings a wealth of experience working with companies like Naukri, Intuit, Cleartrip, Monster and Bharat Petroleum.



Across India, an immense revolution is being shaped, fuelled by intelligence, precision, and scale. Global Capability Centres are transforming into vital decision engines driving global enterprises' strategy, innovation, and growth. GCCs in India are stepping out of the shadows, leveraging the immense power of data, artificial intelligence, and advanced analytics to support and actively drive high-level business decisions. Recent findings by Naukri reveal an exciting and remarkable transformation taking place. According to the **Naukri JobSpeak Report of February 2025**, India's job market recorded a 4% year-on-year growth, driven notably by the AI and Machine Learning sectors.

As companies increasingly rely on data-driven insights to steer their course, the significance of these centres has grown exponentially. The shift is so profound that the GCCs in India are now positioned as central to core strategic decision-making. This momentum is transparent in the growth of the GCC ecosystem itself. The number of GCCs has seen a **CAGR of 4.6%**, total installed talent has grown at **6.3%**, and revenue has increased at a CAGR of **9.8%** between **FY2019 and FY2024**. Together, these figures speak volumes about India's rise as a global decision-making hub, grounded in both scale and substance.

This evolution is far from incidental. It's a natural progression driven by the unprecedented pace of technological advancements and the increasing reliance on data-driven decision-making. India's GCCs have embraced their expanded role, and in doing so, they have not only changed their destinies but have also helped redefine the future of the industries they serve.

What are the Key Growth Levers Powering This Shift?

- Strategic Hubs:** GCCs have transitioned from operational excellence to value creation, becoming integral to global decision-making and innovation. The **India GCC Landscape Report 2024 by Zinnov & NASSCOM** report highlights that **44%** of GCCs have transitioned into Portfolio Hubs, managing multi-functional operations and spearheading innovation.
- Maturity and Expansion:** GCCs in India have matured significantly, with many centres now taking on end-to-end portfolio ownership and assuming global roles. The evolution has been striking – **53%** of GCCs are now in the Portfolio and Transformation Hub stages, compared to just **18%** a decade ago. This reflects a paradigm shift where Indian GCCs are no longer just delivery centres but innovation and transformation powerhouses.
- Technological Leadership:** With over 500 centres dedicated to AI and Machine Learning, India's GCCs are at the forefront of technological advancements. By 2024, **86%** of GCCs are expected to leverage AI/ML and Data Science, **82%** will utilise Cloud Computing, and **88%** will adopt Cybersecurity measures.
- Symbiotic Ecosystem:** The growth of GCCs is supported by a robust ecosystem of start-ups, service providers, and government initiatives, stimulating innovation and agility. Three key engagement models, Joint Ventures, Centres of Excellence, and Joint Risk Partnerships, are being adopted by GCCs to partner with service providers.
- Geographic and Sectoral Expansion:** GCCs are expanding beyond Tier-I

cities into **Tier-II** and **Tier-III** locations, driven by cost advantages and access to a burgeoning talent pool. Cities such as Ahmedabad, Coimbatore, and Vadodara are emerging as key hubs. Additionally, industries such as BFSI, Healthcare, and Automotive are witnessing significant GCC activity. The report indicates that Tier-II and Tier-III cities now house approximately **7%** of total GCC units in FY2024, up from **5%** in **FY2019**.

What is Fuelling the GCC Momentum?

To understand the tectonic shifts underway, we spoke with 17 leaders across the GCC spectrum. Their stories offer a front-row seat to how India is moving from margins to mainstream in the global strategy conversation.

From Transactional to Transformational

Ajay Anand, Global Vice Chair, EY GDS, shares how GCCs are rewriting their talent playbook by integrating AI and automation into the DNA of their operations. At EY, GDS is leading innovation in partnership with its Global EY Service Line teams. "We are not just supporting innovation; we are co-creating it. It requires agile ways of working and embedding continuous learning across roles," he says.

For mature GCCs, the journey has followed a structured path where each stage is building towards a strategic impact. **Fidelity Investments India**, for instance, outlines this evolution through three distinct phases:

1. Setting up and scaling
2. Investing in capability-building
3. Driving business transformation

Now operating in the third phase, Fidelity is focused on delivering strategic outcomes rather than merely enhancing operational efficiencies. As **Seema Unni, Head of HR**, explains, this maturity enables Indian GCCs

to take centre stage in shaping enterprise-level decisions and growth.

The Talent Equation: Skills, Speed, and Scale

Anand Rao, Director—Talent Acquisition, Avalara, points out that the talent challenge is not about availability; it is about readiness. "You can go to the smallest village and find great problem-solving talent." He highlights how the gap lies in how we prepare them and presents how Avalara is working with students early on, even in their first or second year, to help bridge this gap.

At **Finastra**, the emphasis has shifted to skill-based hiring as a foundational approach. **Raja Vasudevan, Global Head of Talent Acquisition and Head of India, People & Communications**, highlights how this shift is enabling them to shape the future of finance while contributing to the wider evolution of India's fintech GCCs.

Beyond Tier 1: The Rise of New Talent Cities

Rajesh Bharatiya, CEO, Peoplefy, outlines how GCCs are spreading to Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities like Indore, Coimbatore, and Ahmedabad. "It is sector-agnostic. Companies want engineering and support capabilities closer to where the next wave of talent is." He predicts two outcomes of this change. One is what he calls the brownfield strategy: GCCs are setting up satellite centres that will eventually ignite local economies through reverse migration and community investment. Secondly, the reverse migration of talent from big cities to tier 2 will start percolating into the local economy with more disposable income.

Women Trailblazing the GCC Success

According to a Zinnov-Nasscom study, 1,100 of the 6,500 senior GCC leadership roles globally are now held by women.

Sreema Nallasivam, CEO, Metro BSC, is

pushing this further through their Mini-CXO programme—a platform for mentoring and leadership training for women to rise through the ranks.

Redefining Culture and Capability

Vidya Munirathnam, Head-HR, Lowe's India, emphasises the cultural reimagination of GCCs. She shares how Lowe's has invested in inclusive leadership programmes and flexible work models that drive retention and deepen engagement. Their 'One-in-a-box' Leadership Model ensures global leadership, enabling faster decision-making, more accountability, ownership, and freedom to strategise for the business globally.

Rency Mathew, People Leader—India & South Asia and MD, Sabre Bengaluru, shares how the company's Hyper Jump internship programme is preparing future leaders. "It is not just an internship. It is a launchpad for building digital talent with leadership potential."

While GCCs scale their operational efficiencies, they have faced challenges along the way. **Sheetal Bhanot Shetty, CHRO, Infra.Market** mentions how scaling at the pace of Infra. Market brings its share of complexities. "One of the primary challenges has been ensuring that their systems and processes grow in tandem with the business. Rapid growth often pressurises existing structures, so they have focused on building scalable frameworks that allow seamless operations across functions." Sheetal attributes Infra.Market's rapid growth to a talent strategy that nourishes entrepreneurial thinking.

AI + Empathy = The New Recruitment Code for GCCs

Speaking on the recruitment trends for GCCs for this year, **Janoo Motiani, CEO & Founder, Reed & Willow**, highlights how GCCs are not just surviving—they are thriving, setting the stage for a 40% surge in

acquisitions. She also spoke on how AI-driven recruitment is transforming not just hiring processes but the very DNA of GCCs, enabling them to attract rare, specialised talent at scale. "This shift allows us to focus on building strategic capability and innovation agility rather than being bogged down by operational inefficiencies," she says.

Gunjandeep Kaur, Director—HRBP, Model N, discusses how the company is redefining work culture by embracing hybrid models and leveraging AI-driven insights. The focus is on employee experience and creating a flexible work environment that attracts talent from beyond metro cities.

The Next Leap: Navigating Future Frontiers for India's GCCs

The transformation of India's GCCs from mere data-processing hubs to strategic decision engines is not a passing trend but rather an evolution that will shape the future of global business. As businesses increasingly rely on real-time, data-driven insights, the role of India's GCCs will only continue to grow in importance.

The future is clear: India's GCCs are no longer just support centres. They are now decision-making powerhouses, shaping business strategies and outcomes that impact millions of people across the globe. With a projected market size of **\$99-105 billion by 2030**, the trajectory is firmly set towards AI-led transformation, expanded global roles, and increased focus on sustainability and social responsibility. As organisations seek to become more agile, efficient, and responsive, India's GCCs will remain at the forefront, guiding the way forward.

If the corporate mavericks of the world once saw India as **Plan B**, they should take another look because today, they are undoubtedly **Plan A**.

Interview

SREEMA NALLASIVAM

BY AKANKSHA THAPLIYAL

SREEMA NALLASIVAM DISCUSSES THE JOURNEY OF WOMEN LEADERS IN GCCS AND THE MINI CXO PROGRAM AT METRO BSC

GET TO KNOW... **SREEMA NALLASIVAM**

CEO, Metro Business Solution
Center

Sreema is the CEO of METRO Business Solution Centers. With two decades of experience, Sreema specialises in curating unique, future-ready solutions to address the evolving complexities of METRO's business landscape. She leads initiatives in transformation, program management, change management, business process re-engineering, hyper-automation, data & insights, design & media solutions, and modern ways of working.



India is making impressive strides in female leadership, with nearly two dozen women now leading global organisations, especially within Global Capability Centres (GCCs), according to a Zinnov-Nasscom report. Of the 6,500 senior positions worldwide, 1,100 are held by women, guiding a shift in traditionally male-dominated industries. **Sreema Nallasivam, CEO of Metro Business Solution Center**, is a standout example of this transformative change. Under her leadership, Metro BSC has not only expanded globally but has redefined the role of GCCs in driving innovation and strategic growth.

In this conversation, Sreema sheds light on how women leaders in GCCs are charting new paths and fostering inclusive work environments. She emphasises the power of empathy, patience, and collaborative leadership in reshaping industries. We discuss how women are uniquely poised to lead change and contribute to the evolving global business landscape. As a forward-thinking trailblazer, Sreema's journey highlights the fresh perspectives women bring to the boardroom, along with the innovative solutions they offer in the face of complex challenges.

GCCs have been champions of women leaders, especially in innovation, engineering, and finance. What do you believe women bring to the table that has changed the game for GCCs?

Women often bring empathy and sensitivity to leadership, which creates an environment of understanding and collaboration. I say this with an acknowledgement that men can also be empathetic leaders, but for women, these qualities are deeply rooted in

personal struggles we've faced, which makes us more attuned to giving others the space they need to grow.

If you look at the history of engineering in India, it was a male-dominated field, so it was harder for women to enter leadership roles. However, GCCs didn't require an engineering degree, which opened doors for women to rise to leadership positions early. This allowed women in GCCs to contribute their unique perspectives and now, many are paving the way for others to follow.

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From leaders like Indra Nooyi to colleagues I've worked with, the common thread is a leadership style rooted in empathy and understanding. **It's about creating a safe space for people to fail and learn, which fosters innovation and diversity.**

How have women's perspectives and leadership styles influenced innovation and diversity in the organisations you've worked with?

Tech, particularly in its early days, had a "bro culture" focused on ego and individual achievement. Women, however, create a more supportive environment where failure is not feared but accepted as part of the process. From leaders like Indra Nooyi to colleagues I've worked with, the common

thread is a leadership style rooted in empathy and understanding. It's about creating a safe space for people to fail and learn, which fosters innovation and diversity.

Sreema Nallasivam, CEO, Metro BSC on the growth of women leaders in Indian GCCs

In many ways, these values help shift the focus from individualism to collaboration—something that's crucial in today's innovation-driven world.

What other factors do you believe have contributed to the growth of women leaders in GCCs, especially on the global stage?

Patience and perseverance are often key. When GCCs first emerged, they were mainly seen as centres for cost efficiency, doing work that others didn't want to handle. But women understood the importance of their role in this larger ecosystem. They contributed to a shift in mindset, helping to grow these centres into hubs of innovation, capability, and talent.

The global recognition of India as a talent hub also played a significant role in boosting the profile of women leaders. Many of us, who started our careers in these centres, now see the fruits of that early work. Today, India's role has shifted from performing low-level tasks to delivering high-value work, such as data analysis and AI innovation. This evolution helped women gain credibility and recognition as leaders who add strategic value.

On being asked about the change she brings to the table, especially about changing the perspective of people on women in technology, Sreema narrates an incident at a university.

I had an interesting experience when I visited this university for hiring. A student

was late for his exam, and while waiting outside, he approached me to ask if he could go inside. Afterwards, I asked him why he came to me, as there were other men around. He explained that he thought I was the HR representative. I realised then how deeply ingrained gender biases can be—even in young students.

That moment made me reflect on the subconscious biases we all hold. Since then, I've been more vocal about challenging these biases, both within myself and in others. Whether it's in a boardroom or within casual conversations, I make it a point to address biases openly, encouraging a more inclusive environment where people understand their patterns and how to break them.

I worked hard to ensure that talent wasn't judged by the country it came from. My passion was to prove that India could deliver top-tier talent and become a leader in innovation.

Can you tell us about your work in positioning the Metro BSC in Pune as a global talent hub and the shift from a cost-efficient model to a more value-driven approach?

This topic is very close to my heart. Throughout my career, I've always stood up for the underrepresented—whether it was me as a child with a darker skin tone or my

early experiences in Europe, where I encountered scepticism about India's capabilities. When I joined Metro, I was determined to change the narrative. I worked hard to ensure that talent wasn't judged by the country it came from. My passion was to prove that India could deliver top-tier talent and become a leader in innovation.

One of the challenges was changing the mindset of middle management. Many people in India were stuck in toxic corporate habits, such as micromanaging and not allowing their team members to take ownership. I realised that to foster the next generation of leaders, I needed to start at the grassroots level.

I began visiting universities, focusing not just on academic performance but on identifying students with a spark, regardless of their grades. We implemented a five-day assessment process that was both rigorous and fun, making sure we selected individuals who could thrive in the corporate world. This program gave birth to our 'Mini CXO Program,' where young graduates shadow me, learn the ropes of leadership, and get hands-on experience in high-stakes projects.

Over the years, we've placed many young talents in senior leadership roles globally. For example, one of our former 'Mini CXOs' now leads innovation in tech in Dusseldorf, at just 26 years old. Another is leading sales for our e-commerce division in Europe. These young leaders are not just part of our talent pool—they're shaping the future of the business.

You said something very interesting, like working with this interesting mix of the Gen Z, Millennials etc. Could you share your learnings with them?

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The Mini CXO Program at Metro BSC

We've placed many young talents in senior leadership roles globally. One of our former 'Mini CXOs' now leads innovation in tech in Dusseldorf. Another is leading sales for our e-commerce division in Europe. These young leaders are shaping the future of the business.

People often stereotype Gen Z as flaky or overly entitled, but I've found them to be refreshingly real. They're the first generation in India that hasn't experienced extreme financial hardship, so they come from a place of ease and abundance. This allows them to question the status quo and challenge conventional wisdom, which is a trait I admire.

What's also interesting is their willingness to hold me accountable. They're not afraid to call me out when they feel something could be done better. This, in turn, shapes my leadership style and keeps me grounded. This younger generation might be unconventional, but its ability to question and innovate is something we can all learn from.

Balancing innovation with operational efficiency in the GCC space can be tricky. How

do you manage to align both while driving forward with new initiatives?

In technology, the solutions we often create are complex and sometimes too advanced for the problem at hand. Balancing the drive for innovation with operational efficiency is always a challenge. In Europe, where Metro is based, the working age group is older, and there's more support from the government. This slower pace often contrasts with the fast-moving environment we have in India, where we are more agile and used to working at a faster pace.

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One of the challenges I face is making sure that **the innovative solutions we create in India** are not dismissed as too fast or too complex for the European teams.

One of the challenges I face is making sure that the innovative solutions we create in India are not dismissed as too fast or too complex for the European teams. A big part of this comes down to cross-cultural exchange. We have a program that encourages people to travel between our offices in Pune and Europe. This helps both teams understand the different working styles and fosters better collaboration between the two regions.

When people from our European offices visit Pune, they often return with a new perspective, realising the vibrance, energy, and creativity that India brings to the table. This exchange has been key to bridging the

gap between innovation and operational efficiency.

Your journey seems deeply intertwined with your leadership style. How do you think your experiences have shaped you as a leader?

My personal experiences, both the positive and the challenging ones, have played a crucial role in shaping who I am today. I have always been deeply committed to the idea of fairness, particularly when it comes to creating equity. The world can often seem unjust, and that motivates me to

strive for change. Growing up, I was part of a minority group—whether it was due to my skin colour, language, or social standing. However, I learned to take pride in my identity and to appreciate the unique contributions I bring to the community.

This sense of fairness has become my leadership mantra—creating opportunities for everyone, irrespective of their background or gender. Over the years, I've realised that leadership isn't about following a specific style; it's about authenticity. It's about being true to who I am, blending my values with my professional goals, and leading from a place of honesty and transparency.



Interview

ANAND RAO

BY AKANKSHA
THAPLIYAL

FROM LOCAL ROOTS TO GLOBAL REACH: ANAND RAO ON AVALARA'S STRATEGY FOR TAPPING INTO INDIA'S GROWING TALENT POOL

GET TO KNOW...

ANAND RAO

Director - Talent Acquisition,
Avalara

Anand Rao, the Director of Talent Acquisition at Avalara Technologies and also a thought leader in knowledge economy, transcending geographical boundaries and industry silos. Known for his engaging job postings and signature hashtag #RotiKapdalidea, which encapsulates his philosophy of learning and unlearning, Anand's approach reflects a deep understanding of the evolving talent market.



In an industry marked by rapid transformation and innovation, the role of talent acquisition has never been more critical. We had the opportunity to sit down with **Anand Rao, the Director of Talent Acquisition at Avalara**, who shared his insights on the ever-changing landscape of Global Capability Centers (GCCs) in India. With over two decades of experience across engineering, consulting, and entrepreneurship, Anand is a seasoned professional and a thought leader driving strategic talent initiatives. Known for his engaging job postings and signature hashtag **#RotiKapdaldea**, which encapsulates his philosophy of learning and unlearning, Anand's approach reflects a deep understanding of the evolving talent market. Our conversation explored the growing significance of AI and ML roles, the potential of tier 2 and tier 3 cities in talent sourcing, and his optimistic outlook for the future of Indian talent in a globalised workforce.

The Naukri Job Speak and LinkedIn Workforce Report for 2023 highlighted a significant rise in demand for AI and ML roles. How has Avalara responded to this shift?

Well, Avalara has been in India for 19 years, and in the last 12 to 18 months, we've seen some pretty rapid growth. Over the years, we always believed India had incredible talent, but it wasn't until about two years ago that Avalara started leveraging India to be a major centre for development. There was a paradigm shift in the thinking patterns of all the stakeholders across the US and India.

India is now set to be one of the biggest hubs for us, not just in terms of development but also in talent. What we're looking for today goes beyond just

technical expertise. We're focused on three key qualities: strong technical skills, deep functional knowledge, and most importantly, a global mindset. Today's world demands professionals who can think beyond local markets, especially in a company like Avalara, where we serve global needs.

How does Avalara approach work policies and employee wellness?

Our policies are designed to support our employees' success. We're not rigid about where people work from—we care more about the quality of their work and the impact they have. For example, our engineering team works 100% remotely, while our marketing and customer compliance teams in Pune follow a hybrid model.

We also offer wellness programs and maternity benefits as part of our commitment to our employees. These aren't perks—they're essential. In today's world, if a company isn't offering these benefits, it's surprising.

How has the importance of a global mindset affected your team structure, especially when it comes to hiring AI and ML talent?

Technology has always been a big part of what we do. It helps us make better products and offer faster, more accurate services. And AI and ML aren't new to us—we've been leveraging them for years. But lately, it feels like everyone is jumping on the AI bandwagon. Whether you're in HR, operations, or engineering, there's a piece of AI in almost everything we do. We encourage all our employees to use these technologies in their daily work, and that's only creating more opportunities, not less.

When it comes to AI and ML talent, we're not just looking for technical experts. We need people who can think critically, solve problems, and bring fresh ideas to the table. This shift has impacted how we structure our teams—more collaboration, more interdisciplinary work, and a stronger focus on innovation.

The younger generation today is all about global experiences—they want to travel, make an impact, and be part of something bigger than just their job. They don't just want to work for a company that's based in the U.S. or Europe—they want to work alongside people from all over the world, with different perspectives. It's about collaboration and influence, not just executing orders.

Working in a product company like ours means your role is often global from the start. For example, our tax solutions aren't one-size-fits-all—they differ across countries. If you want to understand how taxes work in Italy or Portugal, you can't just read a manual. You need to have that experience or work with people from those regions. And that's where the global mindset comes into play—our teams are building products with a global audience in mind, and they need to understand the nuances of different markets.

People are looking up to the evolution of AI and ML roles. Do you think every role will require some level of data expertise?

Yes. AI is becoming as essential as **Roti, Kapda aur Makaan**. I call it- **Roti, Kapda aur AI**. It's not just for specialised roles anymore—it's going to be part of every job. The future is all about data, and everyone will need some level of understanding in this space to stay relevant.

With the mix of generations in GCCs today, how do you manage

collaboration across such diverse age groups?

The first step is recognising that there's a big generational gap in the workplace. As leaders, we need to be aware of it and, more importantly, make sure the culture fosters collaboration. At Avalara, everyone's ideas matter, no matter their age or position. We also believe in bringing our authentic selves to work, and that includes being open to different viewpoints.

When we hire, we look for people who can think beyond their immediate roles. We want people who are willing to experiment, push boundaries, and take risks—especially in areas like AI and ML, where things are constantly evolving. We encourage our younger employees to be bold, to ask questions, and to challenge the status quo. That's how innovation happens.

You mentioned being open to people experimenting and taking risks. Do you think cross-disciplinary roles are becoming more important?

Are traditional roles becoming less relevant?

The world is changing so quickly—economic shifts, geopolitical changes, new technologies—that the old rules just don't apply anymore. It's all about adaptability and continuous learning. (Only for example sake) Java might be the go-to language today, but who knows what will be in demand tomorrow? So, it's no longer enough to just have technical expertise in one area—you need to be able to pivot and learn new things.

At Avalara, we look for people who can blend technical skills with functional knowledge. It's not enough to just be an expert in one thing anymore. You need to be flexible, learn new skills, and bring new ideas to the table. Roles are becoming

much more fluid, and that's where cross-disciplinary skills shine.

How do you think the temperament of today's talent influences your hiring strategy?

At Avalara, we focus a lot on problem-solving abilities. During interviews, we give candidates real-world problems to solve and let them use whatever technology they're most comfortable with. The goal isn't to see if they know a specific tool—it's about how they approach the problem, how they think through solutions, and how they adapt to new challenges.

This approach means that we're not just looking for specialists in one particular technology. We want people, who are willing to learn, and who can solve problems creatively. That's how we hire across all our teams, and it's a big part of how we've adapted to the changing talent landscape.

Do you think India is facing a significant gap in talent and skills within its workforce?

Not at all. I think India has some of the best talent in the world. You can go to the smallest village, and you'll see incredible problem-solving ability. It's not the talent that's the issue—it's more about the education system. Our educational framework needs to evolve to better nurture this raw talent and prepare people for the modern workforce.

That's why we're working with students early on, even in their first or second year, to help bridge this gap. We want to invest in talent from the ground up and make sure they're ready for the challenges of tomorrow.

What about talent from tier-two and tier-three cities? Have you seen growth there?

Absolutely. There's incredible talent in tier-two and tier-three cities, but a lot of GCCs don't know where to look. For example, you'll find automotive experts in specific areas of NCR or Chennai, and tax experts in parts of Maharashtra. The key is for companies like Avalara to go to these places, recognise the expertise, and tap into these underutilized talent pools.

As the talent ecosystem matures, tier-two and tier-three cities will play a bigger role in the next phase of growth. We're already focusing on these regions and looking for ways to connect with this talent.

What is your perspective on the future growth and evolution of Global Capability Centers (GCCs) in India, particularly in terms of their strategic role and impact on the country's economy?

The future is really exciting. Indian GCCs are in phase one, where we're making strategic decisions that impact businesses globally. But phase two is even more exciting—that's when Indian teams will start creating products for the world. We're seeing Indian leaders rise in global organisations, and I'm confident that we'll see similar leadership develop here in India.

Anand concluded the conversation on an optimistic note. "India's future is incredibly bright. We have some of the best talent in the world, and considering the age demographics of this talent, I am confident that we will make a significant impact on a global scale. We should take pride in ourselves and make the most of our talent."

Special Feature

JANOO MOTIANI

BY MAMTA SHARMA

GCC RECRUITMENT TRENDS FOR 2025:

JANOO MOTIANI ON WHAT HR LEADERS SHOULD KNOW

GET TO KNOW...

JANOO MOTIANI

CEO & Founder , Reed & Willow

Janoo Motiani is the founder and CEO of Reed and Willow Talent Advisory group. She is a seasoned talent acquisition and resource management professional with proven expertise in managing Service Delivery for Fortune 100-500 clients in an onshore/offshore model overseeing day-day operations and HR outsourcing functions across geographies.



Global Capability Centers (GCCs) in India are experiencing a rapid metamorphosis. Once primarily cost-effective operational hubs, these centres are now reimagining their role in driving innovation, talent management, and strategic growth for their parent organisations across the globe. "As India positions itself at the forefront of this transformation, the focus is no longer on streamlining operational tasks but on evolving into the nucleus of their sister conglomerates' global ventures. The future of GCCs hinges on their ability to integrate cutting-edge technology with human potential, to continue their unremitting growth and pave the way for a sustainable, inclusive future," says **Janoo Motiani, CEO & Founder of Reed & Willow**, a global data-driven talent solutions company. As a thought leader in the recruitment industry, Janoo has collaborated with Fortune 500 companies and startups alike, helping them navigate the dynamic and evolving talent landscape.

The growing presence of GCCs is underscored by a startling statistic: nearly 364,000 new jobs are expected to be created this year alone within these centres, reaffirming their integral role in India's economic fabric. But, launching and running a successful GCC in India is not without complexities. The process demands careful navigation through the challenges of a constantly evolving workforce, an increasingly digital-first economy, and the demands of international collaborations.

"This year, GCCs are not just surviving—they are thriving, setting the stage for a 40% surge in acquisitions according to recent reports," Motiani emphasises.

As HR leaders prepare for the trends shaping recruitment in 2025, understanding this transformation becomes critical for steering their organisations toward success.

From hybrid work models to diversity initiatives, this evolving landscape is replete with opportunities for innovation and growth, with HR leaders at the helm of this change. As we head into 2025, the talent landscape for GCCs is being redefined by several key trends that are influencing how organisations attract, retain, and grow their workforce."

Motiani elaborates on these pivotal shifts:

Hybrid Work – A New Normal for GCCs

The pandemic threw the corporate world into disarray, but for GCCs in India, it became an opportunity for reinvention. Hybrid work has become the model of the moment, offering employees the flexibility to choose between working from home or an office. This approach has fostered greater job satisfaction and enhanced productivity, aligning seamlessly with the evolving work culture. For employers, it's not just about managing logistics but about fostering an environment of trust, communication, and work-life balance. A recent survey found that 75% of employees prioritise work-from-home options when considering staying with their current employer. For GCCs, this flexible approach has become a linchpin for talent retention, with the potential to drive substantial long-term growth.

AI & Automation – Shaping the Future of Talent Management

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into GCC operations has gone from being a buzzword to an essential tool. AI-driven solutions have revolutionised recruitment, enabling organisations to sift through vast amounts of data, identify ideal candidates, and drastically reduce the time it takes to make hiring decisions. The rise of cloud technology further accelerates the demand for cloud professionals, creating a new

wave of opportunities. According to recent forecasts, India is expected to need over two million cloud professionals by FY25 to meet this ever-growing demand. As GCCs ramp up their use of AI, data analytics, and cloud technologies, they must also ensure that their workforce evolves alongside these innovations, acquiring new skills to stay ahead of the curve.

Data-Driven Recruitment – Aligning Talent with Corporate Goals

The role of data in recruitment has gained significant traction among GCCs, with analytics-driven hiring becoming a vital part of the strategy. By leveraging data, companies can anticipate employment needs, optimise recruitment practices, and align talent acquisition with broader organisational goals. However, a glaring challenge remains: upskilling. A staggering 63% of tech employees missed out on upskilling opportunities last year. As GCCs look to fill emerging roles in AI, cybersecurity, and data science, addressing this skills gap will become increasingly important for staying competitive.

Branding GCCs for Talent Attraction

Branding isn't just for consumer goods anymore—it is a critical tool for GCCs in attracting and retaining top talent. In an increasingly competitive job market, GCCs need to build strong brands that reflect their values, culture, and global impact. This means not only promoting technical expertise but also emphasising a diverse and inclusive work environment. As talent pools become global, the emphasis on language proficiency, cross-cultural communication, and an understanding of international business operations is more important than ever. GCCs in India are uniquely positioned to leverage the country's rich pool of skilled professionals

who bring both technical proficiency and a global outlook to the table, setting them apart from competitors.

Professional Development – A Key Focus for Growth

As industries across the globe face rapid innovation and transformation, professional and skill development have become critical priorities for GCCs. To remain competitive, companies must invest in developing both technical and soft skills in their employees. Areas like digital marketing, data analysis, and cybersecurity are becoming indispensable. For GCCs, creating pathways for continuous learning and professional growth isn't just a trend—it's a necessity. In a rapidly evolving tech landscape, those who don't adapt risk falling behind.

Research consistently shows that companies with diverse teams are more likely to outperform their competitors. For GCCs, cultivating an inclusive work culture—one that celebrates different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives—is critical for unlocking creativity, driving innovation, and ensuring long-term success. Programs like Accenture's Neurodiversity Hiring Initiative are shining examples of how GCCs can push the envelope in creating more inclusive

automation, GCCs need to ensure their workforce is not only tech-savvy but also equipped with the leadership and interpersonal skills necessary to manage these advanced tools. Upskilling and professional development are critical to ensuring employees can keep pace with the rapid changes in technology and industry requirements.

Additionally, collaboration with global teams can be difficult, especially when dealing with different time zones, cultures, and communication styles. Bridging these gaps requires a blend of robust infrastructure, effective leadership, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Aligning operations with global business goals is also paramount, ensuring that GCCs can deliver consistent, high-quality results while maintaining alignment with the broader corporate strategy.



environments that value every individual's unique contribution.

Diversity and Inclusion – The Pillar of Innovation

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) are no longer just buzzwords—they're integral to the future success of GCCs. A diverse workforce brings together varied perspectives and innovative solutions that can drive business growth and set companies apart.

Challenges Ahead for GCCs

While the future looks bright, GCCs are not without their challenges. Talent management remains a top concern, as companies compete with global giants for skilled professionals. With the advent of AI and

Future of GCCs in India

As India continues to be the epicentre of technological innovation, the demand for skilled professionals in fields like software development, cloud technologies, and data engineering will only continue to rise. GCCs are poised to capitalise on this growth, driving both local and global business success. With the right strategies in place—focused on hybrid work, AI integration, data-driven recruitment, professional development, and D&I—India's GCCs will remain at the heart of a global talent revolution. The coming years will undoubtedly see India solidifying its position as the world's most future-ready workforce, with GCCs leading the charge.

Interview

VIDYA MUNIRATHNAM

BY BISWAJIT BHATTACHARYA

BREWING IDEAS AND BUILDING FUTURES: VIDYA MUNIRATHNAM ON HOW LOWE'S INDIA IS REDEFINING THE GCC CULTURE

GET TO KNOW...

VIDYA MUNIRATHNAM

VP—HR, Lowe's India

Vidya leads key functions like talent acquisition, total rewards, and culture. With nearly two decades of experience in retail and semiconductors, she is known for her collaborative leadership. An engineer with an MBA and MBL, she blends technical expertise with strategic acumen. Beyond work, she enjoys parenting her two children and has a passion for teaching.



If there is one thing Vidya Munirathnam knows, it is that impact lies in the details, like the warmth of a coffee chat or the charm of a mascot named Benny. As Vice President of HR at Lowe's India, Vidya blends strategy with storytelling, ensuring employees feel heard, valued, and inspired. From transforming complex benefits into engaging narratives to driving impactful reskilling programmes, her people-first approach is shaping a culture of connection and growth. In this conversation, Vidya shares how Lowe's India is evolving beyond cost efficiency to become a global innovation hub, all while fostering a workplace where employees thrive.

Lowe's India celebrated Sambhav, which marks the organisation's 10th anniversary in the country. Congratulations! How does a cultural congregation like this become a long-term reinforcement of Lowe's India's core values?

Thank you! Yes, it has been an incredible journey for Lowe's in India, and the celebration was a powerful reminder of pride, nostalgia, and a sense of realisation into the journey we have had!

At Lowe's India, fostering a sense of belonging is not left to chance; it is a deliberate effort embedded in our culture. Sambhav has truly marked a significant milestone for Lowe's India, celebrating our achievements while reinforcing the core values driving our growth. For us, cultural initiatives go beyond celebration, they contribute to building an agile, high-performing workforce aligned with the organisation's vision. To reinforce Lowe's core values and messaging from our Total Home Strategy, we had the global leadership team, including Marvin Ellison,

Chairman, President and CEO, Seemantini Godbole, Executive VP and Chief Digital and Information Officer and Janice Dupre, Executive VP of HR visit our India office and celebrate Sambhav with us. We created multiple opportunities for the global leaders to personally recognise the outstanding work being done by our teams.

To create a deep sense of purpose, our Global CEO also announced Lowe's India's commitment to support local communities with an investment of \$2 million over the next two years. This investment will enable various projects in skill development, such as STEM learning and coding and projects that focus on the conservation of natural resources and the adoption of renewable energy. This cultural congregation brought together associates and leadership to celebrate the unified spirit of One Lowe's.

The role of GCCs has evolved from cost arbitrage to value creation. How is Lowe's India positioning itself beyond traditional operational support to become a strategic driver of innovation for Lowe's globally?

It is typical for GCCs to function as the 'back-office' support or the R&D centre that helps drive cost savings and contributes largely to the bottom line. However, at Lowe's India, our role extends beyond that.

When we commenced in Bengaluru in 2014, Lowe's India began as a modest initiative with a team of just 11 associates. Today, we are a thriving GCC of over 4,500 talented professionals driving pivotal functions in technology, merchandising, supply chain and more. This shows the evolution of our India office and how we are empowered to function as one team with the US, working towards a common goal. In the last five years, Lowe's India has grown more than

100% in headcount. These years have been critical in strengthening and expanding our core capabilities beyond engineering. We have evolved from cost arbitrage to talent arbitrage as everything we innovate is directed at the success of the business and aligned with the global strategy and goals. This ensures teams in India play an equal role in driving business impact.

With the 'One-in-a-box' leadership model, our leaders in India have more accountability, ownership and freedom to strategise for the business globally, enabling more cross-functional collaboration between locations.

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One of the core pillars of our talent strategy to become an employer of choice is our commitment to promising futures through continuous learning and development.

Many companies invest in upskilling but struggle with reskilling mid-career employees. How does Lowe's India navigate this challenge?

The real question is, 'How do we keep up with the ever-evolving demand for talent and new skills?' And that's where agile learning strategies and skill-based workforce planning come into play. One of the core pillars of our talent strategy to become an employer of choice is our

commitment to promising futures through continuous learning and development.

At Lowe's, we do not follow generational stereotypes but instead, we adopt a persona-based approach that segments associates based on their roles, shared values, interests, and professional goals. This personalised approach allows us to craft reskilling pathways that resonate with the unique experiences of each associate which mostly lean towards implementation. Also, these are not just opportunities to improve performance, but also, prospects for upskilling and reskilling the knowledge levels of our associates. To create that sense of belonging, we actively listen to feedback and for this, we adopted **the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model**:

- **Level 1:** We assess learner reactions to these trainings. Our 2024 data shows a Net Promoter Score of 4.65, which indicates the positive impact that knowledge-enhancing opportunities have.
- **Level 2:** We evaluate learning outcomes. In 2024, we saw a 42% increase in their knowledge level on a specific topic that could impact their performance at work and personal growth.
- **Level 3:** We reach out to their immediate leaders to measure the behavioural change demonstrated in their day-to-day activities, which saw a 22% increase in 2024, thus showing a steady growth in the benefits of investing in training.

This commitment to continuous learning enables associates to future challenges of our industry, ensuring they remain key contributors to Lowe's global success.

With over 35,000+ hours of learning logged, what has been the most counterintuitive finding about how employees engage with training?

Interestingly, we found that employees engage more effectively with training when it is seamlessly integrated into their daily work rather than treated as a separate activity. Traditionally, learning is seen as a distinct event, but we have found that associates are more motivated when training aligns with their day-to-day responsibilities. In fact, in 2024, over 4,000+ associates logged more than 40,000 hours of learning, highlighting our commitment to cultivating a leadership pipeline that aligns with Lowe's global vision. By offering different resources, we enable associates to immediately apply what they have learned, making the process more practical and impactful. This approach helps increase engagement and ensures that the skills gained directly benefit their work, improving individual performance and overall team outcomes.

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To drive efficiency and collaboration, our unique 'One-in-a-box' Leadership Model ensures global leadership, enabling faster decision-making, more accountability, ownership, and freedom to strategise for the business globally.

GCCs often focus on rapid scaling, but sustaining a strong culture within a fast-growing workforce can be challenging.

What deliberate steps is Lowe's India taking to maintain a unified culture while expanding its talent base?

At Lowe's, we operate as one global team, working towards common goals. Everything we innovate is directed at the success of the business, not for local individual wins. To drive efficiency and collaboration, our unique **'One-in-a-box' Leadership Model** ensures global leadership, enabling faster decision-making, more accountability, ownership, and freedom to strategise for the business globally. Through empowering cross-functional collaboration across locations, this model ensures faster decision-making and improved alignment with Lowe's broader objectives. To maintain this unified culture, we also have our global CEO and other members of the executive leadership team visit India and connect with our associates here to create that alignment with the broader organisational goals.

This level of synergy with our US teams creates a sense of direction and collaboration which also positively impacts the sense of belonging among our associates in India. Team collaboration is strengthened through digital tools and AI-driven platforms that streamline teamwork and knowledge-sharing, keeping us aligned as we grow. By providing career development opportunities, we also empower employees to upskill and evolve within the organisation, making them active contributors to our long-term vision.

Lowe's India tailors communication methods to different generations, even using mascots to simplify complex benefit programmes. What results has this yielded for the organisation?

We are a multigenerational workforce, and this is our asset as an organisation. As companies grow, their workforce demographics shift, bringing new perspectives, work styles, and expectations. To create an inclusive and engaging environment, we have integrated multigenerational diversity as a key pillar in our agenda. A critical part of this is our tailored communication strategy, which ensures that employees across age groups receive information in ways that resonate with them. From leveraging digital channels to hosting interactive sessions and even using mascots to simplify complex benefits programs, we make information that is accessible and engaging for all.

One such initiative is introducing Benny, the official Benefits and Wellness Mascot, who has been instrumental in enhancing benefits communication and employee engagement. Benny made her debut in 2023 during the launch of Lowe's Insurance Flexible Benefits, marking the beginning of a more interactive and engaging approach to benefits awareness. Since then, she has been an integral branding element across all benefits-related communications, making complex policies more accessible and engaging for associates. To date, Benny has successfully supported the onboarding of over 37% of Lowe's associates, ensuring they have a clear understanding of the benefits available to them. By making benefits communication more engaging and interactive, Benny has

reinforced Lowe's commitment to associate well-being, fostering a culture of awareness and accessibility.

What is one unconventional or surprisingly effective way you have seen corporate messaging resonate with employees?

One unconventional yet highly effective initiative that has resonated with our associates is our informal leader coffee connects, introduced last year. These casual yet purposeful gatherings have proven to be a powerful platform for fostering engagement, aligning employees with Lowe's business goals, and reinforcing our core values.

Known as Breakroom, this initiative creates a relaxed environment where associates and leaders can connect over coffee,

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What I envision for the next decade is that **GCCs should invest more in workforce upskilling and strengthening leadership development and career growth pathways.**

engage in open conversations, ask questions, and exchange ideas. This informal setting breaks hierarchical barriers, allowing associates to gain valuable insights directly from leadership. Since its inception, Breakroom has successfully hosted six sessions, each serving as an opportunity for meaningful dialogue. These sessions have enabled associates to understand Lowe's strategic vision better, feel more connected to the organisation's direction, and develop a deeper sense of belonging—all over a simple yet impactful cup of coffee.

If you could time-travel 10 years into the future, what are the capabilities or cultural traits you hope will be the defining moments of GCCs in India?

What I envision for the next decade is that GCCs should invest more in workforce upskilling and strengthening leadership development and career growth pathways. To thrive in the future, GCCs must prioritise a culture of employee well-being and inclusion, which will create a high level of engagement, innovation, business outcomes, and retention, thus building a strong employer brand that is authentic and employee-driven. Also, with skill-based hiring replacing traditional career paths, employees will take on dynamic, expertise-driven roles, ensuring adaptability in an ever-evolving tech landscape.



Interview

RAJESH BHARATIYA

BY AKANKSHA THAPLIYAL

THE INFRASTRUCTURE IMPERATIVE:

RAJESH BHARATIYA, CEO, PEOPLEFY ON HOW GCCS CAN THRIVE IN INDIA'S EMERGING CITIES

GET TO KNOW...

RAJESH BHARATIYA

CEO, Peoplefy

Rajesh Bharatiya is the CEO of Peoplefy, an innovative recruitment solutions provider revitalising how Indian companies source talent. An IIT Kharagpur graduate, he began his career developing HR tech solutions before taking on leadership roles in global HR firms. With deep industry expertise, he is transforming talent acquisition in India through innovation and technology.



The quick saturation of talent, infrastructure, and operational costs in Tier 1 cities has led to a transformation in the landscape of Indian Global Capability Centers (GCC). This change, supported by government initiatives and investment in infrastructure, has opened up new jobs and development prospects in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.

In a detailed conversation with **Rajesh Bharatiya, CEO of Peoplefy**, we explored the driving forces behind this shift, its implications on talent mobility, infrastructure development, and the evolving GCC workforce landscape. Rajesh is a visionary leader whose forward-thinking approach is revolutionising the HR landscape. Having an illustrious career that cuts across various leadership positions in human resources as well as global HR tech firms, Rajesh has known how integral talent is to the functioning of an organisation – and thus Peoplefy became the culmination of his vision and expertise.

If you look at the NASSCOM report from 2019, the share of GCCs in tier 2 and tier 3 cities has grown from 5% to 7% till now. How do you see the talent shifting in the GCCs, how do you see its effect in the employment generation, and infrastructure development in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities?

That's a great question. Currently, the Indian IT industry is worth about \$270 billion and is projected to grow at a rate of around 8-9%. Out of this total, approximately \$65 billion is attributed to Global Capability Centers (GCCs). As major cities become overcrowded, real estate prices rise, and commuting becomes more difficult, companies are beginning to explore

opportunities in Tier 2 cities such as Indore, Coimbatore, and Ahmedabad.

Cities like **Hyderabad and Pune are also gaining preference as they are considered to be somewhere between Tier 1 and Tier 2**. Our Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, announced a new framework to promote the establishment of GCCs in these Tier 2 cities. According to the government, this initiative is expected to create around 500,000 jobs over the next 2-3 years, which will significantly impact the overall GCC ecosystem. Global companies will require high-quality commercial infrastructure to set up their offices successfully. That will push the developer community, the builder community to build premium infra with support from the government. Secondly, I think, once GCCs announce that they want to set up in a Tier 2 city, a lot of local talent will have new avenues of employment.

You may see premium talent from Tier 2 cities which earlier moved to Bangalore, or Gurugram, or Pune, may want to come back to their hometown, or base location, Tier 2 family. Especially post-COVID. The government will have to get involved to ensure that the city provides them with good commute, housing, etc.

While answering our question, Rajesh cited the example of Hyderabad and its infrastructural growth. He says, "**Hyderabad has transformed as a city in the last 20 years. Kudos to the state leadership for the plan and the vision.**"

He also hinted at Indore having huge potential to be another great city for GCC while mentioning major infrastructural changes. "**While it will take time, it doesn't mean that we don't start. I think if the enabler is government. While the GCC market in India is upbeat, it gets tough competition from similar markets in Vietnam and the Philippines.**"

Could you also share insights around which sectors and which particular segments within the GCC are the first ones to move in tier 2 and tier 3 cities or the growth is sector agnostic?

Good question. So, I would say it is sector agnostic right now because there could be one or two cities like Coimbatore coming up more on the engineering side. Or if somebody is putting up something in engineering, they want to go there. Hyderabad, which is not a tier 2 anymore, has a lot of healthcare footprint.

In my view, sector-wise planning of GCCs in tier 2 cities is still very early to comment on. If a company moves to smaller cities, then to tap the local potential, they would primarily start with support functions like customer support, infrastructure support. So far, the space is open for any tier 2 city to become specialised.

I feel we might see two outcomes:

- One is that some of the existing GCCs who are expanding within India will set up another smaller location to tap into the local talent for their 'brownfield project.' These firms have already acclimated to the Indian market, they know how it works. Ultimately the state is going to benefit big time.
- Also, we always come across a lot of candidates who have the willingness or mindset to go back to their hometown. Once that migration happens, the reverse migration of talent from big cities to tier 2, it will start percolating into the local economy with more disposable income, more investment by themselves. It needs to be taken seriously by the governments. Gujarat is doing very well here, in my view. They have picked a lot of large projects because of the facilities

available in the state, and the government has helped remove major hurdles for new companies. Like Gujarat, other governments will have to invest in that space to make a very clear noise to some of these prospective companies.

Insights on the Talent Requirement for New vs Mature GCCs

The rapid advancement of technology is changing the overall nature of job requirements. I'm not just referring to tier 1 or tier 2 roles; this shift is happening across the board. With the emergence of generative AI and other groundbreaking technologies, many routine tasks can now be automated. This means that some workers will need to reskill and learn how to effectively use AI. **Within the realm of AI, there are different levels of knowledge and expertise. Some individuals will need to learn how to use AI tools, others will focus on creating AI models, and some will become experts in the field.** Additionally, there will be developers and designers involved as well. However, everyone needs to have at least a basic understanding of AI. As a result, the talent mix in the workforce is evolving.

For tier 2 cities, they will first establish themselves as a viable option. And once that first set of processes becomes successful, they will go through the regular path of other tier 1 cities.

Concerning the high attrition rates, how can GCCs create meaningful pathways for their employees? What should be done to retain some of the top talent in the GCC?

We are at the cusp of the generational shift. Some decades ago, people would join a company and retire from that company. Today that is not the case.

People will stay as long as they find meaning in their work. So, if a company is successful in showing how the work that one individual is doing is impacting either somebody's life, something in the society or some broader purpose, they will retain their top talent.

Of course, your compensation and other things have to be in line with the market, but you cannot retain talent only through compensation. Second or third thing would be your culture. If you are a very rigid employer with no flexibility, you'll face troubles. Plus, a lot depends on how much the company invests in nurturing the talent.

If an employee for you is as a body working on some project, and you want to bill them per hour, and the moment billing is stopped, you want to chuck them out. If that is the approach—that won't be sustainable.

What hiring or recruitment practices do GCCs follow that are different from other industries?

Based on our experience, it's clear that they typically do not engage simultaneously with numerous vendor partners, issuing the same requirements to all.

This approach frequently leads to compromised hygiene checks and neglect of essential soft elements. In contrast, our collaboration with GCC clients as an exclusive vendor partner allows us to provide a comprehensive, end-to-end service, ensuring a more thorough and thoughtful recruitment process.

They may work with more than one partner like us, but the part given to us is given exclusively to us for maybe 2 months or something. It will only go to someone if we do not deliver. That way we have the time to invest in talking to each candidate in detail, talking about why somebody should join.

Rajesh cited the example of Michelin Tyres – a client they closely work with.

"It is a French tyre manufacturing company which is doing data science and various other green tyre technology and other things out of their center in Pune. So we have that space to talk to the candidates in detail, make them interested and also rule out candidates who are not fitting, because with GCCs, a talent has to be ready to speak to any counterpart in any part of the world. There should be communication, and other elements have to be very sound. GCCs follow the step-by-step routine."

Hiring for GCCs is an exclusive and premium experience for both parties in comparison to the Indian IT industry, which works under a lot of pressure.

Movement of Premium Talent from IT to GCCs

GCCs are an extension of their headquarter unit. So, you are working for your own company, whatever you develop directly impacts the top line or bottom line. So, these are some benefits candidates see in moving to GCCs and sometimes when a new GCC comes up, a leader gets to play multiple roles which they may not have in a typical IT services company where things are very much structured.

How can colleges and organisations collaborate to prepare fresh talent for a rapidly evolving industry?

That's an extremely relevant question, especially in the context of India's demographic dividend. With the country boasting the largest youth population, it's concerning that over 70% of this demographic may not be readily employable due to gaps in both technical and soft skills.

To address this challenge, companies

should develop a strategic plan for their talent pipeline. One effective approach is to collaborate with universities and educational institutions. For instance, implementing a model where one semester is dedicated to internships while the other is to meet specific skills required by the industry can be beneficial. Some of our clients have successfully adopted this model, partnering with institutes to tailor courses to their needs for one semester.

By proactively shaping the talent pipeline in this way, companies can ensure that graduates are equipped with the skills

necessary for immediate involvement in the workforce. Ultimately, it is crucial to anticipate the skills and talent requirements of the future—planning three years and working backward to bridge those gaps.

Rajesh concluded the conversation with his thoughts on India's demographic dividend.

"I believe that while the demographic dividend has great potential, we are not fully leveraging it. Many projects are being shifted to countries like Vietnam or

Thailand, which could have been developed in India. We need to accelerate our reform process, focusing on labor laws and simplifying land acquisition.

The government should consider designating large areas of land near tier-2 cities for specific purposes and streamline the process to avoid unnecessary complications.

Additionally, we are losing valuable energy from our youth by not equipping them adequately and failing to create enough opportunities. Serious work needs to be done in these areas."



Special Feature

SHEETAL BHANOT SHETTY

BY AKANKSHA THAPLIYAL

CONSTRUCTING TOMORROW: INFRA.MARKET'S FORMULA FOR GROWTH AND TALENT EXCELLENCE

GET TO KNOW...
SHEETAL BHANOT
SHETTY

CHRO, Infra.Market

Sheetal Bhanot Shetty is the CHRO of Infra. Market, bringing over 28 years of HR leadership across industries like Hospitality, BFSI, FMCG, Manufacturing, and Construction. Recognised as one of Asia's 100 Women Power Leaders in 2023, she holds expertise in organisational growth, change management, and aligning HR with business strategy.



Global Capability Centres (GCCs) are scaling at an unprecedented pace, transforming from cost-saving extensions to critical enablers of innovation, digital transformation, and business strategy.

However, with this rapid expansion comes a set of complex challenges, particularly in talent acquisition, workforce management, and sustaining an innovation-driven culture. For the construction sector, rapidly growing players like Infra.Market must balance short-term execution with long-term strategy, foster collaboration across diverse teams, and invest in continuous upskilling to meet evolving industry demands. With its pan-India presence and a growing global footprint, the company is working to integrate digital solutions, build sustainable talent pipelines, and ensure that its workforce remains adaptable in a fast-changing industry.

This discussion with **Sheetal Bhanot Shetty, CHRO, Infra.Market** explores critical factors shaping talent strategies, from balancing short-term execution with long-term sustainability to redefining hiring practices in a skills-first economy. We also explore how organisations can drive continuous upskilling, maintain an agile and inclusive work culture, and integrate technology seamlessly across operational and digital functions.

What are some of the biggest challenges you have faced while scaling operations, and how have you adapted your strategies to overcome these obstacles while maintaining growth momentum?

Scaling at the pace of Infra.Market brings its share of complexities. One of the primary challenges has been ensuring that our systems and processes grow in tandem

with the business. Rapid growth often pressurises existing structures, so we've focused on building scalable frameworks that allow seamless operations across functions. For instance, 'Empower', our people operating platform for a unified experience, makes sure automation can eliminate the repetitive tasks and modules within the HR function. Thus, we invest in technology to streamline workflows and reduce bottlenecks, ensuring efficiency isn't compromised as we expand.

Another challenge lies in talent management. As new teams are added, it's crucial to maintain alignment while fostering collaboration. We've addressed this by creating cross-functional engagement platforms and introducing initiatives emphasising shared goals. These measures ensure that our workforce remains cohesive and motivated to drive results as we expand.

Finally, maintaining the balance between short-term execution and long-term vision has required careful prioritisation. Growth momentum is sustained when every decision ties back to the company's purpose. By anchoring our strategies in this vision, we've scaled without losing sight of what makes Infra.Market unique.

In the context of rapid growth, how does Infra.Market ensure that its expansion is sustainable, particularly in balancing short-term gains with long-term strategic goals?

Sustainable expansion requires knowing when to accelerate and when to consolidate. At Infra.Market, we take a structured approach to growth, ensuring that every step forward strengthens the business rather than just making it bigger. This means expanding in a way that operations, talent, and leadership bandwidth can support rather than outpac-

ing internal capacity. Standardisation plays a key role, allowing us to replicate success efficiently rather than reinventing processes with every new milestone.

The ability to scale also comes from staying adaptable. Market conditions shift, priorities evolve, and sustainable businesses are the ones that adjust without losing focus. We've built agility into our decision-making, ensuring that while our long-term vision remains clear, our strategies remain flexible. This balance allows us to maintain momentum without compromising on execution, making growth a deliberate and repeatable process rather than a reaction to immediate opportunities.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 highlights an increased emphasis on skills. In your view, would you lean towards hiring for demonstrated skills rather than formal degrees, especially given the rapid evolution in the supply chain industry?

Skills and education both play significant roles, especially in a fast-evolving environment like ours. At Infra.Market, we value demonstrated expertise in areas like technology, problem-solving, and adaptability, as these skills are critical for navigating modern and complex operations. Hands-on experience can bring unique insights that help to effectively address on-the-ground challenges. Our CSR initiative, 'IM Nirman', aims at creating a positive impact through skill development and empowerment in marginalised communities, paving the way for a brighter, more sustainable future for the construction workforce.

That said, formal education also adds value by offering structured knowledge and a

deeper understanding of core principles. Rather than prioritising one over the other, we focus on identifying well-rounded talent who can bring practical abilities along with a strong foundation. This balanced approach allows us to build teams capable of growing with the demands of an evolving industry.

How do you balance maintaining an innovative, tech-driven culture with the inherent challenges of managing a workforce that spans diverse functions—from manufacturing supply chains to digital technology?

Our approach to innovation begins with creating a shared understanding of our goals across all teams, regardless of function. We rely on technology as a support of this alignment—digital tools and automation streamline workflows, making communication and collaboration intuitive, even for teams with entirely different day-to-day responsibilities. This ensures that supply chain operations and technology teams work towards the same outcomes, even if their methods differ.

At the same time, we actively foster collaboration by bringing diverse teams together for shared projects and knowledge exchange. This helps employees see the impact of their work beyond their immediate function, whether they're on the ground in manufacturing or designing digital solutions. These interactions build respect, trust, and most importantly, an understanding of how each function contributes to the company's vision.

Maintaining this balance is an ongoing effort. By investing in tools that improve communication and creating opportunities for cross-functional collaboration, we've cultivated a culture where innovation

thrives across the board. No matter how specialised, every team feels connected to the broader purpose.

What innovative strategies are in place to ensure continuous upskilling and leadership development, especially considering the critical talent needs of both technology and traditional construction supply domains?

Upskilling at Infra.Market is about staying ahead of industry shifts while preparing employees to lead from wherever they stand. We've developed a structured framework that integrates learning with empathy into everyday work to achieve this. Employees across technology and construction supply domains benefit from access to specialised training modules, real-time problem-solving opportunities, and collaborative workshops. For instance, our Learning and Development module on 'Empower' enables employee growth. These initiatives help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring learning is always relevant and impactful.

Leadership development is approached with equal intent. We identify emerging leaders early, offering them exposure to cross-functional projects and decision-making scenarios that build confidence, capability and empathy. By pairing these opportunities with mentorship from experienced leaders, we create a pipeline of exceptional talent to take on greater responsibilities.

What ties it all together is a culture of empathy that prioritises growth. Whether through skilling or leadership programmes, employees are encouraged to take ownership of their development. This ensures that as our business evolves, our people are

always ready to lead the way.

What specific measures do you take to ensure that the company's culture doesn't get diluted as new talent comes on board?

We see our culture as the backbone of our success and treat it as something to nurture rather than preserve. Growth allows us to bring more voices, perspectives, and energy into the fold, so we approach onboarding as more than a routine process. It's a chance to truly immerse new talent in the values that guide us—Ownership, Respect, Bold, Integrity, Togetherness and Celebration (ORBIT-C) backed by our vision of Rebuilding the Future of Construction Through Innovation and Technology.

We encourage new employees to ask questions, connect with peers across functions, and contribute from day one. Our initiatives strive to create natural touchpoints for cross-functional teamwork and open communication, ensuring a smooth integration into their roles and the broader company ethos. What excites me most is seeing how these new perspectives help us evolve while staying grounded in what has made us successful. By focusing on empathy, connection, and mutual growth, we make culture something that scales naturally as the company grows.



Interview

SEEMA UNNI

BY BISWAJIT BHATTACHARYA

MORE THAN JUST CAPABILITY CENTRES: **SEEMA UNNI ON THE RISE OF SMART GCCS IN INDIA**

GET TO KNOW...

SEEMA UNNI

Head – HR, Fidelity Investments
India

Seema Unni has nearly 30 years of experience in HR leadership, including business partnerships and organisational development. She has worked with Arthur Andersen and Ernst & Young and actively contributes to diversity and inclusion through NASSCOM, NHRD, and IMA India. A Common Purpose organisation alumna, she supports grassroots education initiatives and leadership development. Seema holds an MBA from Tata Institute of Social Sciences and a Diploma in French from Alliance Française.



Global Capability Centres (GCCs) in India are evolving rapidly, shifting from captive units to business and transformation hubs. As newer GCCs tap into diverse talent pools and emerging locations, mature ones bring in benchmark practices, collaboration, and evolutionary learning. In this insightful conversation, **Seema Unni, Head of Human Resources at Fidelity Investments India**, shares how GCCs shape the future by driving innovation and fostering upskilling to redefine workplace culture. From the synergy between established and emerging GCCs to Fidelity's focus on employee development, internal gig platforms, and a culture rooted in respect and inclusion, she offers a compelling take on what lies ahead for the industry.

What role do you see for GCCs in a larger organisational strategy like yours, and how does it pan out for you?

I'd say that Fidelity's GCC journey has been a fairly mature and sophisticated one. As we stand today, we have been in existence here for the last 20 years. During this time, we have evolved to become a microcosm of the Fidelity Enterprise, providing solutions to all business groups across technology, analytics, data, and operations. The way we have evolved can be understood in a couple of stages.

The **first stage** was about growth as we established work across business lines first in the areas of operations and technology and then expanding into analytics.

The **second phase** was more about consolidation; recognising that our mission was to serve Fidelity's customers and consciously aligning with the Fidelity mission of strengthening the financial well-being of its customers, and this resulted in us building business & domain

knowledge through required investments in our capabilities.

Now, as we stand in the **third phase**, the focus is on the value we bring in terms of platform modernisation, technology and business transformation, and our continued focus on customer-centricity in operations and analytics.

As we expand to build on the breadth and depth of our solutions, we have sought to ensure all our associates adopt a T-shaped approach to learning.

This includes:

- **Depth** in their expertise, whether in technology, analytics, or operations.
- **Breadth** of domain knowledge, as success is not achievable without a comprehensive understanding of the industry.

We are focused on leveraging our business domain and technical expertise, along with our strong focus on innovation, customer obsession, and quality, to continuously drive business value.

You mentioned Fidelity's transformation across three stages to meet business needs and touched on innovation. Has recent technological transformation impacted your talent pool's composition? I would also like to discuss emerging skills next, but first, could you address this?

In terms of the composition of our talent pool, we have a strong mix of what we call '**run-the-business**' skills, which remain critical due to the volume of work they support. The second part consists of high-demand skills that align closely with industry trends.

From a talent composition perspective, we maintain a balance between "run" skills and "change" skills, adapting to evolving market technologies. Both are essential, as our portfolio of work spans across maintaining existing operations and driving transformation.

Additionally, we actively assess our **hiring strategy**, balancing external recruitment and internal talent development.

We recruit from universities for graduates with adaptability and strong learning abilities, while also hiring experienced professionals to manage critical technology platforms, projects, operations and analytics functions in India.

Overall, it is a well-balanced mix of experienced and entry-level talent, as well as a blend of **run skills** and **change skills**, ensuring we remain agile and future-ready.

We recruit from universities for graduates with adaptability and strong learning abilities, while also hiring experienced professionals to manage critical technology platforms, projects, and operational analytics functions in India.

This leads me to the other part of the question—do you think any emerging skills are particularly critical to running a

successful GCC like yours? And how do you future-proof your talent and workforce?

I would say that for us, the way we define critical skills is very much based on business needs and requirements. At certain points in time, one might say that cloud skills, cybersecurity skills, or data-related skills are extremely critical. At other times, because we also manage large platforms from a financial services perspective, foundational skills like DevOps become equally important.

The maturity of our GCC has been shaped by how well we meet business needs. Therefore, we define critical skills dynamically based on what the business requires at a given time.

Regarding your question on future-proofing, we actively engage with leading training partners, vendors, and global learning platforms. This allows our associates to align their development with both their immediate business needs and their long-term career goals. They assess which skills they need to develop now and which future skills they should focus on as part of their roadmap.

We approach this systematically through a three-part framework:

- 1. Acquire** — Employees gain skills through structured learning platforms aligned with their current and future goals.
- 2. Act** — They apply these skills in real-world projects or sandbox environments, ensuring practical implementation.
- 3. Assess** — They evaluate their progress through self-assessments and managerial feedback on learning platforms, determining their proficiency and skill development.

This end-to-end future-proofing approach is **highly iterative**; all three steps must work

together. If only one or two elements are prioritised, the learning process becomes redundant over time, as employees may lose the ability to effectively leverage the skills they have acquired.

A crucial aspect of future-proofing is **soft skills**. While hard skills are essential, we place significant emphasis on **leadership development, communication, and influencing skills**. These are just as critical as technical expertise. Both need to work in tandem for success — both individually and organisationally.

This is particularly true for GCCs, not just at Fidelity but across the industry, as reflected in my interactions with peers in other GCCs.

You spoke on Fidelity's transformation across three stages to meet business needs and touched on innovation. Has recent technological transformation impacted your talent pool's composition?

I would say it is a two-pronged approach. Fundamentally, it follows what we call a **'Learn and Do'** model. On the **'Learn'** side, we have instituted two critical leadership programmes over the last three years.

1. Global Mindset Programme: This programme focuses on building psychological capital, social capital, and intellectual capital in a global arena. It enables professionals to understand different cultures, lead across diverse teams, and influence change effectively at an international level.

2. Global Leadership Programme: Many of our leaders participate in global programmes, while others benefit from global initiatives that we have adapted and brought to India. These programmes cater to different talent segments, including both new and experienced

leaders. Each level focuses on developing the competencies required to succeed at that stage.

Since leadership development is **not one-size-fits-all**, these programmes are tailored to address different leadership transitions from emerging leaders to seasoned executives.

On the **'Do'** side, these leaders step into **global roles** spanning **technology platforms, operations, and analytics functions**. However, the nature of these roles allows them to contribute from anywhere in the world.

Over time, we have observed **increased emphasis** on skills that these leaders bring, specifically, **domain expertise, technological proficiency, and leadership acumen**. The more they take on these roles, the more they build momentum which plays on the entire ecosystem; that's why they say success begets success.

This leads to a stronger pipeline of future leaders who are being groomed.

To reinforce this, we have implemented **leadership succession planning** initiatives. One key framework is our **experience-driven development playbook**, which defines the **critical experiences** that future global leaders must undertake. This structured approach ensures that we **actively cultivate** the next generation of global leaders.

Is this only happening in India at Fidelity, or is it a global playbook?

We initially started it in India as well as with a specific group in the US in partnership. Now, we are working on scaling it across. It is a great example of how we have lifted and shifted best practices from India.

What are some of the best practices in GCCs that other

industries should take note of?

I would say that in a GCC, we are building the global brand at the regional level, ensuring close alignment. When we think about the brand, it must incorporate **four key components: work, talent, learning, and career pathing**. All these elements need to come together for a GCC to be truly successful.

One of the best practices I have already touched upon in terms of work is when you are part of a large, global enterprise, understanding both technology and business domains is critical. Whether it is analytics, operations, or business processing being carried out from India, having a deep understanding of the domain you are working in is essential.

On the people and talent side, it is vital to invest in both learning and culture. We put a significant focus on culture because it becomes a key differentiator, particularly with a multi-generational workforce where everyone is competing based on work. The question is, how do you build and present a culture that offers **flexibility, empowerment, and autonomy**? That is a major aspect.

The third key element is leadership, and I have already spoken about some of the core methodologies in that space. Training programmes have a shelf life, but experience-driven development is what sustains long-term growth.

So, one of the leading methodologies here is finding the right balance between structured training and experiential learning in a creative and adaptive manner.

And finally, career pathing. The model tactic here is to allow for multiple career pathways. We focus more on the concept of a **career lattice** than a **career ladder**.

A career lattice is about enriching one's work horizontally, either through lateral

moves that build skills and expand one's repertoire or by enhancing the scope of the current role. Of course, the career ladder still plays a role through promotions and upward mobility, but we place significant emphasis on associates experiencing lateral growth and learning.

Within a GCC, the key is to provide an internal talent market where employees feel encouraged to explore work across different business lines and develop a mix of operational and transformational skills. That is what ultimately shapes leadership at a high level.

So, career pathing is about balancing both the lattice and the ladder.

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Within a GCC, the key is to provide an internal talent market where employees feel encouraged to explore different business lines and **develop a mix of operational and transformational skills**.

As India continues to be a hub for skilled talent, how do you foresee the competition for talent evolving? Given that we are talking about GCCs, especially with newer ones emerging, there are close to 1,700 GCCs as of 2024. How

do you see this competition shaping up?

Yes, I would say India is undoubtedly a hub for digital skills, and we will continue to see intense competition for talent. However, I believe that every GCC will carve out its own space based on its core value proposition. The unique value proposition of each GCC plays a crucial role in differentiating it in this competitive landscape.

For us, our unique value proposition is a blend of culture, learning, career pathing, and deep expertise in financial services. Depending on where an organisation positions itself in terms of value creation, it can gain a competitive edge in attracting and retaining talent.

While skills are something organisations compete for, culture remains a unique factor. Every individual's connection to an organisation is shaped by culture, and that varies from person to person. In my view, culture serves as a powerful differentiator, and companies should focus on nurturing and sustaining it.

If the competition is solely centred around skills, it becomes a tough race. The real differentiator will be a combination of both skills and culture.

What is the current position of the mature GCCs in India? Given the space they have established, what role do they play in shaping the path for newer GCCs, at the same time, what do they have to offer to these emerging players?

One promising aspect of newer GCCs in the market is their ability to prudently decide where to establish their presence. Many are expanding beyond tier-one cities and tapping into India's diverse talent pool across the nation.

That is a good thing because GCCs' modus operandi for locations is another unique value proposition in how they compete for talent because having such diversity makes a big difference, and the upskilling of the workforce in tier-two cities has also grown significantly over the last five years. So, I would say that is one dimension to consider when entering the market as a newer GCC.

From the perspective of mature GCCs, collaboration and knowledge-sharing across the GCC ecosystem are incredibly valuable. The exchange of optimal approaches benefits the entire industry, allowing organisations to learn from one another. For instance, GCCs working together can also enhance partnerships with vendor ecosystems, helping bring global learning and development opportunities to the Indian region.

Moreover, the presence of both established and emerging GCCs helps elevate the entire industry along the value chain. Over time, the operating models of GCCs have evolved from being captive centres to capability hubs, and now increasingly shifting towards innovation-driven centres. While the terminology may evolve, what truly matters is the industry's continuous progression.

Another significant trend is the diversification of GCCs across multiple industry sectors. As more sectors establish their GCCs in India, the ability to exchange insights and learn from different industries adds tremendous value, further advancing the ecosystem.

In essence, the interplay between newer and more mature GCCs fosters collective growth, strengthens India's position as a global GCC hub, and paves the way for future advancements in the industry.

As the landscape greatly

evolves, which you rightly pointed out, where do you see your operations in the next few years in terms of the kind of strategy that you have in place for the next three to four years?

We continue to look at our GCC strategy within the context of Fidelity's larger operating organisational framework.

Our focus remains on the financial well-being of our customers while continuing to develop technology, operations, and analytical solutions that have a meaningful impact on the work we do. From a strategic perspective, we are constantly evaluating our portfolio of work—how we contribute to the larger enterprise operating plan.

From an employee perspective, as I mentioned earlier, ensuring that our employees feel the value added, experience upskilling, and have career vitality is critical. Retention will continue to be a key focus area for us.

We also have several enabling innovation platforms, such as hackathons and experimentation initiatives. We run both 'Small i' and 'Big I' innovation programmes within our ecosystem to further drive the open talent market I spoke about earlier.

So, our focus will remain on two key aspects—our work portfolio and ensuring our associates continue to feel enriched in terms of career growth and development.

You spoke of two programmes distinctively: 'Small i' and 'Big I'. Could you explain these in detail? Are these upskilling programmes?

These are primarily programmes where our employees can contribute ideas based on their ongoing work. In our view, the highest

impact comes from enabling incremental innovation through the Small i initiatives, where employees can enhance their work through learning, observation, experience, or expertise. This allows them to drive continuous, small-scale improvements in their day-to-day roles.

The second part of innovation focuses on solving big business problems. Through Big I initiatives, we conduct events like hackathons and experimentation sessions, where teams, both globally and locally, collaborate to address large-scale challenges. These platforms are essential for fostering innovation, and we absolutely thrive on them.

Additionally, we have an internal gig platform where employees can participate in short-term gigs posted by colleagues from across the enterprise. This serves as another avenue for employees to gain exposure and experiment with different projects, further reinforcing our culture of innovation.

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GCCs working together can also enhance partnerships with vendor ecosystems, helping bring **global learning and development opportunities to the India region.**

Share your closing thoughts on the culture at Fidelity. What are some of its key highlights?

We have some very strong cultural standards that define us at Fidelity. These standards are rooted in respect, compassion, excellence, and integrity. While these may seem simple on paper, we place great emphasis on translating them into everyday practice.

To ensure this, we conduct regular culture and community workshops within the India

region, where we actively discuss these standards and explore their real-world application through case studies and use cases on the floor. It is not just about having a written standard; it is about how these values manifest in daily interactions and decision-making.

Anyone joining Fidelity undergoes comprehensive training on culture,

community, and allyship, as inclusion is a fundamental part of our culture. We see these elements as foundational to our cultural fabric, ensuring that respect, compassion, integrity, and expertise are not just words but are truly reflected in how we operate and engage with one another.



Interview

RENCY MATHEW

BY AKANKSHA THAPLIYAL

RENCY MATHEW ON SABRE'S BOLD TALENT MOVES POWERING INDIA'S GCC EVOLUTION

GET TO KNOW...

RENCY MATHEW

People Leader - India and South Asia, and MD, Sabre Bengaluru

Rency is the People Leader APAC and MD, Sabre Bengaluru and has two decades of extensive experience collaborating with executive teams to analyse, determine and implement HR solutions focused on achieving business results. In the past, she has collaborated with notable companies such as IBM, Delphi, and Scientific Games of India.



With over 1,700 GCCs operating across India and employing nearly 1.9 million people, the country has firmly established itself as a global hub for these centres. Projected to reach \$100 billion in revenue by 2030, with headcount surpassing 2.5 million, the sector is on a strong growth trajectory. To stay ahead, GCCs are addressing key challenges in talent acquisition, sustainability, diversity, and inclusion. We sat down with **Rency Mathew from Sabre**, to gain valuable insights into the talent strategies Sabre is implementing to contribute to the success of GCCs and drive continued growth in this dynamic sector.

Rency is the People Leader APAC and MD, Sabre Bengaluru and has two decades of extensive experience collaborating with executive teams to analyse, determine and implement HR solutions focused on achieving business results. In the past, she has collaborated with notable companies such as IBM, Delphi, and Scientific Games of India.

India is rapidly emerging as a global hub for GCCs. With over 1,700 centres and millions employed, what do you see as the key factors driving this growth?

India's GCC journey has been remarkable. Things truly accelerated around 20 years ago. Sabre itself is completing 20 years next year. Initially, companies viewed India as a source of cost-effective talent, but they quickly realised the immense potential here. Indian professionals consistently deliver above and beyond expectations.

Data from Zinnov and NASSCOM reveals that around 80-100 GCCs have established themselves in India, offering skills that are often unmatched globally. Today, GCCs

have evolved into Centers of Excellence (CoEs), handling advanced functions. For example, at IBM over a decade ago, we created a CoE for marketing in India that was even larger than their domestic team. Similarly, Sabre has seen more senior and strategic roles emerge in its Indian CoE.

As the GCC sector expands, what talent challenges are Sabre encountering, and how are you addressing them?

At Sabre, we've introduced several forward-thinking initiatives. One of our standout programs is Sabre Hyper Jump. It's a robust internship program where students spend six months working closely with us during their final semester. This isn't just about on-the-job training; we combine hands-on projects with classroom sessions to groom future leaders.

We've seen remarkable results. Many of these interns have taken on roles two levels above entry positions due to the comprehensive training. They bring energy and confidence, often directly interacting with our CEOs and driving initiatives that boost office culture.

We've also focused on increasing diversity. Our 2024 internship batch, for instance, had a 50-50 gender split. However, we never compromise on merit. While we ensure a healthy pipeline of women candidates, the selection process is uniform for everyone. Additionally, we recruit across India—from Chandigarh to Bihar—bringing in diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Diversity seems to play a significant role in your strategies. Can you share more about how Sabre supports inclusivity?

Flexibility has been key to fostering inclusivity. Remote and hybrid working

options have allowed us to retain talent, especially women who may have left due to family commitments. Return-to-work programs have also been pivotal in welcoming women back into the workforce.

We're also mindful of supporting the LGBTQ+ community. For instance, our insurance policies allow employees to add non-spousal partners, ensuring inclusivity. Beyond that, we're seeing newer trends, like employees including pets in insurance plans, reflecting how workplace policies need to adapt to evolving lifestyles.

Millennials and Gen Z employees are transforming workplaces. What has Sabre learned from them?

This new generation has brought fresh energy and a questioning mindset. Unlike older generations who often accepted the status quo, Gen Z asks, "Why can't we do this differently?" Their curiosity and drive have pushed us to rethink long-standing processes.

For example, we now assign interns to customer-facing roles right away, helping them understand client needs from the outset. It's a mutually beneficial relationship—these young professionals challenge us with new ideas, and we guide them in navigating the corporate world.

What does it take to build high-performance teams at Sabre?

Collaboration between HR and engineering teams has been critical to our success. When hiring, we don't limit ourselves to Tier-1 colleges. We actively recruit from Tier-2 institutions, focusing on candidates who show a passion for learning and growth rather than entitlement.

We also prepare interns for the transition from campus to corporate life. Through our

Campus to Corporate program, we teach them how to adapt to a professional environment, ensuring they hit the ground running. Alumni from these colleges often help identify candidates who align with Sabre's values, further strengthening our hiring process. Collaboration between HR and engineering teams has been critical to our success. When hiring, we don't limit ourselves to Tier-1 colleges. We actively recruit from Tier-2 institutions, focusing on candidates who show a passion for learning and growth rather than entitlement.

We also prepare interns for the transition from campus to corporate life. Through our Campus to Corporate program, we teach them how to adapt to a professional environment, ensuring they hit the ground running. Alumni from these colleges often help identify candidates who align with Sabre's values, further strengthening our hiring process.

Can you share some insights into Sabre's work policies and how they're evolving?

At Sabre, we prioritise flexibility and trust in how our teams work. We've adopted a hybrid work policy, where 25% of our

employees are fully remote, even based in cities like Bangalore. The decision to work remotely is based on individual roles, locations, and manager approval.

In addition, 45% of our teams work with remote managers, meaning they aren't co-located with their direct reports. We also offer flexibility in scheduling—employees can decide which days to come to the office within their scheduled work week. For cross-functional collaboration, we've encouraged teams to establish core days or hours where everyone can be in the office at the same time.

To streamline coordination, we recently held a vote to define a specific day for all-hands events, ensuring that key gatherings are easy for everyone to attend.

We also offer comprehensive family leave policies—while women are entitled to six months of maternity leave, we've extended 12 weeks of paternity leave for our male employees to promote a more balanced approach to caregiving.

One unique policy we've introduced is the

Core Commute Time—from 4 to 6 PM, we avoid scheduling meetings to prevent employees from taking calls while driving. And finally, our year-end break, from December 25th to January 1st, ensures everyone gets time off to recharge.

At Sabre, we believe in creating a work environment that supports flexibility, well-being, and productivity.

How do you ensure employees find a sense of purpose in their work?

The purpose is critical, especially for Millennials and Gen Z. In their early career years, they want challenging and meaningful projects that add value to their professional growth. At Sabre, we assign interns and new hires to high-impact roles, including customer-facing projects.

We also focus on fostering community and friendships at work, which enhances engagement and satisfaction. Beyond this, employees care about their company's larger purpose. Programs like Give Together align their contributions with societal impact, reinforcing their sense of purpose.



Interview

RAJA VASUDEVAN

BY AKANKSHA THAPLIYAL

**REDEFINING FINANCE
FOR GOOD:**

RAJA VASUDEVAN ON WHAT MAKES PEOPLE STAY AT FINASTRA

GET TO KNOW...

RAJA VASUDEVAN

Global Head, TA & Head of India,
People & Communications, Finastra

Raja Vasudevan is a dynamic talent leader with 15+ years of experience across engineering, fintech, shared services, and automotive industries. He has successfully led global hiring strategies, built high-performing teams, and driven large-scale organizational transformations. Passionate about people, innovation, and the future of work, Raja is dedicated to shaping a workforce that drives business success.



India's fintech sector has seen a meteoric rise, with reports estimating it will reach a market value of \$150 billion by 2025, driven by a surge in digital financial services and innovations. The growth is not only in startups but also in the expansion of Global Capability Centers (GCCs), which have witnessed a 25% increase in hiring within the last two years. As the demand for specialised fintech talent continues to outpace supply, companies like Finastra are leading the charge in nurturing this ecosystem.

In this conversation with **Raja Vasudevan, Global Head, Talent Acquisition & Head of India, People & Communications at Finastra**, we explored how the organisation is adapting to this dynamic landscape. Raja discussed the evolving strategies for talent acquisition, the importance of skill-based hiring, and how Finastra is shaping the future of finance through innovation, while also providing insight into the broader transformation occurring in India's fintech GCCs.

How does Finastra's mission of 'redefining finance for good' translate into your hiring strategies? How do you attract and retain the right people to drive innovation at Finastra?

It all starts with workforce planning. Even before the talent team begins the hiring process, we focus on what skills are needed. We start by looking at workforce planning and talent mapping. This strategy aligns well with our overall employer planning and also helps us think about the flexibility we can offer potential candidates in today's work environment.

We also believe that sticking only to industry-based experience isn't always necessary. The world is changing, and we

focus more on skills rather than experience. So, expanding our talent pipeline is key. And it's not just about bringing in external talent—we also prioritise internal talent. Upskilling and reskilling are crucial if we want to stay ahead in this evolving landscape.

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At Finastra, we have an internal platform where employees can evaluate their skills. **It helps them assess where they stand and offers resources for learning and upgrading their skills.** This approach ensures that retention is handled well-because when you offer growth and learning opportunities, it's a win-win for both the company and employees.

Eventually, we aim to move completely towards skill-based hiring. For instance, right now, very few companies hire purely based on skills. Often, we just replace someone with someone else, without considering the actual skill gap. The focus should be on the specific skill needed, not just replacing the person.

We also make sure that our talent acquisition team is prepared to move quickly. In today's fast-paced market,

automation plays a big role in identifying process gaps and streamlining how we bring in external talent.

You mentioned the readiness of talent in recruitment teams. Could you elaborate on the challenges organisations are still facing, particularly the roadblocks?

While India has the supply of talent, the demand is outpacing supply. More importantly, the quality of that supply is a big factor. This is where we face a challenge as a country, we're still relying on traditional education systems. If we don't modernise our approach, we could find ourselves in a difficult position.

There needs to be a stronger partnership between industries and universities. Industry-relevant courses should be introduced, and universities should prepare students with skills that are needed on day one. I'm not saying training isn't important, but a significant portion of the learning could happen while students are still in school. We need both sides to collaborate more closely.

Mr. Vasudevan highlights the fresh perspectives and meaningful work the new generation looks for. He notes, "When I started my career 15-16 years ago, all we wanted was a job. Today's younger generation isn't just looking for a job; they want to know what value the company can add to their lives. They care about the support system the organisation provides, especially in terms of learning and work-life balance.

Raja appreciates the preparedness of this generation and the homework they do before joining an organisation. "They're already doing extensive research about a company's values, work culture, and what they offer. This shift is forcing companies to

adapt. We also partner with universities and engage with students from their second and third years to ensure we're on the same page."

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In 2024, we hired around 75 fresh graduates, and last year it was about 82-85. They go through rotation programs and are placed in various business areas. This hands-on approach is where real learning happens. **We also hosted a Gen AI Expo, where we invited companies like Google, Amazon, and IBM, allowing students to engage with industry leaders.**

What do you think have been the key pillars of Finastra's retention strategies?

One of the main pillars is upskilling and reskilling. We focus heavily on developing our existing talent, which is at the core of why people stay. Benefits also play a significant role, but I'm not just talking about money. We offer a lot of flexibility—there's no upper limit on leave, for example. The conversation is more between the manager and employee about what works for them.

We also have one of the best hybrid work cultures in the industry. Career growth and learning opportunities are integral to our retention strategies.

Let's switch gears and talk about how Finastra is supporting smaller financial institutions and enabling innovation. How does this compare to more established banks with bigger setups?

At Finastra, we actively support smaller financial institutions by providing them with advanced technology solutions. Our mantra is about reducing their investment burden while offering cutting-edge solutions that help them innovate.

We've formed partnerships with several tech providers, which help address the challenges smaller businesses face in accessing formal financial services. We focus on personalised finance options, which are much more dynamic than traditional commercial loans. This is where we make an impact—whether we're working with major banks like SBI, HSBC or smaller players.

In markets like South Asia, Japan, and Singapore, we're seeing strong growth, and the SMEs we hire are crucial in shifting traditional products to modern, scalable solutions.

What skills have become more critical in the fintech industry, especially in the context of AI, cybersecurity, and the modernisation of products?

Across the financial industry, the demand for specialised skills has surged, particularly in AI and cybersecurity. The percentage of recruiting in these areas has jumped significantly.

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When it comes to diversity, we're proud of our numbers. **Globally, we're at 46% diversity in hiring, and in India, it's around 50%.** We also have initiatives like Women at Finastra, where we don't just teach women what's required for their current job, but help them build their careers.

AI has seen an increase of 50 to 60%, while cybersecurity recruiting stands at around 25 to 30%. This trend is true for Finastra as well. When compared to other industries, like engineering or manufacturing, change is harder to implement because those sectors are more process-driven with set rule books. However, in fintech, companies are eager to modernise the moment they spot new opportunities.

For instance, in the banking sector, which has traditionally been resistant to change, fintech companies are taking bold steps towards modernisation, and that's where Finastra plays a crucial role.

Our focus is on modernising our products without disrupting the customer experience. To achieve this, we offer both existing and new solutions, allowing customers to use both concurrently while gradually transitioning to the new versions. This balanced approach minimises disruption



and highlights the value of modernised solutions.

I can also link this back to the way our Talent Acquisition (TA) team operates. It's not just about recruiters and HR folks—it's a holistic approach to workforce planning. As we move forward with product modernisation and development, our talent team plays an essential role in ensuring we have the right skills in place to support these strategic shifts.

As organisations evolve, are they ready to embrace skills-based hiring? Are job descriptions changing to reflect that?

Definitely. In the past, companies would often set strict requirements like "must have a degree" or "must have X years of experience."

"But now, especially in fintech, the focus has shifted. Most companies, including Finastra, no longer have rigid educational requirements.

Instead, we focus on the skills and experience that matter most for the role. We believe in upskilling and reskilling people to meet the job requirements, so education isn't a barrier. This change is happening fast, especially in fintech, where agility is key.

According to Raja, for Indian fintech

companies to bolster India's growing stature as a Global Capability Center (GCC) hub, it is crucial to attract greater investment from global players while also focusing on developing fresh talent.

"We need to increase our investment in academic partnerships and research. As a country, our R&D investment is not enough, and that needs to change if we aim to stay competitive on the global stage," he emphasises.

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Our focus is on modernising our products without disrupting the customer experience. To achieve this, we offer both existing and new solutions, allowing customers to use both concurrently while gradually transitioning to the new versions. **This balanced approach minimises disruption and highlights the value of modernised solutions.**

Special Feature

BY MAMTA SHARMA

HER VOICE IN STEM: HERE ARE THE BOLD TRUTHS BEHIND WOMEN'S SUCCESS IN TECH

5 most influential women in tech dropped truth bombs on what's changing, and what still needs fixing.



**Shantha Maheswari
Sekhar**

Markets Leader, EY
Global Delivery Services

Roshini Nayar

Principal Structural
Engineer, SBM Offshore
India

**Anita
Domańska**

IT Delivery Manager &
Deputy of Business Unit
Director & Coach,
R Systems

Leaders Discuss Biggest Challenges:

- ✓ Overcome x, Speak Up for Opportunities
- ✓ Like Career, Family Needs Equal Attention
- ✓ Sponsorship and Mentorship Go a Long Way
- ✓ It Is Not Always Technical



**Sree Niranjanaa
Bose**

Technical Lead - Healthcare,
Bosch Global Software
Technologies

Sudha Gorti

Technical Lead - Healthcare,
Bosch Global Software
Technologies

For centuries, women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) have pushed boundaries, shattered stereotypes, and redefined what's possible often without the recognition they deserve. Yet, their contributions have shaped the world in ways both visible and unseen.

As we mark the **International Day of Women and Girls in Science**, it's not just about celebration, it's about reflection and action. Why do so few women still make it to the top in STEM? What barriers persist, and how can we dismantle them? More importantly, how do we ensure that future generations of women don't just enter these fields but thrive in them?

This year's theme, **Unpacking STEM Careers: Her Voice in Science**, brings us closer to the answers. Through the stories of five women leaders, we explore the challenges, breakthroughs, and pivotal moments that define their journeys.

My Biggest Challenge: Overcoming Self-doubt and Speaking Up for Opportunities.

For **Shantha Maheswari Sekhar, Markets Leader at EY Global Delivery Services**, the toughest barrier in STEM wasn't technical expertise or industry knowledge—it was self-doubt. "One of my biggest challenges was overcoming self-doubt and speaking up for opportunities," she says. "Growth comes from stepping forward, not waiting to be noticed."

She tackled this by embracing mentorship, developing an experimentation mindset, and committing to continuous learning. Over time, her curiosity became her strength, helping her build confidence and stay relevant. "It was about ensuring my contributions were recognised," she reflects.

Navigating career growth while balancing maternity is another challenge many women in STEM face. While organizations have evolved with policies supporting flexibility and performance management, she believes more targeted interventions are needed. "Accelerating training and reintegrating women into core roles—not just support or enablement positions—is crucial," she emphasises. "From my experience, this is what enables a continued career progression and long-term career growth in STEM."

Thriving in a male-dominated environment also requires confronting imposter syndrome head-on. "Recognising your merit is key," she asserts. A meritocratic mindset—stepping into roles with confidence and visibility—helps reinforce one's place in the industry. While mentorship plays a crucial role in this journey, offering guidance, validation, and growth opportunities, she believes the responsibility lies with women to actively seek it out. "Maximise mentorship, leveraging it to build resilience, gain insights, and navigate challenges in male-dominated environments," she adds.

A continuous learning mindset and a figure-it-out attitude have been invaluable in her STEM journey. "Embracing challenges with curiosity and adaptability has allowed me to navigate diverse roles, solve problems collaboratively, and grow alongside my peers. Success isn't about having all the answers—it's about the willingness to learn, experiment, and evolve with every opportunity," she shares.

Looking back, she wishes she had been more vocal about her ambitions earlier. "**If I could give my younger self one piece of advice, it would be to let go of self-doubt and speak up with confidence**," she says. "Opportunities don't just come to those who work hard—they come to those who advocate for themselves, share ideas, and

take initiative. Trusting my abilities earlier would have made the journey smoother and more fulfilling."

As for stereotypes about women in STEM, she is determined to see one debunked entirely: the notion that women have limitations in the field. "Talent, skill, and innovation are not defined by gender," she asserts. "Women excel in technical expertise, leadership, problem-solving, and innovation. It's time we recognize their contributions without bias or assumptions about their capabilities."

A common misconception, she adds, is that STEM lacks curiosity or creativity. "In reality, STEM thrives on innovation, experimentation, and continuous learning," she clarifies. "It's not just about technical skills—it's about solving complex problems, pushing boundaries, and discovering new possibilities. Curiosity drives progress, making it an exciting and ever-evolving field."

Throughout her journey, the best advice she received from a fellow woman in STEM was simple yet powerful: "Stay curious, embrace the unexpected, and enjoy the journey—both personally and professionally." And for those aspiring to enter the field, her advice is just as encouraging: "Explore fearlessly, seek challenges, and never stop learning. STEM is a dynamic space where curiosity and adaptability open limitless possibilities."

Your Expertise Defines You, Not Stereotypes'

Structural engineering has traditionally been a male-dominated field, and early in her career, **Roshini Nayar, Principal Structural Engineer, SBM Offshore India** often found herself as the only woman in the room. "Facing both conscious and unconscious bias, I focused on demonstrating my expertise through results that spoke for themselves. Rather than letting challenges

discourage me, I embraced quiet perseverance, seeking out mentors and allies who valued my skills over stereotypes. I also try and stay committed to driving change. Whenever possible, I try to mentor young professionals, advocating for better representation, and working to break down barriers. I aimed to ensure that the obstacles I faced wouldn't persist for the next generation."

One stereotype she wants to see debunked? "The assumption that women shy away from high-pressure, hands-on roles. I've worked in shipyards under tough conditions—long hours, language barriers, and physically demanding environments. Women in STEM are just as capable of excelling in these spaces. Despite the challenges, I never let myself believe I didn't belong." The stereotype that women aren't suited for such roles isn't just inaccurate—it actively limits opportunities, she adds. "Women bring immense technical capability and problem-solving skills to these settings, and it's time the industry acknowledges and supports that. The more we normalise this, the more inclusive the industry will become."

The best piece of advice she's received from a fellow woman in STEM? Perseverance. "Life isn't easy for anyone, but resilience and perseverance make all the difference. My policy has always been: If you cannot run, walk. If you cannot walk, crawl. But whatever you do, keep moving forward."

And to aspiring women in STEM, her message is clear: "Your expertise defines you, not stereotypes. Keep learning, keep pushing boundaries, and build a strong support system that empowers you to grow and succeed."

'I waited a long time before deciding to start a family because I needed to feel secure'

in my career.'

Anita Domańska, IT Delivery Manager & Deputy of Business Unit Director & Coach at R Systems, a global technology company that designs and develops digital products and platforms, reflects on her journey, highlighting the importance of career security and a supportive work environment in navigating the intersection of career growth and maternity.

"I waited a long time before deciding to start a family because I needed to feel secure in my career," Anita shares. "It was also crucial that my employer supported and understood this life stage." At R Systems, she found a place where employees, especially women, thrive professionally while managing family responsibilities. Many women, even in top positions, have expanded their families while continuing to grow within the organisation. This supportive environment not only ensures a safe space for women but also encourages long-term professional commitment.

Anita's career blossomed in the months and years after returning from maternity leave. "I gradually increased my working hours, which showed me that women can be incredibly organised and efficient during this period." She attributes her career growth to a company that holds positions open for women returning from maternity leave, offering flexibility and reduced working hours in the early years after their return. "Employers should believe in the effectiveness of women during such times and provide the necessary support," she advises.

Anita admits that her own beliefs and perceptions about what was expected of her were the most challenging. "When I stopped comparing myself, especially to male management styles, and followed my inner truth, ethics, and standards, I realised there was a place for me," she explains.

Imposter syndrome is another challenge many women face, and Anita believes it's not exclusive to women alone. "It's important to remember that many men experience imposter syndrome too," she points out. It manifests as the belief that one never has enough courses or skills. "The most common armour we adopt in response to this syndrome is perfectionism, but this path can disconnect us from our creativity, inner honesty and productivity. The more success we achieve through perfectionism, the more we feel the need to perpetuate this cycle, which can lead to burnout. If we see this syndrome leading us in that direction, it's important to address it and work on it," she advises.

To overcome imposter syndrome, she suggests, "We can work with a mentor who shares their experiences, helping us understand that there is room for imperfection and find other ways. Another tool is working with a coach. Yet another model is mastermind groups, where we can support each other and hear that others face similar challenges."

Looking back, Anita's advice to her younger self would be to invest in her strengths and have the courage to make bold decisions. "I would also wish for more courage in changing situations that were not good for me," she shares.

Anita clears up a misconception that to work in STEM, one must start in a highly technical role. "That wasn't my case," she says, demonstrating that diverse paths exist in the field.

The best advice Anita received from a fellow woman in STEM is simple but powerful: "If you don't respect yourself, your boundaries, and your time, no one else will." Her advice to aspiring women in STEM is equally practical: "No one will remember that you stayed up all night to deliver a project, except your loved ones who missed you. So, work smart."

'Imposter syndrome thrives in isolation; mentorship combats it, empowering women in STEM.'

In the early days of her career, **Sree Niranjanaa Bose, Technical Lead - Healthcare, Bosch Global Software Technologies**, often questioned her place in the world of STEM. "I sometimes wondered if I truly belonged," she admits. It's a sentiment shared by many women in the field—research shows that nearly 75% of women experience imposter syndrome at some point, often creating unnecessary self-doubt. But for Sree, a turning point came when she embraced mentorship, which helped her navigate these challenges.

"I joined my organisation's mentorship program, and it changed everything," Sree reflects. Through regular sessions, goal setting, and self-reflection exercises, she discovered her strengths and began to build confidence in her expertise. "Mentorship helped me shift my mindset from self-doubt to self-assurance," she explains. The value of mentorship became clear to her: "Imposter syndrome thrives in isolation, but mentorship fosters a strong support system, enabling women to thrive in STEM with confidence."

As a woman in STEM, balancing career growth with maternity is a real challenge. Sree has seen firsthand how essential workplace support is during this phase. "A colleague of mine is navigating this transition, and the workplace support has been invaluable," she shares. She believes that organisations must take proactive steps to ensure women feel supported when they return to work after maternity. Flexible schedules, remote work options, and wellness programs are a strong foundation, but Sree emphasises that mentorship, training, and leadership opportunities are what truly empower

women to succeed. "By encouraging an inclusive environment that aligns with their aspirations, organizations enable women to thrive both professionally and personally, ensuring women will have a better chance of succeeding in every facet of their lives."

For Sree, one unexpected trait that has helped her succeed in STEM is her passion for learning across disciplines. "I've always been drawn to exploring new fields—whether it's biomedical sciences, AI system design, or user-centric methodologies," she says. This broad knowledge base has been crucial in solving complex challenges in healthcare technology. "Every day, I dive into new code, experiment with emerging technologies, and constantly refine my skills, ensuring continuous growth and innovation," she shares.

'A common misconception is that careers in STEM may be isolating or purely technical.'

When Sudha Gorti, Senior Delivery Agile Program Management at Publicis Sapient, talks to young women considering a career in STEM, she often hears them express doubts about their abilities. "They may think their strengths lie in being social and enjoy working with people, but they believe STEM is for 'geniuses' and too challenging," she says. Sudha is quick to challenge this misconception, emphasising that these very strengths—curiosity, problem-solving, and collaboration—are what make women particularly suited for success in STEM careers.

"A common misconception is that STEM careers are isolating or purely technical," Sudha explains. "In reality, collaboration is essential, and this is where women truly excel. Women are natural team players, eager to seek help and offer support. STEM isn't about working alone; it's about diverse minds coming together to drive progress." Sudha believes women have always played

a pivotal role in building strong communities, and this quality is invaluable in STEM environments.

Another misconception, Sudha adds, is that you need to be a 'genius' to succeed in STEM. "STEM careers are built on curiosity, problem-solving, and perseverance. Women's natural curiosity leads them to ask insightful questions and seek understanding, fuelling innovation in science and technology," she explains. "Problem-solving is what engineers do every day, and women are already equipped with the mindset needed for that."

For any woman questioning if she belongs in STEM, Sudha reassures, "STEM is about making a difference. If you're curious, resilient, and eager to learn, you're exactly what the field needs."

Sudha credits her success in STEM to an unexpected trait—competitiveness, shaped by her passion for analysing sports. She spent hours breaking down games, player performances, and strategies, which honed her analytical mindset, proving invaluable in STEM.

Growing up competing in swimming, badminton, and interschool March Past competitions taught Sudha discipline, resilience, and the drive to improve. "In sports, setbacks are inevitable, but you learn to push through, strategise, and come back stronger," she says, a mindset that applies perfectly to STEM.

Sudha's love for solving puzzles also plays a key role in her success. "STEM is about problem-solving—finding patterns, troubleshooting, and fitting pieces together to solve challenges," she explains. The thrill of solving tough problems keeps her motivated.

These qualities—competitiveness, analytical thinking, and problem-solving passion—have helped Sudha thrive in STEM.

Interview

GUNJANDEEP KAUR

BY BISWAJIT BHATTACHARYA

GCCS BEYOND METROS: GUNJANDEEP KAUR ON HOW MODEL N IS REDEFINING WORK CULTURE

GET TO KNOW... **GUNJANDEEP KAUR**

Director—HR Business Partner,
Model N

With 15+ years of HR experience, Gunjandeep leads the India People Leadership Team, drives DEIB initiatives, and has helped Model N achieve the Great Place to Work® certification. Her expertise includes strategic business partnering, talent and change management, and policy development. She held key People Advisory roles at Accenture and Netcracker Technology, contributing to the Core Compete-Accenture AI merger in 2021. Recognised in BW 40 Under 40 (2024), she holds a master's in HR and Labour Law.



The old rules of work no longer apply. Hybrid models, AI-driven insights, and a focus on employee experience are shaping a new playbook. At **Model N's Hyderabad GCC**, this is not just a vision but a reality. From harnessing AI-driven insights to redefining talent strategies beyond metro cities, **Gunjandeep Kaur** takes us through how **Model N** shapes the future of work. With a workforce that values impact over mere presence and a culture that champions learning, Model N is not just keeping up with change, it is leading it.

Could you talk about Model N and the roles and objectives of its India GCC?

Model N is the leader in revenue optimisation and compliance for pharmaceutical, MedTech, and high-tech innovators. For over 25 years, our intelligent platform has powered digital transformation for pharmaceutical, MedTech, and high-tech companies with integrated technology, data, analytics, and expert services that deliver deep insight and control. Model N is trusted in over 120 countries by the world's leading companies, including Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca, Stryker, Seagate Technology, Broadcom, and Microchip Technology.

This year, Model N is celebrating its **25th anniversary**, honouring the company's longstanding commitment to innovation, and excellence, and enabling customers to deliver life-changing products to the world.

Our **Hyderabad Global Capability Centre (GCC)** is an extended office established to access rich talent in India and drive innovation, technology, and R&D. Such centres allow companies like Model N to leverage global expertise and perform functions that might not be feasible at home locations.

Historically, GCCs were established primarily for cost arbitrage. Over time, they transitioned to scaling operations, managing portfolios, and housing senior leadership roles that operate globally. **Today, GCCs have reached a stage where they are driving digital transformation, serving as strategic hubs of innovation, value creation, and operational excellence.**

GCCs in India are transitioning from cost-saving hubs to centres of innovation and business transformation. How is Model N leveraging its GCC in India to drive this shift and how do you measure its impact?

India is now recognised as the GCC capital of the world. The GCC ecosystem here is currently valued at approximately **\$65 billion** and is projected to grow to **\$110 billion by 2030**. This growth is driven by the unparalleled talent India offers.

Currently, there are around **1,700 GCCs in India**, and this number is expected to rise

to **2,500 within the next five years**.

Remarkably, 70% of Fortune 500 companies anticipate establishing operations in India during this period. Additionally, 23% of the world's software engineering talent resides in India. These statistics highlight not just the talent density but also the country's evolution as a global innovation hub.

Historically, GCCs were established primarily for cost arbitrage. Over time, they transitioned to scaling operations, managing portfolios, and housing senior leadership roles that operate globally. Today, GCCs have reached a stage where they are driving digital transformation, serving as strategic hubs of innovation, value creation, and operational excellence.

At Model N, we are embracing this shift by focusing on the following:

- **Moving Beyond the Metros:** Some of our talent comes from emerging cities rather than tier-one metros, which expands and diversifies our talent pool.
- **Government and Policy Support:** We recognise the importance of government support in the form of favourable policies, tax exemptions, and incentives to help GCCs thrive.
- **Upskilling and Reskilling:** We are heavily invested in future-proofing our workforce by focusing on building key skills such as AI, machine learning, data analytics, and cybersecurity to name a few.

Model N's GCC in Hyderabad has evolved alongside the broader GCC ecosystem. While the GCC landscape in India continues to shift from operational hubs to strategic innovation centres, Model N is well-positioned to make the most of these changes through its focus on technology, talent, and innovation..

How does Model N's GCC position itself as an employer

of choice in India's competitive talent market, and what unique initiatives have you implemented to reduce attrition and retain top talent, especially in leadership roles within the GCC?

First and foremost, the key to positioning ourselves as an employer of choice lies in providing clear career paths for our employees. In today's competitive market, where GCCs typically pay **12-20% higher than standard IT services**, creating growth opportunities within the organisation is a major motivator for talent retention.

Each year, we host **DARE to Grow**—a six-week career development program that includes a series of learning events designed to help our employees discover their career interests, design their development plans, and take action to grow their careers. Topics of discussion include but are not limited to the following: taking charge of your career, internal mobility, using feedback to develop and grow, writing your development plan, understanding your professional brand, and holding career conversations.

Secondly, **hybrid work models** are redefining workspaces entirely. We see a strong demand for work-life balance and wellness. Today's talent is not only focused on career growth but also on how organisations contribute to the broader community.

We have cultivated an environment that rewards employees and supports them holistically. Our internal culture cultivates a space where employees can give their best while feeling valued and supported.

Model N being **Great Place to Work®** certified for two consecutive years is a testament to our efforts. We also earned regional recognition for our people-centric

approach, including the **GCC Workplace Award 2024** in the **Employee Learning & Development Category**.

In the end, it's about firing on all cylinders—career growth, wellness, competitive rewards, and a culture of support. These factors collectively enable us to attract, retain, and develop top-tier talent, even in such a highly competitive landscape.

Tier 2 cities have a wealth of untapped talent. How does your organisation approach talent acquisition in these cities, and what challenges have you faced?

Currently, Model N operates a GCC in Hyderabad, a Tier 1 city. While our physical presence is here, our approach to talent acquisition is pan-India and inclusive. We emphasise diversity in hiring and have mechanisms in place to eliminate unconscious bias during the hiring process.

Since the pandemic, the workspace dynamic has shifted significantly, allowing for **hybrid work environments**. This has reduced location constraints, enabling us to hire talent from anywhere.

That said, **Tier 1 cities, such as Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, and NCR**, may not be as attractive to some talent because of factors like congestion and high living costs. This has encouraged employers to expand the talent search into emerging Tier 2 cities like Vishakhapatnam, Indore, Jaipur, or Ahmedabad.

Challenges and Solutions: We provide employees, including those in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities, with structured training and mentorship. To ensure long-term engagement, we create clear career pathways, mentorship programs, and local leadership opportunities.

Beyond Virtual: We make it a point to bring employees to our Hyderabad office occasionally for in-person interactions, strengthening collaboration and connection. Virtual engagement is another focus area, where we use tools and initiatives to maintain strong communication and camaraderie among team members. Putting faces to names during these in-person visits creates a sense of belonging, which is crucial in today's hybrid work environment.

You spoke about hiring talent from Tier 2 cities but retaining such talent can be challenging. How do you address this and what innovative solutions have you implemented?

A key factor in retaining talent is career advancement opportunities. For talent from Tier 2 cities joining us in Hyderabad, the primary motivator for relocating or even joining a new organisation is the potential for career growth. At Model N, we ensure that we provide clear pathways for development and advancement, offering roles that challenge and grow their skills.

Additionally, we actively focus on listening to our employees. Addressing their concerns, whether related to career growth, relocation, or workplace environment through timely interventions has been critical in simplifying the hiring process and ensuring retention.

How is AI transforming the functioning of your GCC in India, and what areas are you prioritising for automation and innovation and is there any case study that you'd like to elucidate?

AI is indeed disruptive, and no company today, regardless of industry, can afford to

overlook its transformative potential. At Model N, we are utilising AI in multiple ways to enhance efficiency, productivity, and decision-making.

To empower employees, we have integrated tools like **Copilot**, which enable them to harness AI capabilities in their day-to-day tasks. This integration supports faster, more accurate outcomes and boosts productivity across the board.

AI is deeply embedded in our daily operations, spanning various facets such as support functions and process automation. Tasks like creating PowerPoint presentations and summarising meeting notes can now be automated, saving time and improving operational efficiency across teams.

Backing that up, we utilise AI for sentiment analysis through **employee pulse surveys**. This provides valuable insights into employee morale and helps identify areas requiring attention or improvement, encouraging a more engaged and satisfied workforce.

Case Study: Model N recently launched **AI Catalog Discovery**, a new generative AI (GenAI) capability to strengthen its core product suite. AI Catalog Discovery is a part of its Channel Data Management solution that effectively helps high-tech companies manage revenue from indirect sources. GenAI Catalog Discovery automates point-of-sale (POS) data processing, converting unstructured product descriptions into structured, actionable data, regardless of language. High-tech manufacturers can use the AI output to identify how their products are used and bundled for consumption. This helps optimise product bundles for increased channel sales and market share.

To sum it up, we are well along our journey of harnessing AI and ML, with opportunities still abound. The key lies in identifying

where AI can make the most significant impact within the organisation.

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Through inclusive hiring programs, **we have chartered aggressive goals for improving our diversity ratios and are leveraging a broad talent pool** to ensure women are represented in leadership roles.

A report by Nasscom stated more than 50% of GCCs are transitioning into portfolio and transformation hubs, coupled with a 40% CAGR increase in global roles and women leadership roles over the last five years, how do you see this evolution influencing the strategic direction of GCCs in India? What specific steps is your organisation taking to accelerate this growth further and foster inclusivity in leadership?

As we approach 2030, it's projected that there will be around **22,000 leadership roles in GCCs, with 30% of these roles expected to be filled by women**. I am personally excited about this evolution, as it represents a significant step forward in advocating diversity and inclusivity. At Model N, we have implemented several

initiatives to ensure that we are not only nurturing existing leadership talent but also providing opportunities for high-potential female talent to rise. Through inclusive hiring programs, we have chartered aggressive goals for improving our diversity ratios and are leveraging a broad talent pool to ensure women are represented in leadership roles. Here's how we are addressing this:

Women-Focused Development: Model N launched an impactful, internal program called **She Leads**, designed to accelerate the growth of rising women leaders within the company. Participants included those who were identified by leadership as having a strong performance track record and significant potential for future success.

Employee Resource Groups: Employee resource groups, such as **Alpha Women**, serve as inclusive platforms for open dialogue and mutual support. These groups promote collaboration and allow employees to share experiences and learn from each other's journeys.

Through these initiatives, we aim to not only **retain STEM talent** but also attract and nurture diverse leaders who can drive innovation and inclusivity. Our focus is on ensuring our policies are equitable, fair, and reflective of our commitment to diversity.

How do you think global organisations view India's GCC landscape today, and what competitive advantages does India offer compared to other GCC hubs like the Philippines or Eastern Europe?

The key advantage India offers lies in its technology expertise. Technology is the heart of everything. Regardless of the industry, whether it's retail, healthcare, or finance, technology is at the core of operations, and India leads with apex

engineering and R&D talent in the world.

Talent Density

India accounts for **23% of the world's software engineering talent**. GCCs in India currently employ around **1.9 million professionals**, a number expected to double to **4.5 million by 2030**. While cost arbitrage was once the primary driver, today, talent arbitrage sets India apart.

Future-Ready Skills

Secondly, Indian talent is consistently being upskilled and reskilled to be future-ready and align with market demands. Companies invest heavily in talent development programs across all levels including early talent, mid-level, and senior roles. Key focus areas include cloud computing, Generative AI, IoT, metaverse, blockchain, and data analytics, ensuring India's workforce remains at the cutting edge of innovation.

Integrated Collaboration

India's GCCs house end-to-end business functions. For instance, the product team can seamlessly collaborate with operations, analytics, and R&D teams to work towards a common objective. This integrated approach helps spark new ideas and innovative solutions for our customers.

Policy Support and Onboarding

Excellence

GCCs in India prioritise smooth onboarding programs, ensuring that new talent is set up for success without impediments. Policies are crafted to eliminate barriers and create a conducive environment for talent to thrive.

With geopolitical changes, supply chain challenges, and shifting market dynamics, what are the key risks and opportunities for GCCs in India, and how is Model N adapting?

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India's ability to **combine world-class talent with competitive costs** makes it a preferred choice for global organisations.

Rising competition for skilled professionals in cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Pune can drive up costs and attrition rates. Increasing reliance on a smaller talent pool may create scalability challenges. Tier 1 cities face infrastructure strain, including traffic congestion and rising real estate costs. Government intervention plays a crucial role in mitigating risks by providing policy incentives and tax exemptions to companies setting up GCCs in India. While talent arbitrage remains a key advantage, cost efficiency continues to be a driver. This not only offsets cost-related concerns but also positions India as a stable and attractive destination despite global uncertainties. India's ability to combine world-class talent with competitive costs makes it a preferred choice for global organisations. By ensuring the right infrastructure and creating opportunities for talent to thrive, India can turn challenges into opportunities. Organisations like ours can leverage this by tapping into diverse talent, optimising costs, and providing employees with career growth opportunities.

What are the top three lessons you have learned from managing a GCC in India, and how can other organisations learn from your journey?

Define your Unique Proposition: Every GCC must have a unique proposition or a clear

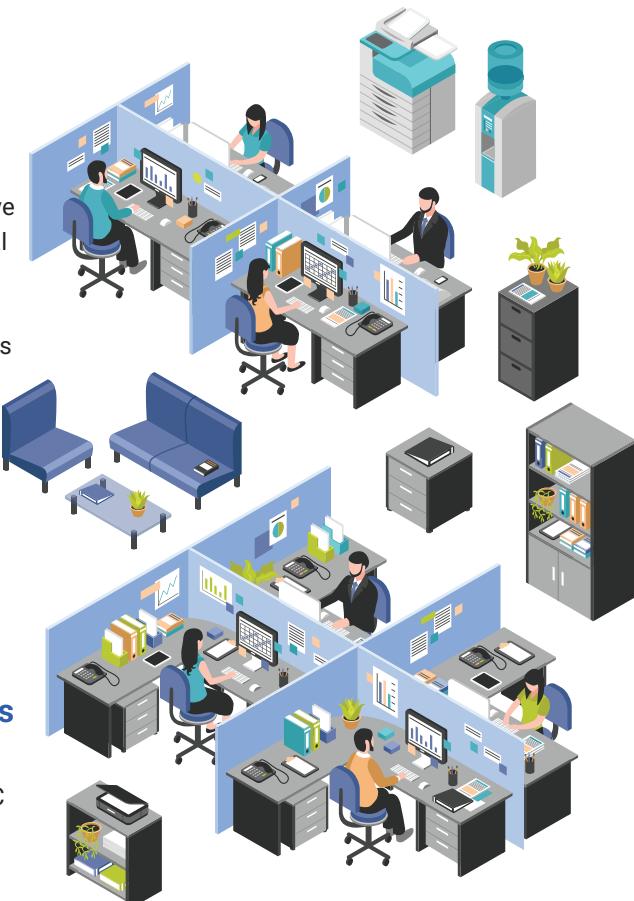
focus area. Whether it's becoming centres of excellence for cloud computing, digitalisation, or another capability, defining your GCC's unique value proposition is critical to driving impact and delivering value to the parent organisation.

Adopt a Growth Mindset in Leadership:

With more global roles being established in GCCs, leadership needs to nurture talent effectively. Understanding diverse aspirations and providing tailored development opportunities, be it through upskilling, mentoring, leadership pathways are key to retaining high-performing talent.

Synergise; No Silos:

GCCs must work in alignment with their global counterparts, understanding the strategic vision of the organisation. Operating in silos limits the potential for value creation. Through effective collaboration, GCCs can contribute meaningfully to the company's global objectives.



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