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ARTICLE 3

Developing the GCC leadership: Succession as a strategic imperative

Leadership conversations around India's Global Capability Centres (GCCs) often start with individual stories — the country head who now runs a global platform, the technology leader who has taken on regional responsibility, or the returning Indian executive who has relocated from another market.

Important as these examples are, they reveal only part of what leadership strength in a GCC actually looks like. In practice, a strong GCC is not defined only by the visibility of the person at the top, but by the quality of the team that supports them and by how prepared the wider leadership is when roles begin to shift.

That is why succession planning is becoming a strategic priority for GCCs. As roles grow in scope and organisations rely on a broader layer of leadership strength, the question is no longer just who leads today, but who is ready to lead next.

That scrutiny is increasing because the next talent gap is being shaped by several forces all at once:

- Continued market growth, with new GCCs entering India while competing for talent from the same leadership pool.
- A shift in mindset, as GCCs move from support centres to strategic growth engines with broader enterprise responsibilities.
- Structural disruption is being driven by AI and automation, reshaping organisational structures from traditional pyramids and into more diamond-shaped models, while increasing demand for more specialised leadership capability.
- The emergence of new leadership roles, from heads of AI enabled platforms to leaders overseeing global products, data and customer journeys.

Together, these shifts are placing greater pressure on leadership pipelines. For many GCCs, the challenge starts earlier than it appears — in the leadership choices made as the centre first takes shape.

How early leadership choices shape future options

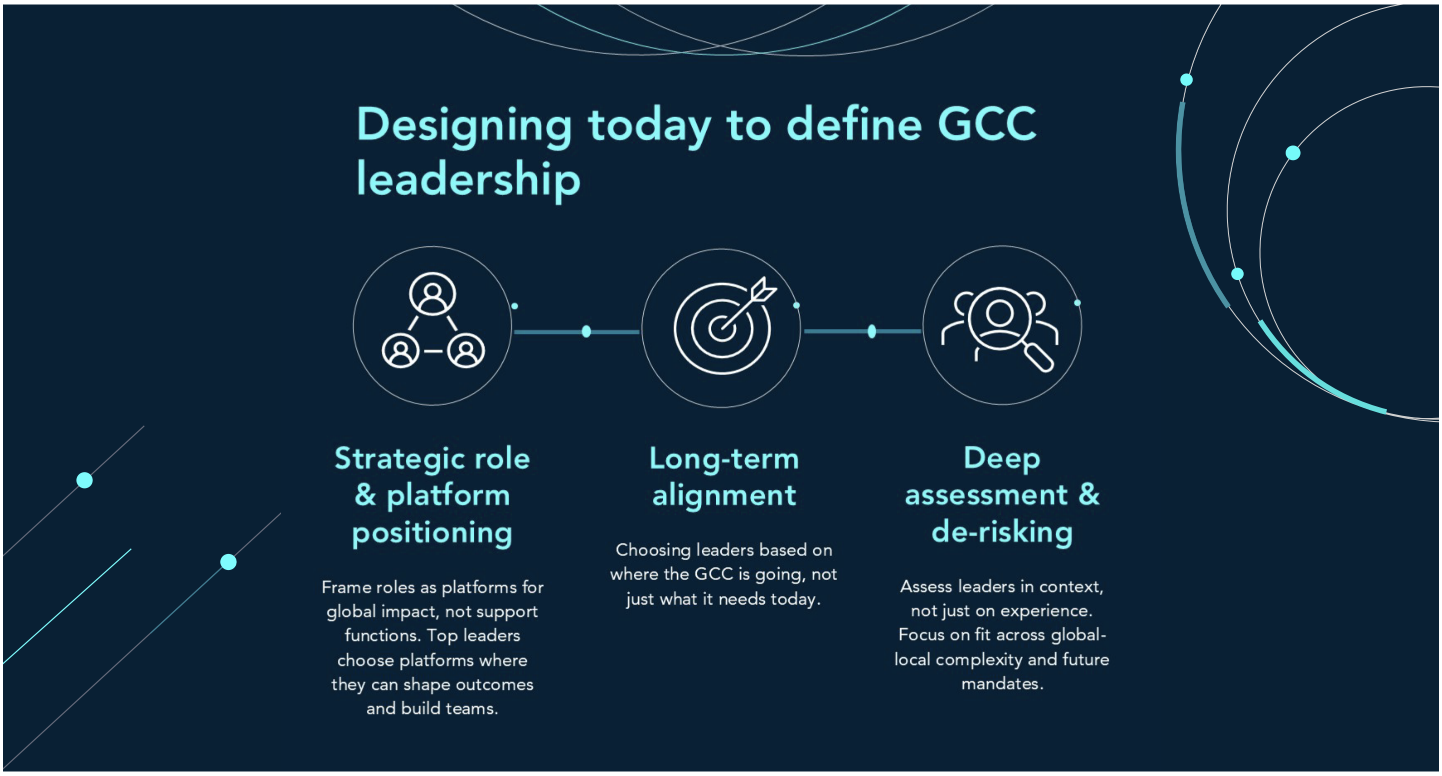
When organisations set up or significantly expand a GCC, one of the early priorities is often to establish visible leadership that can help the centre gain credibility across the organisation. Under that pressure, it is easy for organisations to gravitate towards familiar profiles — senior leaders who have succeeded in other markets, individuals from known networks, or candidates whose experience feels immediately reassuring on paper.

The challenge is not that these leaders are necessarily the wrong choices, but that familiarity can sometimes be mistaken for fit, particularly in a GCC context where leadership requirements are often more nuanced than they first appear. A common mistake at this stage is to over-index on experience and technical credentials while giving insufficient weight to cultural fit. GCC leadership roles require more than a familiar title or a similar posting elsewhere; they require leaders who can operate across global and local contexts, build trust within diverse stakeholders, and connect India-based capability to broader enterprise priorities. A leader can look entirely right on paper and still be the wrong fit for a role that depends as much on influence and judgement as it does on execution.

Early appointments can also be shaped too heavily by speed, with organisations prioritising availability and recognisable profiles during setup phases rather taking a more deliberate approach to long-term fit. As GCC responsibilities expand into global platforms, AI-enabled transformation, or multi-country operations, organisations may find that only a small number of leaders appear credible for those roles, with limited depth behind them. Succession risk in GCCs often begins there. Choices made early to establish the centre can either create a bench with room to grow or leave the organisation dependent on a small number of leaders with no obvious next line.

Designing GCC roles that build successors as well as deliver results

A different picture emerges when organisations start by asking what a GCC leadership role should look like several years from now, rather than only what it needs in the immediate term.



It begins with how the role and platform are positioned. Stronger organisations position the platform from which leaders can shape global products, influence enterprise decisions and build long-term capability. The GCC's vision, scale and impact are communicated deliberately because top leaders choose platforms, not just postings. That, in turn, changes the type of leadership bench the organisation can attract. When the opportunity is positioned more strategically, it becomes easier not only to attract stronger leaders at the top, but also high-potential talent capable of growing into larger leadership mandates over time.

It also encourages prioritising long-term alignment. As GCC mandates continue to evolve, organisations are increasingly looking beyond what a role requires today and assessing whether a leader can grow with it over time. That means evaluating not only current capability, but also the ability to build teams, develop talent in India, and take on broader responsibilities as the GCC expands in scope and strategic importance.

The same applies to assessment and succession de-risking. What matters is not only whether a candidate looks strong in abstract competency terms, but whether they are likely to succeed in the specific context of a GCC in India, with all the cultural nuance, global-local interfaces and organisational complexity that role now carries.

This is where structured, insight-led assessment becomes valuable. Deep referencing, calibration and market validation help organisations build conviction around who is genuinely right for the role, especially when the strongest candidates are not actively in the market and require credible, strategic engagement before they consider moving. The thread through all of this is intent. Senior hires are treated not as a standalone appointment, but as the beginning of a longer-term leadership pipeline in India — one expected to deliver results today while also creating successors for what comes next.

Making succession a standing capability

As global organisations place more decision-making responsibility, higher-value work and broader enterprise mandates within their Indian GCCs, demand for leaders who can grow with those responsibilities will continue to rise. That pressure is already visible in the broader leadership gap: while 66% of organisations want to create global roles in India and 90% of selected candidates in those roles are regarded as successful, only 12% have been able to appoint local leaders to them.

Leading organisations are increasingly treating succession planning as a standing capability that runs alongside GCC business planning, rather than as a periodic exercise triggered only by vacancies or board discussions. The work begins well before leadership transitions occur. It starts with identifying which roles will matter most next and whether enough depth is being built behind them early enough.

As GCCs take on more end-to-end global processes and participate more directly in enterprise decision-making, stronger organisations are mapping not only the country head role, but also the functional and second-line positions beneath it, particularly in areas where ownership is growing fastest and continuity matters most. It also means tying succession planning much more closely to the future direction of the GCC, especially in the functions where scope and complexity are increasing most quickly.

External insight needs to sit alongside that internal view. Market mapping, benchmarking and calibration help organisations understand how their leadership bench compares against the broader GCC ecosystem, while also keeping them connected to external talent who may strengthen the pipeline over time. That matters in a market where many of the strongest leaders are neither visible nor actively available.

Over time, this allows GCCs to evolve into leadership development platforms, where emerging leaders can test themselves on global projects and transformation programmes before stepping into larger roles.

Succession as a core strategy

For organisations that have anchored significant parts of their global business in India, the most important succession decisions are no longer made only in boardrooms overseas; they are embedded in the leadership choices being made within their GCCs today. Organisations that treat early hires as the foundation of a long-term leadership architecture — and succession planning as a continuous capability rather than a reactive exercise — will be best placed to turn India's GCC scale into a long-term leadership advantage.

**This article is the final instalment exploring the evolution of Global Capability Centres (GCCs).*

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