

ARTICLE 2

Talent in action: Leadership and mobility

India's Global Capability Centre (GCC) story has reached a point where scale alone is no longer the most interesting part of the global strategy. Recent [industry](#) estimates suggest that the ecosystem has expanded even further, with over 2,100 GCCs employing more than 2.1 million professionals and a projected 2030 revenue outlook of [US\\$105 billion](#). These numbers reinforce how deeply GCCs are now embedded in how global organisations operate, innovate, and transform. As their mandate evolves, so too do expectations around leadership capacity and talent systems.

This shift changes the talent conversation. The question is no longer only whether organisations can hire at scale, but whether leadership depth and readiness are developing quickly enough to match the mandate now sitting in India. That is where mobility comes into focus, showing up in three distinct ways.

First, there is the movement of leaders across geographies internally, with Indian leaders returning from global roles and international talent relocating to GCCs. Second, there is a growing emphasis on internal global mobility and development, as organisations invest more deliberately in building leaders within India who can operate and transition at a global level in the headquarters. Lastly, there is a steady inflow of external and international talent, brought in to fill capability gaps that existing systems in India have yet to fulfill.

Seen this way, mobility is not a standalone trend, but a visible response to the pressure to build leadership capacity and succession at pace.

India as a base for global leadership

India has become a far more credible base for global and regional leadership roles than it was a few years ago. Research such as EY's [Global Capability Center Pulse Survey 2025](#) highlights how GCCs are expected to act as enterprise innovation orchestrators, with expanding responsibility across digital transformation, AI adoption, AI Centres of Excellence (CoEs), and integrated global business processes — moving beyond traditional corporate functions into areas such as digital, product development, pitch books, front-office research, trade support etc. As GCC portfolios expand, so does the willingness of organisations to place senior leadership capacity closer to where those capabilities sit.

The change is also visible in how leadership roles are distributed. While not all GCCs in India host globally scoped leadership roles, their overall number has grown significantly, with estimates suggesting that this could cross 10,000 roles by the end of the decade.

A recent industry survey also reveal around [45% of GCCs now participate in global decision-making](#). India is increasingly treated as a base from which global responsibilities can be exercised.

The more important implication is not only where roles now sit, but what that requires of leadership on the ground. As India-based GCCs become more embedded in global operating models, expectations around judgement, readiness and operating range rise with them.



Building the bench

As leadership expectations rise, organisations are becoming more pragmatic in how they build their leadership benches, not limited to top management but also one level below. Moving beyond volume-based hiring and relying on a small group of established names, there is growing acceptance that leadership breadth needs to be built earlier by creating movement through the system.

In practice, this has made organisations more open to leaders one level below the most obvious choices, particularly where there is confidence in learning agility and the ability to scale. Mobility becomes the mechanism through which that potential is tested, expanding scope and accountability rather than waiting for fully formed profiles to appear.

One recent assignment illustrates this shift. When filling a GCC head role for a large US-based organisation, the client appointed a leader who had been a strong number two elsewhere, backing their readiness to step into a larger role. In another case, a leader who had been running the GCC for the India region was given responsibility for multi-country GCCs, extending the remit significantly and widening the scope rather than making a like-for-like hire.

There is also greater willingness to consider adjacent profiles, where relevance and context matter more than title history alone. Mobility, in this sense, functions both as a development lever and as a way of validating readiness.

Where the bench still thins out

Expanding the pool of potential leaders is a necessary first step, but it does not automatically create a bench that can support the next phase of growth. The hardest gaps still sit at the top, particularly in very senior general management roles and specialist “player-coach” leaders, where organisations need both leadership judgement and deep domain expertise.

The challenge is also becoming more demanding. As GCCs take on broader ownership and participate more directly in global decision-making, the leadership brief is evolving with them. In that environment, organisations are not only looking for leadership continuity, but those who can handle more complexity, operate across the global-local matrix, and grow with the mandate rather than simply inherit it.

This highlights a broader tension. In India, confidence in current leadership remains high, but confidence in the systems that sustain it is less assured.

Our latest [2026 CEO & Board Confidence Monitor](#) reveals 85% of Indian respondents expressed confidence in their executive leadership teams going into 2026, while only 64% said they were confident that their CEO succession planning was positioning the organisation well for the future. In a GCC context, where leadership mandates are expanding faster than the ready-now talent pool, that is not a small distinction. It indicates whether the bench beneath the top layer is developing quick enough to keep pace. That gap matters even more because the leadership brief itself is becoming more demanding. The same report found that 51% of Indian leaders identified AI as one of the most significant issues facing their organisations in 2026, while 47% cited cybersecurity. The next layer of GCC leaders will therefore need more than operational strength, requiring the judgement and range to lead through a more demanding technology and governance environment.

In practice, the decision is rarely between perfect profiles, but between trade-offs. Organisations are increasingly assessing leaders across several considerations: whether they are internal or external hires, the depth of their regional or global exposure, and how long they are likely to stay and grow with the mandate. These factors do not carry equal weight. The ability to operate across global and local contexts, and to scale with the role as expectations evolve, is becoming more important than pedigree alone. At the same time, leadership tenure shapes whether leadership continuity can be built or repeatedly reset.

As a result, the strongest appointments are not always the most experienced, but those with the right mix of exposure, headroom and commitment.

What matters when choosing GCC leaders

Assessing leaders across three dimensions

1



Origin

Internal vs external candidates

Focus on readiness and potential, not just pedigree.

2



Exposure

Regional depth vs global operating range

Ability to operate across global and local contexts.

3



Commitment

Tenure and willingness to stay

Enables continuity, not constant reset.

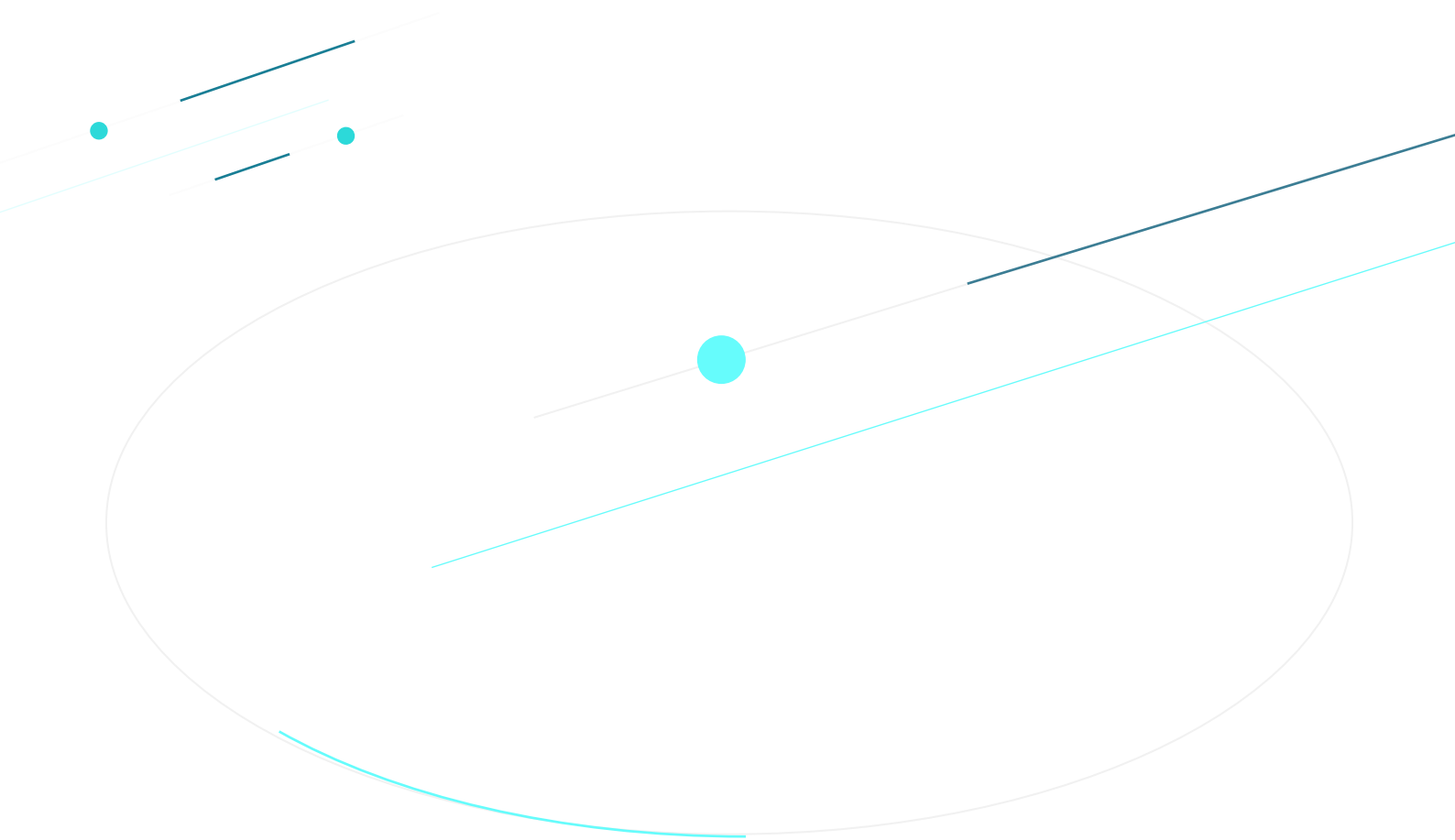
The next test

Mobility is helping organisations respond to immediate leadership gaps, making GCCs more attractive in creating a global path, widening the pool of potential leaders and accelerating readiness across the system.

But it is only part of the answer. As GCCs in India continue to take on greater strategic responsibility, sustaining that growth will depend less on movement alone and more on the depth and strength of the leadership pipeline beneath it.

That is where the conversation turns next – to how organisations identify high-potential talent and strengthen succession pathways for the next phase of growth.

**This article is the second in a three-part series exploring the evolution of Global Capability Centres (GCCs), with the subsequent piece examining succession planning and leadership development.*



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