

Box 4.1: Charting careers in GCCs: Real journeys of three finance professionals

CASE STUDY: 1. Pawan Pratap Singh, head of business units – FP&A, British Telecom; ex-Tata Communications, Infosys Group, Archer Daniels Midland

ACCA: Tell us about your background in GCCs.

PPS: I have worked in corporates managing GCCs, in GCCs managed by parent organisations, as well as in designing the overall framework of a GCC. I have worked across sectors: tech, telecom, oil manufacturing and refining, healthcare and the spectrum of finance roles: SOX compliance, risk management, finance controllership, business partnering, financial planning and analysis.

ACCA: How are finance professionals being integrated in GCCs and what opportunities lie ahead?

PPS: As GCCs in India move from managing basic finance and accounting functionalities to strategic functions, finance professionals in GCCs are now working alongside business teams to shape decisions. They help answer real questions like ‘Where should we invest?’ or ‘How can we grow profitably?’ by using financial and commercial insights.

Looking ahead, there’s a big opportunity to get even closer to the business – leading automation, building smarter data tools, and becoming trusted advisers who help drive the company’s future.

ACCA: Given these opportunities, how can finance professionals equip themselves?

PPS: Think of upskilling like a ‘T model’ for your career.

- The horizontal bar is about building broad skills: get comfortable with AI, digital tools, automation, and storytelling with data. Also, take time to understand how your business works – this helps you connect finance to real-world decisions.
- The vertical bar is about going deep: pick your interest area in finance, whether it’s FP&A, controllership, or commercial finance, and build strong technical expertise there.

This balance will help you solve bigger problems, work smarter with technology, and become a finance partner the business can rely on.

ACCA: Can you give an example of these horizontal and verticals for a specific job role in a GCC?

PPS: One example is a finance business partner. Vertically, you need strong knowledge of finance, accounting and commercial concepts – this is your foundation, a non-negotiable. You must be able to explain the numbers, assess risks, and understand

what drives profitability. Horizontally, you should know the business thoroughly – its products, customers and market trends. You also need digital tools, scenario planning, data analytics and storytelling skills to translate financials into actionable choices for business leaders. When you build both, you’re not just reporting the numbers – you’re helping the business make smarter decisions. That’s how you create real impact.

ACCA: How can young accountancy professionals working in GCCs learn the required skills?

PPS: There are multiple avenues: self-learning through digital platforms; collaborating with counterparts in other functions and going through quarterly financial reporting sessions and annual reports to build your business understanding; attending sessions on business and new product updates. Once you understand the business/product, it’s easier to see how your finance skills make a real difference – and that combination of product, business, and finance know-how gives you the edge.

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CASE STUDY: 2. Arun Venkatachalam, ACCA member and finance director – NES Fircroft

ACCA: Tell us about your background and journey in GCCs?

AV: I began my career with NES in 2015 in Dubai as a management accountant. I relocated to Bengaluru in May 2019 to establish our Global Support Centre [GSC]. Over the past six years, we've grown to a team of 540 employees, providing comprehensive support to all our global offices. I oversee the entire support function, focusing on finance operations, including payroll, invoicing, control, regional and group reporting, internal audit and group treasury. Additionally, our Bengaluru centre supports other departments such as travel, HR, IT compliance, quality control. My role involves ensuring the smooth operation of these functions.

ACCA: How has the GSC evolved from 2019 to now, in 2025?

AV: There were three phases.

Setting the base: launched the support centre focusing on smooth transitions of tasks from global

offices, built strong team structures, set up key performance indicators (KPIs), and secured regional support.

Process improvement: transitioned to end-to-end processing to improve efficiency and standardised practices across regions: splitting the global offices across regions based on the business practices to improve efficiency, while accommodating diverse business operations.

Integrate transformation and value creation (in process): integrating automation and RPA to streamline processes, leading finance transformation and adopting advanced tools for digital transformation.

ACCA: With GCCs moving to a transformation phase, what opportunities do you see for finance professionals?

AV: The standard roles will continue as all processes are not yet automated. Some key roles will be high in demand. Finance transformation – people who

understand procurement processes, the required tools, those with digital transformation skills will be much needed as GCCs mature.

ACCA: From your journey as a finance professional, which skills have been the most useful?

AV: At first, I tried to do everything myself – but over time I learned the value of trusting others and building accountable teams, a key skill for mid-management professionals. When I hire, technical skills are essential, but what really stands out are interpersonal skills – I look for people eager to learn and grow. I recommend focusing on building strong fundamentals early in your career. Learning the fundamentals, irrespective of the size of business, will give you an edge in the long term. Since I worked across different functions in finance, I am now able to manage finance as well as other functions for our GCC.



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CASE STUDY: 3. Thanuja Balaji, director-accounting, Ford Business Solutions

ACCA: Tell us about your experience of working and progressing in a GCC set-up?

TB: I started here as a mid-manager two decades ago, and my journey with this business has been one of continuous learning. Transitioning from a traditional company to a global firm required a significant cultural adjustment, adapting to everything from understanding diverse accents to learning how to effectively collaborate with colleagues from vastly different cultural backgrounds. What has kept me here for 20 years (and counting!) is the constant opportunity for growth and learning that being in a GCC has provided.

ACCA: Which skills have been the most helpful?

TB: I'll start with the technical part. My degree is from two decades ago: I prioritise continuously updating my technical knowledge, especially regarding evolving principles, along with the latest AI and automation tools, always looking for ways they can optimise our processes and add more value.

Beyond staying updated, a fundamental understanding and practical application of accounting standards relevant to our parent company is non-negotiable. You need to know the processes you're handling – from their core principles to their complete end-to-end application. For instance, if you're managing accounts payable, you should fully grasp the 'source to pay' journey and its wider implications, both upstream and

downstream. Tech proficiency is also essential. While you don't need to be a system expert, you must be able to use core systems like ERP and SAP to extract the data and reports you need. Understanding the company's control environment, including frameworks like the SOX Act (which is critical for us), is equally important. This knowledge is key for ensuring accurate financial reporting, preventing fraud, spotting any red flags: all upholding our financial integrity.

But it's not just about technical knowledge. Your ability to communicate effectively – and I mean truly communicate, not just talk – with global colleagues is paramount: expressing yourself clearly and being able to connect. Being a strong team player is also vital, especially when you're collaborating with multiple stakeholders. For example, I often need to coordinate closely with our supply chain purchasing team to discuss pricing issues, and with our treasury team to ensure funding. As to essential interpersonal skills, analytical skills and business acumen as important as communication and teamwork – those would be my top few.

ACCA: How can young finance professionals equip themselves with these skills?

TB: Staying relevant in today's world means upskilling and reskilling continuously – otherwise, you risk becoming obsolete. The pace of change

now is unlike anything we've seen before, certainly compared with when I qualified. To keep up, we must shift our mindset. Instead of just learning about things like automation, we need to fully embrace them, actively seeking tasks that can be automated to boost efficiency. Being flexible, nimble and proactive is what makes you invaluable to an organisation. I've always benefited immensely from having many mentors, as I firmly believe in the power of continuous learning and coaching.

ACCA: While hiring people for your GCC, what skills do you look at?

TB: I primarily seek individuals with a very specific mindset – people who aren't just comfortable with change but actively embrace it. This means taking initiative rather than waiting to be told and being highly flexible, able to adapt quickly to new challenges, processes or technologies. Alongside this crucial adaptive mindset, strong systems proficiency is necessary. Our operations are highly integrated and heavily dependent on various systems and platforms. Therefore, I expect candidates to have the practical knowledge to navigate these systems, efficiently extract the necessary data and reports, and understand how to leverage them and contribute effectively.

