

INSIGHTS · GBS TALENT STRATEGY

# GBS Has a Talent Brand Problem — and It's Getting Worse

India's global capability centers are out-hiring everyone and quietly losing the talent market. Four straight years of falling employer-brand perception land hardest on career development — the exact promise the capability-hub pitch depends on — and the bill is arriving as sector-leading pay premiums, not attrition. The fix is an operating-model rebuild, not a rebrand.

EvoNova Advisors | Insight | June 2026 | 8 min read

## BY THE NUMBERS

### \$98.4B

in annual GCC revenue, across 2,117 centers and 2.36M professionals — on the dashboards, the model has never looked stronger. (Nasscom-Zinnov, 2026)

### 4 years

of falling employer-brand perception in Everest's outside-in index, now at its lowest in the series — with India sliding fastest. (Everest Group, 2026)

### 9.4%

GCC pay rises in 2025 vs. 7.0% for IT services — the brand gap is being financed on the pay line, not in attrition. (Aon, 2025)

On every dashboard a GBS leader actually watches, the model has never looked stronger. India's global capability centers added roughly 200,000 net employees in FY26, out-hiring the IT-services industry for a third consecutive year (Business Standard, 2026). The sector now counts 2,117 centers, about 2.36 million professionals, and \$98.4 billion in annual revenue (Nasscom-Zinnov, 2026). Attrition, at 14.1 percent, is the lowest of any major sector in Indian tech (EY, 2026). Half of GBS organizations plan to expand their footprint (Deloitte, 2025).

The talent market is reading the same centers differently. Everest Group's Top GBS Employers research, an outside-in index built from public sentiment data rather than an employer survey, has recorded four consecutive years of weakening employer-brand perception, and the index now sits at its lowest point in the series. The fall was sharpest in India, where roughly 57 percent of assessed GBS employers saw their composite brand-perception scores decline more than 5 percent (Everest Group, 2026). A note on vocabulary: these in-house centers are what the Indian market calls GCCs and what Everest's research

calls GBS organizations. One sector, two labels – and one that is winning the talent-volume war while losing the talent-belief war.

The argument here is short. The erosion concentrates on career development, the exact promise the strategic-capability-hub pitch depends on. The cause sits in operating-model economics that fund utilization over growth, which is why the bill is arriving as sector-leading pay premiums rather than attrition. The fix is an operating-model rebuild, not a rebrand.

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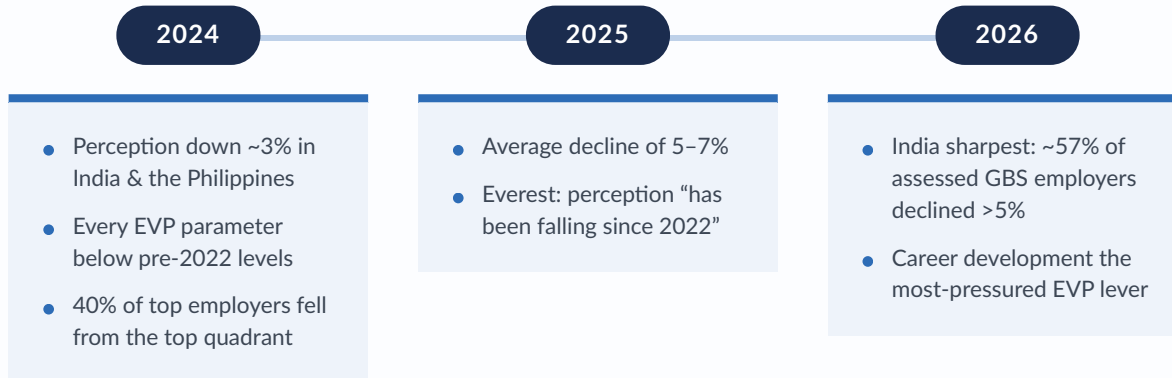
## Four years, one direction: the signal is the trend, not the level

Begin with what this index is and is not. Everest Group builds its Top GBS Employers scores entirely from publicly available information – employee forums, job boards, social and professional media – and states plainly that the study “analyzes and reports perception” rather than surveying employers (Everest Group, 2024). Sentiment data of this kind carries known selection and polarization biases. The index is also noisy: in one recent edition, 40 to 45 percent of top-ranked employers churned out of the top quadrant. And Everest sells employer value proposition assessments (the EVP being the bundle of pay, work environment, culture, and career prospects an employer offers), so it has a commercial interest in the problem it measures.

What survives that skepticism is the trend. The 2024 edition put GBS brand perception down about 3 percent in India and the Philippines, with every EVP parameter below pre-2022 levels. The 2025 edition reported average declines of 5 to 7 percent and observed that perception “has been falling since 2022.” The 2026 edition found India falling sharpest, with the roughly 57 percent share of declining employers noted above. Four years of readings, one consistent methodology, one direction. Independent data points the same way: Gallup’s global engagement reading fell to 20 percent in 2025, a five-year low, with South Asia posting the largest regional drop (Gallup, 2026). The global-malaise objection is genuine, and it gets a full hearing later in this piece; what it does not explain is why the India GBS reading is the steepest in the series, or why the damage concentrates where it does.

The geography needs the same discipline. Philippines scores run structurally higher than India’s and Poland’s, and Poland improved on some levers in 2024 (Everest Group, 2024). The claim the data defends is a slide that is sharpest in India, not a universal collapse.

## EXHIBIT 1

**Four years, one direction: the employer-brand slide is a trend, not a blip.**

*Outside-in perception index built from public sentiment data, not an employer survey. Per-edition metrics are reported in different forms, so these are stat cards, not a continuous line; single-year moves are noisy – the trend is the signal.*

Source: Everest Group, Top GBS Employers reports, 2024–2026 editions.

## The erosion is sharpest exactly where the pitch is boldest

Ask GCC leaders what they run, and the answer is confident: 55 percent describe their centers as strategic hubs for AI-led innovation, per a 2025 HFS Research pulse of 204 enterprise decision-makers. Ask the talent market what it sees in the same centers Everest scores, and the answer is close to the inverse. Career development is “the most structurally pressured” EVP lever in the 2026 research, with GBS employers showing the widest dispersion in the industry, “ranging from selective improvement to severe underperformance” (Everest Group, 2026). This is not a one-year blemish: career-development ratings fell 6 to 10 percent in the 2025 edition and 7 percent in India and the Philippines in 2024. In every edition of the series, the most pressured promise is the one the strategy decks lean on hardest. Everest’s own conclusion is that “career clarity has become the defining competitive lever.”

Why would the gap sit exactly there? The likeliest explanation, in our reading, is structural. HFS, surveying enterprise GCC leaders in a separate 2026 study (a small sample, n=19, so treat it as directional), found centers “strategically positioned as a transformation engine” that “often serve as an execution arm in day-to-day operations.” Its diagnosis of the mechanism is blunt: capacity-based FTE economics make headcount the unit of value and utilization the proxy for performance, a model that “rewards keeping people busy rather than eliminating work” (HFS Research, 2026). The same economics that punish AI-enabled productivity gains also punish investment in growth pathways, because a center funded and measured on utilization has no natural line item for career architecture. On that reading, the career promise is underfunded, not under-marketed. No employer-brand campaign fixes a funding problem.

## No attrition crisis: the bill arrives on the pay line

Take the obvious objection first, because the data is unambiguous: there is no attrition crisis. GCC attrition stands at 14.1 percent, the lowest of any major sector in Indian tech and well below Hi-Tech and IT at 20.5 percent (EY, 2026). India-wide attrition has moderated each year since 2023, down to 17.1 percent (Aon, 2025). If retention dashboards were the whole story, GBS leaders could stop reading here.

The cost is showing up on a different line. Aon's 2025–26 India survey of more than 1,060 companies puts GCC salary increases at 9.4 percent in 2025 and a projected 9.5 percent in 2026, against 7.0 and 6.8 percent for IT services — an increment gap of roughly two and a half points, compounding annually (Aon, 2025). EY's Future of Pay research, separately, projects that GCCs will lead every India sector with 10.4 percent increments in 2026 and finds AI, machine-learning, cybersecurity, and cloud skills commanding pay premiums of 30 to 40 percent (EY, 2026). Zinnov, drawing on data from more than 90 GCCs, reports niche-skill hikes running 1.7 times the norm, a differential in raises rather than in absolute salaries (Zinnov, 2025). The hiring mix amplifies all of it: mid-to-senior roles rose from 60 percent of GCC hiring in 2023 to more than 77 percent in FY26 (TeamLease Digital data reported by The Economic Times, 2026). Beneath that, the entry pipeline is thinning. TCS's planned graduate intake has fallen to roughly half its typical level — reports put it between 20,000 and 25,000 (Business Standard, 2026), and industry estimates put IT-services fresher hiring down from about 600,000 in FY22 to 120,000 in FY25.

*“That is the early invoice of erosion: you do not lose the people, you buy them back at premium prices.”*

These premiums are evidence of scarce-skill market pricing, and every employer in this market pays them. Our argument — and it is an argument, not an accounting identity — is that employer-brand strength determines the terms on which you pay. Gartner's EVP research, 2021-vintage and directional, suggests organizations whose employer promise the market finds attractive and credible can cut the compensation premium required to hire by as much as half; an eroding brand pays the market's premium without the discount that belief earns. That is the early invoice of erosion: you do not lose the people, you buy them back at premium prices.

## Yes, the decline is market-wide. No, that isn't exculpatory.

The argument owes three concessions before the implication. First, this is not a GBS-only phenomenon. Everest itself states that employer-brand pressure “is no longer concentrated among a few high-profile players – it is market-wide and intensifying across sectors” (Everest Group, 2026). In its companion tech-

talent index, average scores fell 5 to 10 percent in the US and UK against roughly 2 percent in India; mature markets are under more pressure, not less. Gallup's 20 percent global engagement reading is a five-year low, and no region improved (Gallup, 2026). Second, demand for the model is not collapsing. Half of GBS organizations plan to increase their footprint (Deloitte, 2025), India's GCC count has grown 32 percent since FY21, and Nasscom-Zinnov calls hiring "resilient" (2026). Third, as covered earlier, the index has known biases and a noisy year-to-year signal.

None of these concessions closes the case. Grant the macro tide in full, and the sector-specific reading still stands: within the hardest-hit market, the sector that is winning hiring share is bleeding belief fastest on the one lever it claims as its differentiator. A global malaise does not explain why career development, specifically, is the hardest-falling promise in every edition of the series. And the 2026 finding that 50 to 60 percent of mid-tier GBS employers moved downward (Everest Group, 2026) means differentiation is narrowing, which only raises what credible career clarity is worth. GBS is not dying; the expansion data contradicts that directly. What the data describes is GBS growth outrunning its talent proposition, with the gap financed at premium prices.

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## **Brand is the leading indicator; attrition is the lagging one**

The case for acting now rests on sequence, and this is the article's reasoning rather than a sourced finding: perception moves before behavior does. Candidates and employees update what they believe about an employer well before they update their resumes, and recruiting-market terms reprice long before retention dashboards flinch. A leader who waits for attrition to confirm the problem pays the premium bill in the meantime and the scramble bill afterward.

There are early signs the lagging indicators are softening at the margin. Trade coverage of staffing data suggests GCC hiring grew only 4 to 6 percent quarter-on-quarter in Q3 FY26 before rebounding, with roughly 40 percent of recruitment activity now replacement-driven (YourStory, 2026), and Xpheno's leadership expects a visible drop in net additions within a year or two (Business Standard, 2026). These are directional readings, not settled fact, and the 200,000-versus-110,000 hiring gap should not be extrapolated forward. The demand side adds context of its own: when Opendoor closed its India operations in June 2026, HFS chief executive Phil Fersht called it part of a broader redesign of operations around AI and leaner workflows, though TechCrunch noted the company was shrinking globally, which complicates the case (TechCrunch, 2026).

The practical conclusion is narrower than the headlines suggest. An index built from public sentiment will not be moved by messaging; it moves when delivery changes, and when the change becomes visible where talent looks. That is the rebuild.

## The rebuild: four moves from promise to proof

Rebuilding the GBS talent value proposition is an operating-model redesign; by the logic above, no communications campaign will move the index. Call it the promise-to-proof rebuild: four moves that close the distance between what the strategy deck promises and what the talent market can verify.

The first move is to reprice the promise. Run the same outside-in audit the market runs: read your center through the employee forums, job boards, and social platforms the index reads, rather than through engagement surveys alone; Everest's published methodology is, usefully, a template (Everest Group, 2024). Locate where your career-development scores sit against a sector showing the widest dispersion in the industry. Then put the brand-perception trend on the executive dashboard beside attrition and compensation, so the leading indicator gets reviewed with the lagging ones.

The second is to rewire the economics. As long as headcount is the unit of value and utilization the proxy for performance, career architecture will stay unfunded. HFS's formulation is that real value starts "when GCCs are trusted, empowered, and rewarded for outcomes, not headcount" (HFS Research, 2026). Shift center-level metrics from FTE utilization to outcome measures, and move pay with the skills: 45 to 50 percent of India organizations are already shifting toward skills-based pay frameworks, and GCCs are extending long-term incentives beyond leadership to scarce-skill individual contributors (EY, 2026). This is also where AI belongs in the talent story, as an economics question: the same FTE math that starves career paths penalizes productivity gains.

Third, rebuild the pathways. Everest's prescription is specific: growth paths must be "visible, credible, and attainable" (Everest Group, 2026). Delivery runs through three channels. Career architecture should reflect how careers now move: Zinnov finds lateral moves outpacing vertical promotions (2025), so design for lateral mastery as well as ladders. Manager capability is the multiplier, given that manager engagement is the strongest predictor of team engagement and has fallen 9 points globally since 2022 (Gallup, 2026). And ecosystem pipelines restore the entry routes a thinning fresher market no longer guarantees: more than 90 percent of leading GCCs already run university partnerships, and over half co-innovate with startups (Nasscom-Zinnov, 2026).

And the fourth: prove it where talent looks. An index built from public sentiment means delivery must become publicly legible. Publish internal-mobility rates. Name the growth paths and show the people who have walked them, and let alumni outcomes circulate where candidates research you. Gartner's EVP research (2021, directional) associates delivering on the promise with materially lower turnover, and an attractive, credible promise with a deeper reachable labor pool, but the mechanism works on proof, not assertion.

A note on the evidence behind this playbook: the costs in this article are measured and current, while the returns are directional and older. That asymmetry is real, and it is also the point — the premiums and increments are being paid today, audit-grade, so the case for the rebuild does not rest on a speculative ROI model.

EXHIBIT 2

**From promise to proof: four moves that rebuild the GBS talent value proposition.**



Source: EvoNova Advisors synthesis of Everest Group, HFS Research, EY, Gallup, Nasscom-Zinnov, Zinnov, and Gartner evidence.

**Make the board story and the talent story the same story**

The uncomfortable summary for a GBS leadership team is that the capability-hub narrative is being funded in board decks while the career architecture the talent market actually prices goes underfunded, and the market is charging for the difference. Four consecutive years of decline are the evidence that waiting has not worked (Everest Group, 2024–2026).

The encouraging part is that the first move is cheap. An outside-in audit of your own employer brand, read the way the market reads you, costs little, commits you to nothing, and tells you within a quarter whether the gap described here is yours. If it is, the rebuild is the agenda. The centers that close the promise-to-proof gap stand to hire scarce skills on better terms than their market; the rest will keep paying the premium for disbelief. Make the board story and the talent story the same story.



**EVONOVA ADVISORS**

An EvoNova Advisors Insight, synthesizing published research from Everest Group, HFS Research, EY, Aon, Zinnov, Nasscom-Zinnov, Gallup, Deloitte, and Gartner. Costs cited are current; return estimates are directional and vintage-flagged.

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