

What's your GBS and shared services management persona?

So often we shop for GBS and shared services leaders with a skills and capability checklist--- Deep domain knowledge? Check. Nice career progression? Check. Change agent? Check. Able to deal with complexity? Global experience? Track record effectively leading women (and men)? Check, check, check. But how often do we drill down into management style, and correlate it with what's best at any given time during the evolution of a GBS model?

I'm a voyeur for a living. I'm fascinated by the ins and outs of any internal business services platform, whether it is configured as an all-singing, all-dancing global business services platform or a single function shared service. I love to develop conclusions about structure, leadership, careers, capabilities and skills. And I look for patterns, especially when it comes to looking at the fit between the needs of the enterprise and the GBS and shared services leaders I know.

I've come to the conclusion that one of the critical success factors in GBS leadership is ensuring that there's the right fit between management persona—which I define as the intentional style, approach, and level of engagement that can drive the GBS team and stakeholders to achieve a common goal. While all leaders can be effective, it's contextual: what matters is the fit between that persona and the culture and imperative of a GBS organization at any given time.

To push the thesis further, I've found there's a season for every GBS organization. Is it time for the leader to concentrate on building consensus? Or put a firm hand on the management throttle? Is the imperative to model behaviors that will endure, or just get tasks done? Is spending most of the leader's time negotiating at the top table the driver of success, or just keeping the trains running accurately on time?

Smart enterprises achieve GBS and shared services success by calibrating needs with the evolution of the model and the persona of its top dog. Some of the finest GBS careers have been derailed (temporarily or not) by finding out that there's a persona mismatch. And pity the enterprise that hires the wrong persona. Urban history is rife with stories about hiring aggressive external leaders when the enterprise just wasn't ready for a full-on GBS model or appointing a fixer when a more strategic head is warranted.

Try on five personas for size.



The egg-breaker



Are you charged with mixing it all up in the name of finally obtaining tangible real value from a global services model? Grabbing more scope? Giving a sclerotic organization a good kick? Finally implementing digital after years of timid attempts? You are an egg-breaker.

The egg breaker's leadership style is to upend every aspect of GBS strategy and operations in the name of making change. He/she, armed with tried-and-true playbooks and templates that have worked previously, works fast to impose structure and get some early wins on the board.

Hallmarks of the role: Almost without exception the egg breaker comes in from another organization, seemingly flush with the success of advancing the GBS cause elsewhere. S/he is well-known, considered a rock star in GBS circles, and is capable not only of making change but getting an organization to operate to best practice level.

Best for

- New build GBS, or reboots that require a major rethink...usually in a hurry
- Enterprises with a strong GBS mandate and a sponsor who doesn't mind if there is initial collateral damage
- Shared services organizations ready to pivot to a true GBS model

Egg-breaker success can be illusive when

- Sponsors like the idea of GBS but are not fully onboard or do not fully understand the dark underbelly of and the fall-out from changing the way the enterprise works
- Working incrementally within the corporate context is of paramount importance; the egg breaker doesn't have the time to learn
- The enterprise does not easily accept and embrace outsiders

The governor

Are you a “safe pair of hands” charged by the C-suite to keep the wheels running and the noise down? Expected to deliver modest productivity increments over time, but not rock the boat by pushing for much more than incremental scope or scale? Are you the next act after an egg-breaker who stirred the pot a bit too much? Likely valued for your institutional knowledge as opposed to mastery of GBS dance moves? If so, you are probably a governor.

S/he takes a top-down approach, focused on improving and stabilizing relationships both with stakeholders and within the GBS organization in order to improve communication and make incremental changes. Delivering as promised is his/her mantra. Hallmarks of the role: At times, the governor is an enterprise loyalist, a company insider cum safe pair of hands who has either been asked to calm the waters after a torrid period of too rapid change or babysit a mature operation that’s seen as generally reliable.

Best for

- Enterprises that are either taking a pause in their GBS evolution or have limited current ambition to evolve the model
- GBS organizations with the imperative to institutionalize the model
- GBS teams that need better care and feeding

The governor might not be successful when

- The enterprise pushes GBS to deliver more than the status quo
- There is no apparent career upside to playing a babysitter
- The business is playing a wait-and-see game relative to support of GBS



The orchestrator



Are you focused on cobbling together a GBS by assembling reasonably successful functional shared services organizations under one roof? See yourself as setting strategy, busting through roadblocks for your team, and getting your direct reports to coalesce as a team? Likely your management persona is orchestrator.

Think orchestra conductor. Each leader in the orchestra knows how to play his or her own music, but when playing each part in isolation, the true beauty of the music is illusive. The orchestrator's job is to create some connection between the teams to create incremental value, pushing to implement the beginnings of an end-to-end model, and building the case for investment in enablers such as analytics, service management or change management programs.

Hallmarks of the role: The orchestrator knows both internal GBS and customer stakeholders well, with some but not necessarily deep GBS knowledge. S/he sees the mandate as connecting the obvious dots, enabling and nurturing resident talent but not rocking the boat by dramatically changing direction or being too dictatorial about how individual tower leaders should work. In short, the orchestrator is careful not to throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water.

Best for:

- Enterprises with high levels of business unit autonomy taking their first measured steps towards creation of a GBS model
- Enterprises that are starting to ask, "how do I get more value from my operations?"
- Organizations with functional stakeholders that are relatively happy with the status quo

The orchestrator's success will likely be illusive when

- The functions have outsize power
- The GBS tower leads see themselves as working for the function with no or limited allegiance to GBS
- There are no funds to invest in the enablers that create a common GBS orchestration layer such as service management, stakeholder management or process mining

The fix-and-runner

Are you charged with leading a GBS organization that has had serial misses closing the books? Some lapses in the control environment? Or has been creating so much noise that the C-suite is focused on a quick repair? Was there a data breach? Perhaps the goal is silent running? If so, you exemplify the persona of a fix-and-runner.

This persona's approach to GBS leadership is to move fast, with a dig-in roll-up-your-sleeve approach to management. S/he is deep into the details, obsessed with paper trails, cost per transaction, and root cause analysis. Not afraid to redefine scope, the fixer is singularly focused on righting or running the ship, not creating a GBS empire.

Hallmarks of the role: The fix-and-runner comes may be recruited in from the outside or is an internal executive from an operations or controllership background. This persona is all about process, risk and reporting. At times s/he takes the role on an interim basis, stabilizing operations for a few years before turning the helm over to another GBS management persona.

Best for

- GBS and shared services organizations that need to quickly get back on the quality track
- Enterprises that see the model primarily as a no-noise transactions factory, not a lever for transformation
- Highly regulated industry back offices

Fixers may find themselves on the back foot when

- The GBS or shared services conversation moves beyond tactics, techniques and technology
- Business conditions put pressure on the model to deliver agility and new thinking
- A top-down management style no longer delivers value



The presider

Are you at the top table of the enterprise, likely charged with corporate transformation with GBS as a pillar of the program? As a presider, you are aligning yourself with the C-suite rather with your organization, leaving the heavy lifting to direct reports you've inherited or quickly assembled. The imperative is to get the model in place to deliver the transformation business case, using any and all political clout (and institutional knowledge) to move as fast as possible.

Hallmarks of the role: The provider may be a trusted internal executive who is experienced in implementing large enterprise-wide programs. Not one to get into the GBS operational weeds, the presider sees his or her job as getting the GBS party started by walking the hallowed halls of power and cajoling the business to participate—an executive change agent—before moving on to (likely) bigger and better things.

Best for

- Initial establishment of a GBS model as a pillar of a larger transformation program
- Enterprises that have just experienced a merger, acquisition or spin off and must deliver cost savings to the street
- Organizations with a talent bench that know the delivery dance moves and can quickly mobilize

Presiders need to be leery when

- Common expectation of the role is that selling the change is more critical than having the mechanisms to deliver the change
- The business case is based upon a blueprint that is difficult to deliver on time because of funding shortfalls and lack of stakeholder alignment
- They only wish to “preside” over their team without any interest in the actual operation

See yourself in any of these personas?

