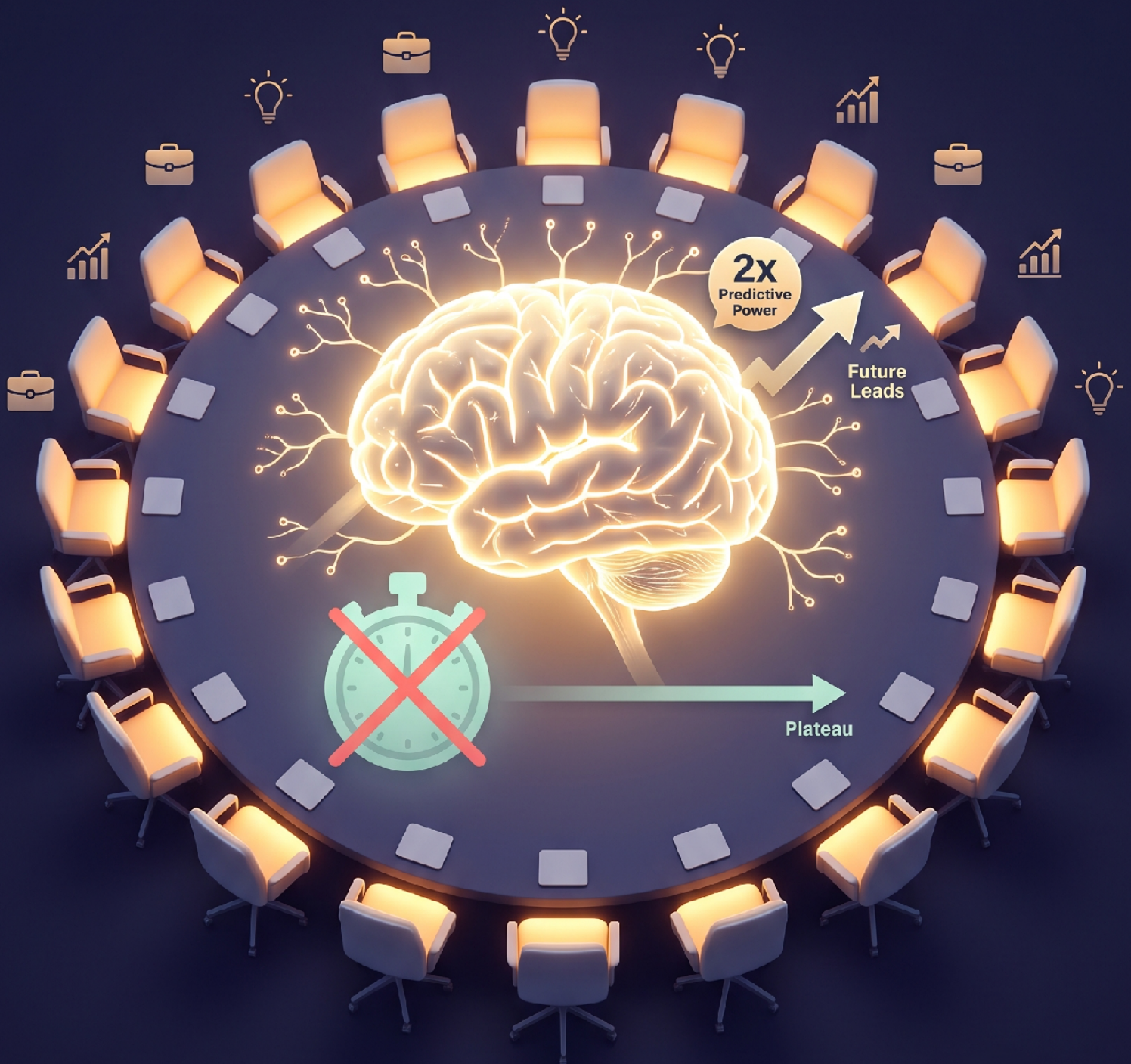


# GCC Talent Leaders: “We Now Prioritize Cognitive Over Coding Speed.”



## The Shift That's Reshaping Tech Hiring

A candidate solves a complex algorithmic problem in record time. The code is flawless. The logic is optimal.

But when asked to explain the trade-offs, consider edge cases, or adapt the solution to changing requirements, they freeze.

**In 2026, that candidate is increasingly unlikely to get hired.**

Not because they lack technical ability. But because Global Capability Centers (GCCs) have fundamentally shifted what they're looking for. The priority is no longer coding speed. It's cognitive ability, judgment, and adaptability.

## The Transformation of Global Capability Centers

GCCs in India are undergoing a transformation. They're no longer just cost-saving outposts. They're becoming strategic partners that drive innovation and create value for global headquarters <sup>[1]</sup>.

This shift has fundamentally altered what organizations expect from their employees. When GCCs were primarily delivery centers, the priority was execution speed and accuracy. Now that they're strategic business partners, the priority has shifted to something entirely different.

Veena Khandke, SVP and Managing Director at Ensono India, captured this evolution perfectly <sup>[2]</sup>:

*"When we started off, it was important for people to understand the SOPs, make sure you're executing at the fastest level, at the most accurate level, and making sure it is happening at a low cost. Now we are looking at creating value, creating business outcomes. That definitely requires a very different perspective."*

The "different perspective" centers on cognitive ability—not just what someone knows today, but how they think, adapt, and solve problems.

## What GCCs Are Actually Looking For

The data is clear. GCC leaders are explicitly prioritizing skills that go far beyond coding speed.

**Anitha Sarathy, India Head of People and Culture at Encora Inc.,** states directly <sup>[3]</sup>:

*"We don't just look for graduates; we look for builders. We value curiosity, learning agility, and the ability to think beyond code."*

Similarly, **Narane Gundabathula, Executive Manager of Talent Acquisition at Hexagon R&D India**, confirms that skill-based hiring has "definitively taken precedence." The key pillars for Hexagon's hiring are <sup>[3]</sup>:

- **Technical capability**
- **Adaptability**
- **Ownership mindset**
- **Strong ethical belief system**
- **Passion for continuous learning**

These are cognitive and behavioural traits—not just coding speed.

## Skills vs. Capability: The New Talent Equation

The distinction is becoming critical. Skills are what people can do. Capability is what they can become.

For years, corporate learning has focused on skills: new tools, coding languages, and compliance modules. But today's GCC requires more than technical competence. Employees need the ability to navigate ambiguity, collaborate across geographies, and influence without formal authority <sup>[4]</sup>.

| Traditional Focus   | Emerging Focus        |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Technical skills    | Cognitive ability     |
| Execution speed     | Problem-solving depth |
| Following processes | Shaping outcomes      |
| Job descriptions    | Capability profiles   |

## The AI-Ready Talent Mandate

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping engineering work at an unprecedented pace. The shelf life of a role has diminished significantly—job descriptions change within six months.

**"We need to have a nice blend of hiring for now and transition into hiring for the future,"** says Sandeep Poddar, Chief Architect at Kimberly Clark GCC Pune <sup>[2]</sup>.

The strategy is to hire professionals who combine business acumen, AI fluency, and the ability to understand how their decisions impact broader organizational outcomes.

*"It is more about creating somebody who can do transformation. Transformation is somebody who's able to deliver long-term business outcomes by knowing the impact that a decision can have."* <sup>[2]</sup>

## The Cognitive Priority

Over **75% of new GCC investments are expected to be AI-native by design**, embedding GenAI, decision intelligence, and autonomous workflows across engineering, finance, cybersecurity, and customer experience <sup>[5]</sup>.

This has created a decisive shift in what leaders value during hiring. Ashfak Shaikh, Senior Director at Domo India, describes the new standard:

*"Leaders of the future need to be the ones who understand the product, who have customer empathy, are data curious, and understand foundational systems engineering."* <sup>[2]</sup>

## What Leaders Are Saying About Cognitive Ability

The evidence from industry conversations is consistent. Cognitive ability—not coding speed—is becoming the primary filter.

**"Skill-based hiring has definitively taken precedence,"** asserts Narane Gundabathula <sup>[6]</sup>.

According to Hays GCC Salary Guide 2026, **90% of employers report skills shortages**, particularly in advanced tech roles <sup>[7]</sup>. Academic research supports this shift: a 2024 study found that AI adoption increases demand for **complementary skills such as analytical thinking, adaptability, and collaboration**—not just technical proficiency.

## The GCC Evolution: From Execution to Innovation

India is now home to over 1,600 GCCs, with more than 1.6 million professionals on board. According to NASSCOM, India has **120,000+ AI/ML professionals and 185+ dedicated AI/ML CoEs within GCCs** <sup>[8]</sup>.

A Nasscom-Zinnov report forecasts that India's GCC market will hit **\$99–105 billion in annual revenue by 2030**, up from \$64.6 billion in FY 2024 <sup>[8]</sup>.

This growth is driving demand for deeper capabilities:

- GCCs are now leading product strategy, building AI platforms, and running compliance-heavy applications
- The shift demands **domain-savvy engineers** who understand the business they're coding for

- **Regulatory awareness and business context** are becoming as important as technical expertise

## What This Means for Hiring

Yadhu Kishore Nandikolla, Human Resource Senior Director at Evernorth Health Services India, explains what they look for:

*"We expect campus hires to have an open mind to learning, not just technology, but build strong foundations on domain knowledge. Equally important are behavioural skills – innovation mindset, application/real-life thinking, challenging the status quo, problem solving."*<sup>[6]</sup>

Organizations are now measuring candidates through:

- **Cognitive ability assessments** that evaluate analytical skills and problem-solving
- **Practical assignments** that test real-world application
- **Behavioural evaluations** that assess innovation mindset and adaptability
- **AI literacy** that gauges readiness for human-plus-AI collaboration <sup>[9]</sup>

## The Defining Shift

The future of GCCs will not be defined by how many people they hire, but by **how intelligently they configure the relationship between humans and machines**.

As one leader put it: **"Skills will become outdated; the ability to learn fast, adapt faster, and lead through change will define the organisations that move from execution partners to strategic innovators"**.

The shift from skills to capability, from learning to transformation—that is the defining mindset that separates the GCCs that merely survive from those that lead.

**The question isn't "how fast can you code?"**

**It's "how fast can you think?"**

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