

Think Ahead

ACCA

Finance shared
services careers:
opportunity
or end game?



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For this report ACCA surveyed over 260 shared services leaders and interviewed a number of leading shared services professionals across the globe. The findings not only challenge some commonly held beliefs about shared services careers, but also provide insights into how the finance function may evolve its career pathways.

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Findings suggest that finance leaders electing to pursue shared services careers are challenged and engaged by the variety these roles offer.

ACCA's findings not only challenge some commonly held beliefs about shared services careers, but also provide insights into how the finance function may evolve its career pathways.

- **Shared services roles are increasingly seen as an attractive career choice.**

For many finance professionals, a move to shared services is an opportunity, not a mandatory rotation or a requirement before moving on to traditionally desirable retained finance roles. More than half of survey respondents, and all the interviewees, see opportunities for a long-term career as the function matures, gains scope, and becomes a critical component of best-practice shared services delivery.

- **More than half plan to follow a shared services career path.**

Perhaps the commitment to a shared services career pathway is due to the growing maturity of the model and the increasing influence of shared services and GBS. This may explain why respondents and interviewees have found a high level of career satisfaction in their capacity as leaders. In any event, the findings suggest that finance leaders electing to pursue shared services careers are challenged and engaged by the variety these roles offer, and are not necessarily looking for a path out.

- **The skills required for success in a shared services leadership role generally start – but do not end – with finance and accounting.**

Leaders for the most part acknowledge that command of the finance and accounting subject matter is critical to shared services leadership, but that finance mastery alone is insufficient. Broader business and, particularly, soft skills such as influencing, communicating, change management and a keen sense of the customer, are of paramount importance.

- **Influence of shared services/GBS in large organisations is slowly increasing.** Both the survey data, and the interviewees' opinions suggest that shared services, and their leaders, are slowly growing in stature in their organisations, getting closer to the top table in that shared services are now being seen as a strategic imperative and a real creator of business value and, by association, so are their leaders.
- **Yet the finance shared services model is sometimes still perceived as a 'transaction factory' for the organisation.** While shared service respondents and interviewees are bullish about their career opportunities and the business value they create for the enterprise, they still believe that their retained team colleagues and the business do not always understand the concept or the value of shared services.
- **Technology, as the main purview of the finance shared services organisation, may "change the game".** Respondents see the role of finance shared services as that of innovation and believe that the application of technology, namely automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and others, is the natural purview of shared services operations, which are charged with continually improving processes and creating efficiencies. Perhaps this trend will reposition shared services from the traditional perception of back office to it being a centre of innovation, underscoring the real, tangible business value that shared services bring to the enterprise. This, too, should have positive implications for shared service leaders as transformers of the finance function, adding immeasurably to business value.

This evolution of the finance function means that the traditional career pathway is not as clear-cut as it once was.

'Down the hall to across the globe'. 'Evolving skills requirements from core finance skills to a breadth of broader soft and business skills'. These are just two of the fundamental shifts facing the finance profession, and its leaders. With a growing number of finance professionals in corporate and public sector organisations now belonging to shared services units in many enterprises, the traditional career pathways, attraction and retention, and development interventions are no longer as relevant, challenging the future of finance talent. The implications for finance leaders, and their future development are profound.

Shared services entered the lexicon of the finance operating model as long ago as the late 1980s, as European-based multinational organisations looked to combine common transactional or 'finance factory' processes, such as payroll, purchasing and accounts payable, thereby consolidating operations and eliminating duplication. Since that time, the concept of shared services has evolved, not only moving up the finance value chain into high-value processes, but also increasing in geographic scope to encompass global operations. Today, many one-country, one- or two-process finance shared services operations in leading enterprises have matured into what is commonly referred to as a global business services organisation (GBS), moving beyond finance processes to include other functional areas, such as human resources, procurement, real estate, sales and marketing, and information technology.

This evolution of the finance function means that the traditional career pathway, with the finance professional's sights often set on a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) role, is not as clear-cut as it once was. What are the career implications for those finance leaders who choose – or find themselves

assigned to – a shared services leadership role? Can and should a corporate finance shared services role lead to the position of CFO? Does a finance shared services leadership role offer the same level of satisfaction and career progression? Are there opportunities for mobility, both within and outside the finance organisation that enhance career value? Can and do shared services attract the best and brightest finance professionals?

Historically, finance shared services leadership roles have been perceived in some organisations as career limiting for those who aspired to occupy the top finance seat at the executive table. Perhaps that is because finance shared services only started to gain significant traction as a model in the early 2000s, giving finance transformers and shared service leaders insufficient time to reach the top. Perhaps it is because organisations need to amend their view of the capabilities now required to balance agility and risk, growth and compliance in increasingly complex market contexts. Or perhaps it simply stems from insufficient corporate imagination, resulting in leadership development constructs that have followed the more traditional pathway through controllership and/or retained finance roles, ultimately to the CFO role.

In a bid to test or challenge this view, ACCA surveyed over 260 shared service leaders to gain their insights about what attracts them to a finance role in shared services or in a more encompassing Global Business Services (GBS) model – their career aspirations and challenges, satisfaction levels and views of the future of the profession. Insights were also obtained from interviews with a number of leading shared services professionals, giving a front-line view of what it is like to follow a shared services career path.

Shared services models diversify career options for finance professionals.

1. CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Finance shared service leaders see significant career opportunities

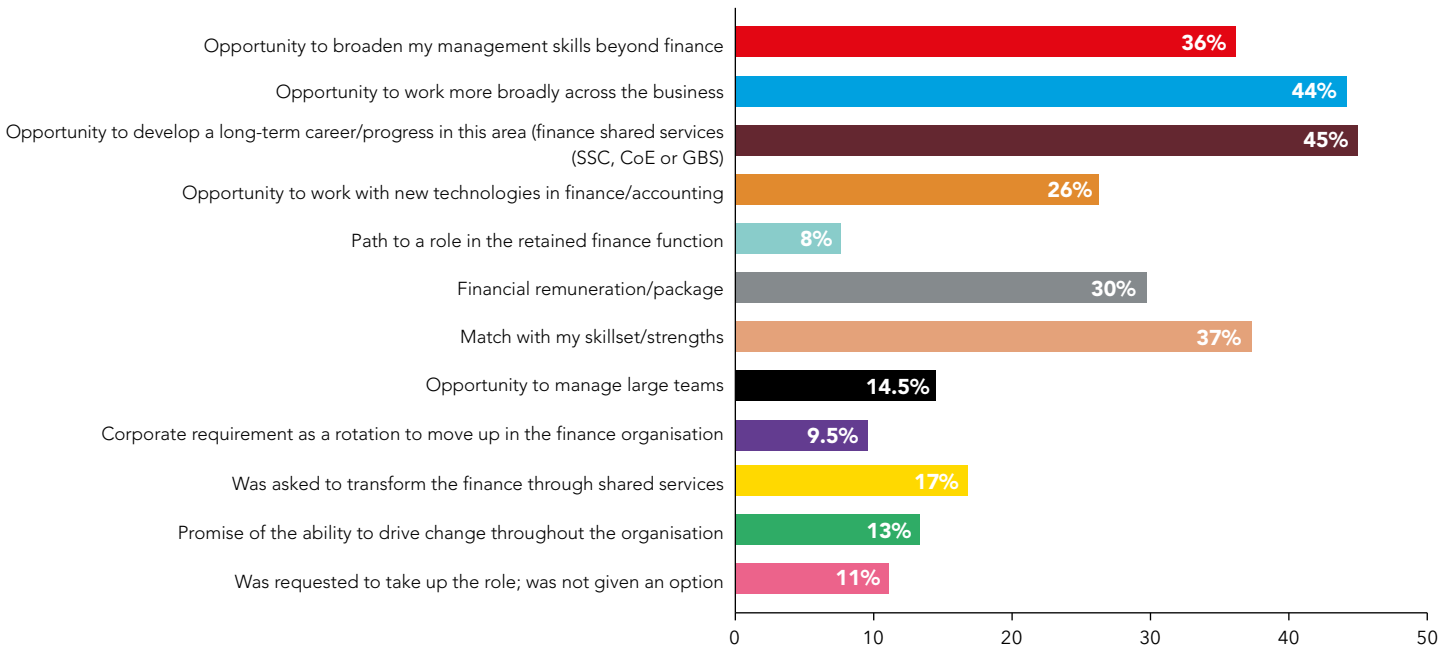
As the finance operating model matures, its leaders increasingly see a career in shared services as a long-term career opportunity, as a development opportunity, and as a stepping-stone to other business careers. Almost 45% of the respondents perceive that a finance shared services leadership role provides the opportunity to develop a long-term career in business operations (shared services, centre of excellence (CoE) or GBS), whilst they are also seizing the chance to broaden management skills beyond finance (36%), and work more broadly across the business (44%) (see Figure 1.1).

John Ashworth, Senior Vice President (SVP), Finance and Operations, at Smith and Nephew, is emphatic about the value that a shared services career provides for finance professionals. 'I really feel passionate about the pace of change, the speed of evolution, the change dynamics in the market place in terms of service provision, the political and economic [landscape] influencing the

delivery – where and how you do it and the impact of Digital Business Services – there's enough change and excitement in that area to keep me interested, probably for the rest of my career'.

Shared services are also increasingly seen as an 'innovation lab' for finance careers. Cindy Gallagher, SVP Global Business Services at Discovery and Rob Bradford, SVP – GBS Customer, Demand and Support at AkzoNobel believe that the pressures on shared services to perform means that capability and innovation, not time spent in a particular job role or grade, become more important. Rob Bradford's view is that although 'we do have defined career paths that prepare our staff for internal promotions, there's nothing set in stone, there's no guarantee that two years in a position will get you your next career advancement. What makes staff more valuable to us and our customers is now a proficiency in their current role, combined with the ability to innovate and problem-solve. Having these other skills is that fastest way to get recognised for new opportunities and promotions'.

Figure 1.1: Respondents' reasons for taking up a role in shared services



Almost half of survey respondents see themselves continuing in a shared services capacity in their next roles.

More options mean more continuity within shared services careers

With the recognition of growing career development opportunities in finance shared services leadership roles, it is perhaps not surprising that almost 50% of respondents see themselves continuing in a shared services capacity in their next roles. Whether they intend to take up a multi-functional shared services role, move up the

career ladder in their current shared services organisation, move to a larger organisation, or assume a role in a different country or region, respondents perceive they have a variety of career options (Figure 1.2).

Almost one-third see themselves taking up a new role within the next year, while a further one-third plan to move one to two years from now. (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.2: Respondents' perceptions of their next career opportunities

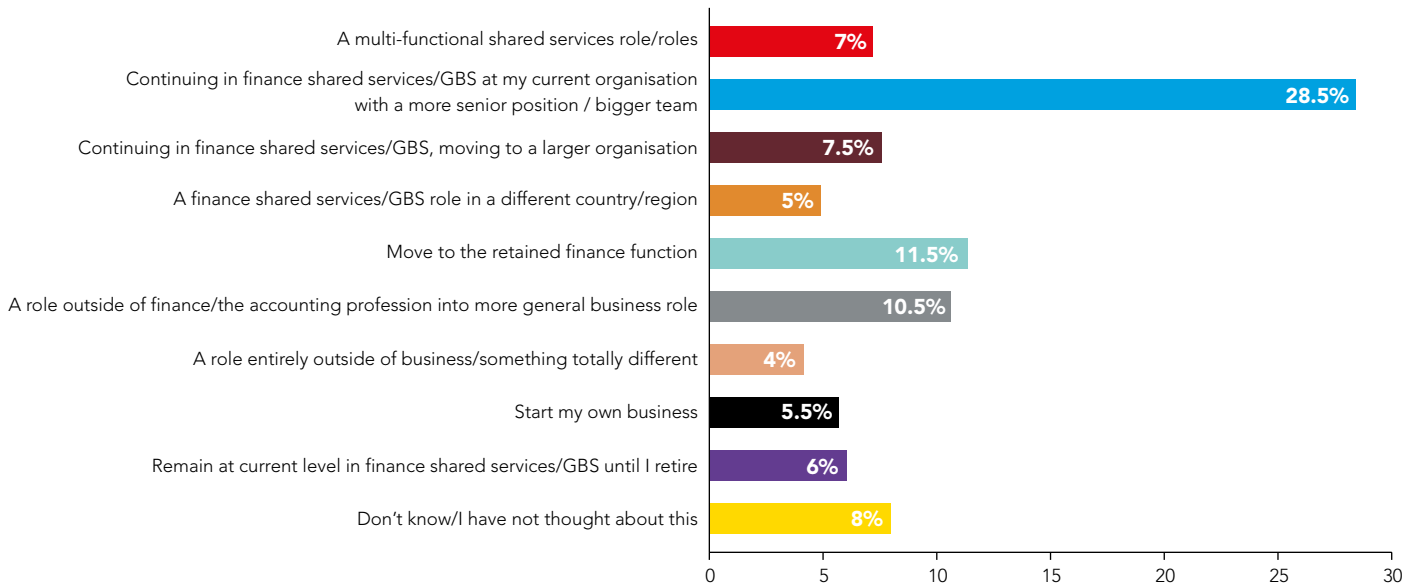
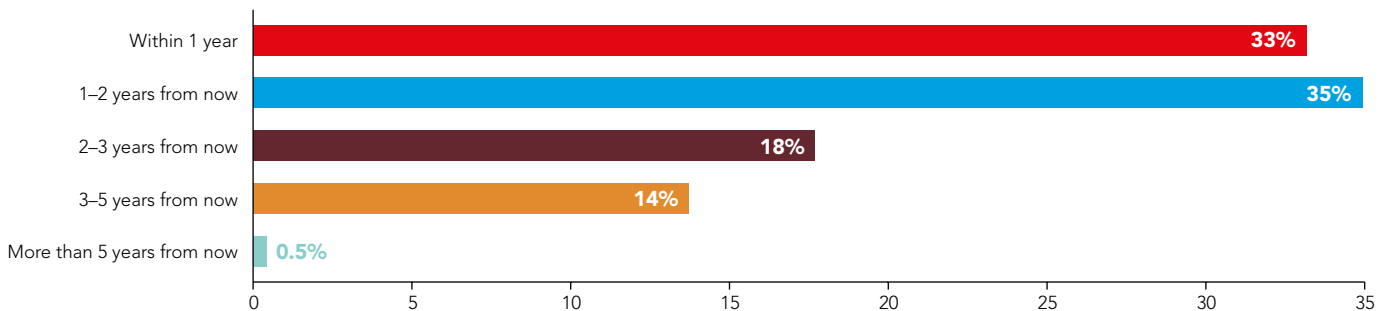


Figure 1.3: Respondents' beliefs about how long they will stay in their current position



Over 71% of respondents say they will continue to follow a shared services career path.

Shared service careers also have longevity

Importantly, the attractiveness of a shared services role does not decrease over time. Over 71% of the respondents say that they will continue to follow a shared services career path later in their careers. The data also further supports the notion that career opportunity and mobility aspirations are not confined to those staying in a shared services role (Figure 1.4).

There is good news for employers as regards leadership retention opportunities. When asked whether their current organisations offer sufficient opportunity,

the results suggest that a finance shared services role opens up a number of options within respondents' current organisations (Figure 1.5). Almost 50% of respondents believe or strongly believe that staying with their current employer offers a range of opportunities to progress not only within a shared services/CoE/GBS operation, but elsewhere. As Discovery's Cindy Gallagher explains: 'I want to build new things; once one operation is built, I start over and build something else – it's just what I like! Within Discovery, there is definitely room for a strong shared services leader to continue to grow'.

Figure 1.4: Respondents' views about their future career paths

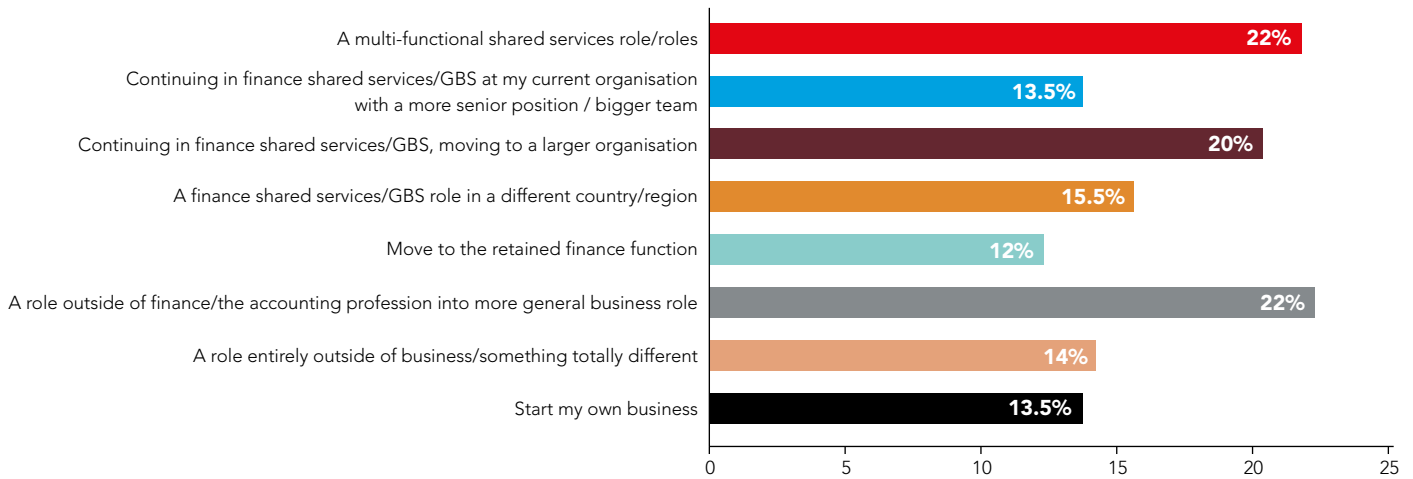
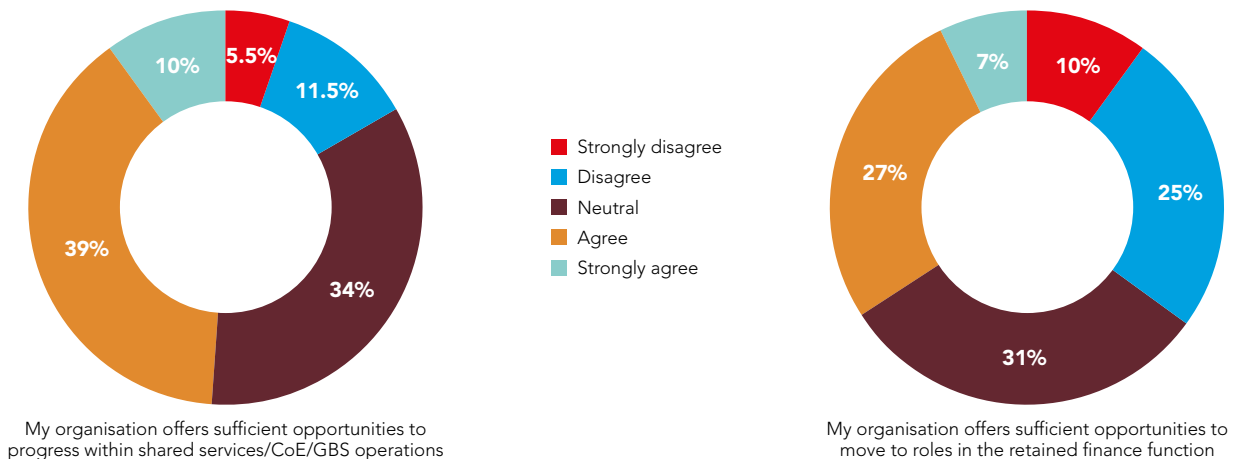


Figure 1.5: Respondents views about career opportunities in their organisation



Only 11% of respondents said they were requested to take up leadership role in shared services.

Shared services career paths are becoming a matter of choice

Another positive implication of the findings is that finance shared service careers are increasingly seen as a matter of choice. Only 11% of the respondents suggested they were requested to take up a leadership role without any option (Figure 1.1). This data is more remarkable given the fact that respondents indicated how rotations through shared services roles are still not institutionalised; fewer than 10% identified rotation through a shared services role as being part of a corporate requirement (Figure 1.1). In short, shared services is increasingly a career destination in its own right, and is well-positioned to attract the best and brightest, something Sudipto Mukherjee from Standard Chartered Bank agrees with, recognising that people in shared services now pursue a career rather than a job.

A particular challenge here though is to ensure that the attractiveness of longer term shared services careers, as suggested in the survey results (see Figure 1.5), permeates throughout the shared service organisation at all levels. Further analysis suggests that those in management roles perceive greater career opportunities for the longer term (55%) than those in more junior, individual contributor roles (30%).

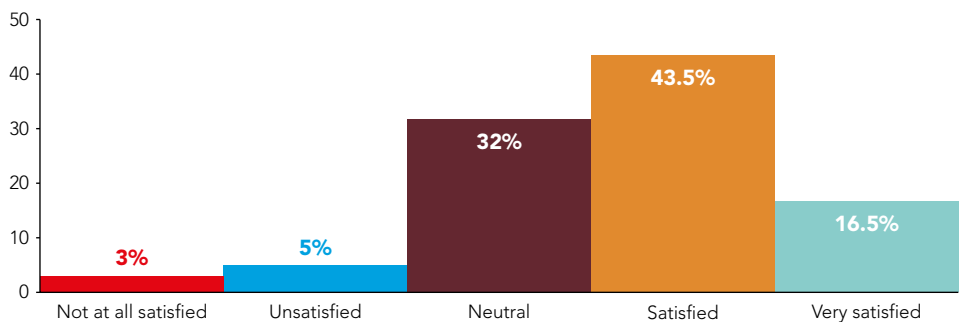
Notably, this carries over to opportunities in the retained team; 39% of managers see chances to progress while only 21% of junior roles perceive the same level of opportunity. It suggests that as shared services leaders develop in their roles and increase their business acumen, they become more adept in visualising the opportunities for moving to retained finance, perhaps because they have more exposure.

With growing career opportunities, satisfaction levels are becoming higher

Over 60% of survey respondents say they are satisfied or very satisfied with their current role, with fewer than 8% declaring their dissatisfaction with a shared services role (Figure 1.6).

When interrogating the data, respondents who are in management roles, whether responsible for a team, department or function, or in a GBS role, are more likely to be satisfied (65%) than those not in a management role (47%). This again suggests that those in more senior roles have a clearer perception of both the career and the development opportunities that shared services offer – such as experience in managing large teams, global remits, and attainment of broader leadership skills.

Figure 1.6: Respondents' satisfaction levels with their current roles



Shared services leadership roles provide valuable experiences and wide exposure to multiple functions and areas of a business.

The interviewees contributing in this study indicate high levels of satisfaction with their roles, extolling the valuable experiences that shared services leadership roles can provide. Rob Bradford of AkzoNobel explains: 'If you really want to get to know the entire company's operations, I would venture to say that a shared services career is actually one of the better roles. I really like the variety, the intensity and the exposure to multiple areas of the business and multiple functions'. Discovery's Cindy Gallagher concurs: 'Shared services opened up a completely new world for me'.

Finance & Shared Services Leader Gary Critchley of National Grid is of a similar opinion: 'I like the freedom that you get in a shared services centre to shape outcomes. The accountability of the role also appeals as well as the opportunity to get involved in a wide-range of activities from designing sourcing models, to developing people and skill sets, to having to work across different cultures'.



Shared services roles provide an opportunity to develop and strengthen skills beyond finance.

2. CAPABILITIES AND SKILLS

Finance skills can be enhanced in a shared services role

There can be a misconception that shared services roles are not much more than low-level rules-based jobs with little career upside. Respondents are clear that the basic accounting skills required to succeed are little different from those in the retained finance team, or indeed in the rest of the business, and that there is the same opportunity for enhanced finance skills development in shared services as there is in other parts of finance. Understanding debits and credits, general ledger transactions and accounts receivable is the same irrespective of what the finance operating model is.

Yet the opportunity to link processes across a department, a geographical region, a function or the whole enterprise is more often available in shared services, giving those in relatively junior roles opportunities to develop broader finance skills. Solvay's Head of Services Strategy & Delivery Operations Guy Mercier says: 'I think you need financial knowledge if not financial experience / background. But in terms of factoring, netting, cash pooling and foreign exchange online management, you need the ability to manage massive volumes of transactions online – without being scared of anything. Shared services give you the ability to see and proactively anticipate all different business situations based on scenario "what ifs".'

Shared services capabilities start with finance but go much broader

One of the strongest conclusions that can be drawn from the survey data is the opportunity that shared services roles afford for the development of broader business skills. The perception that finance shared services is not much more than a "process

factory" of any organisation is not borne out by this research; the respondents and interviewees alike are emphatic that shared services roles provide a unique opportunity to build broad management skills as finance organisation structures change – and, at the same time, provide less development opportunity. Finance director Li Zheng of Hewlett Packard argues that shared services roles offer a superb opportunity to build a broader skills base. 'Shared services roles are a very good starting point for a finance career. In addition to finance skills, you get solid experience in process, so if you go back into the business, you can provide real value to the organisation'.

Cora McLoughlin, formerly shared services leader at a number of multinational organisations, concurs: 'the skill sets are different from retained finance because, in retained finance, there isn't the same focus on process or customer service delivery'. Shared services adviser, Suzanne Ryder, also believes that the capabilities developed in shared services can go beyond the typical capabilities of the retained team. She believes that 'working in shared services actually could help the controller role better understand the business partner role, to start to understand commercial principles, start to move from being inwardly focused to externally focused'.

Near the top of the ladder, management skills take on more importance

Further analysis from the survey suggests that the shared services skills pyramid does not look very different from that of retained finance, or indeed other areas of business with leadership and management, business and strategic thinking, and soft skills highly valued at the senior levels. Similarly, technical knowledge and skills in continuous improvement are valuable at the manager level, while technical skills are given weight for entry-level roles (Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

Figure 2.1: The skills expected at different levels of the organisation



Managing large teams, having the capacity to influence, and understanding customer needs are essential for progressing in shared services leadership roles.

People skills are paramount

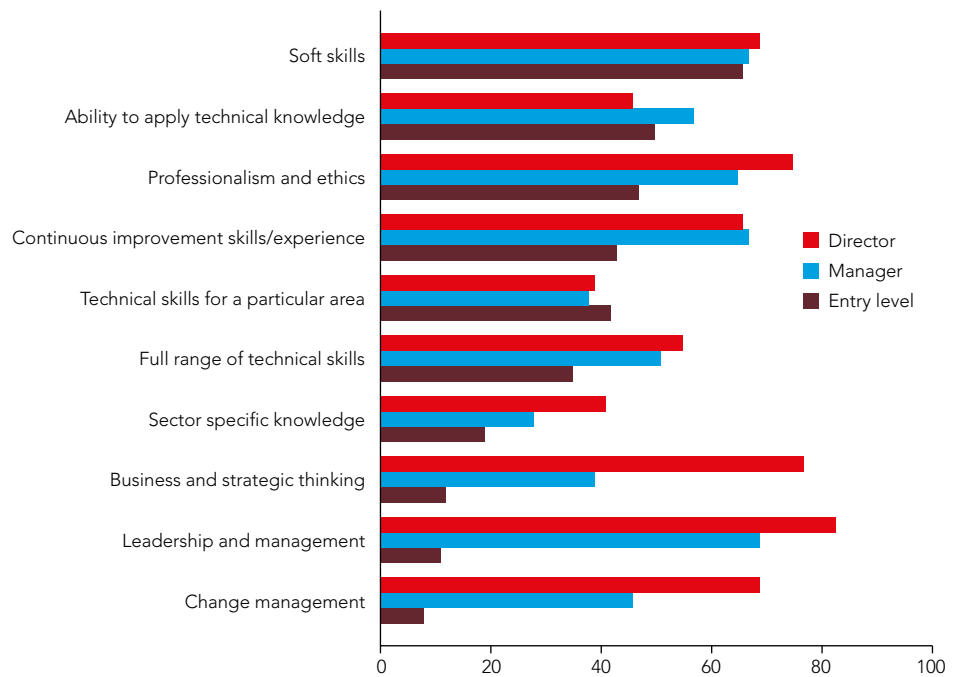
Across all the interviews conducted for this study, and particularly in the views of John Gregory from Kellogg's, undeniably the ability to manage large teams is an essential capability for progressing in shared services organisations. According to AkzoNobel's Rob Bradford, 'The imperative to build broader business skills, soft skills and influencing skills becomes imperative to shared services success'. He argues that shared services' value lies not only in people development but also in promoting true finance innovation, by giving the team a broader set of capabilities.

Smith and Nephew's John Ashworth's skills development history makes the point. 'At the bottom of the pyramid when I started there was a real premium on having the

requisite technical skills and understanding of accountancy standards, good controls and process. As you develop however, you need to move beyond technical skills and develop the capability to influence, the ability to understand customer needs and requirements, the desire to understand what's happening in the wider landscape, the capacity to network and the facility to learn and keep up to date – these have been really critical to my career and I attained these capabilities in shared services roles'.

Standard Chartered Bank's Sudipto Mukherjee concurs and suggests particularly self-awareness is a critical attribute; for him, the abilities 'to deal with transition, ambiguity, how to stay focused and move on when you don't have all the answers' are essential qualities.

Figure 2.2: The skills required as the finance professional progresses



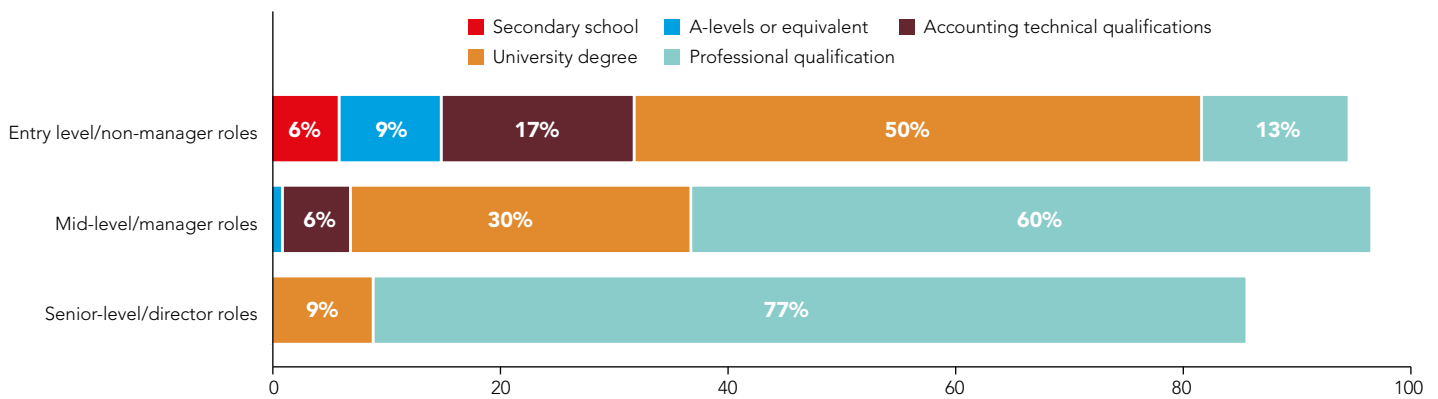
Having a professional qualification appears essential at mid-management level and above.

Qualifications are valued in shared services careers

If having the skills required to climb the finance shared services career ladder is not enough, respondents suggest that university degrees and formal qualifications also help prepare professionals for success (Figure 2.3). Those recruiting for entry-level shared services/GBS roles are most often looking for degree-level candidates, while having a professional-level qualification is essential for mid-level managers and above.

Interviewees are adamant – if not biased – that shared services, by their very nature, provide the best platform on which to develop finance professionals. Operational excellence, value creation and skills development go hand in hand. They suggest that experience in developing skills such as continuous improvement, communications processes, programme management and ‘customer-centricity’ are often needed in the retained finance function, but often only presently available in shared services.

Figure 2.3: Qualifications needed at different levels of the organisation



Finance organisations are yet to define career paths encompassing all finance functions.

3. CAREER CHALLENGES

Shared services are still not part of finance function career paths in many organisations

While respondents are convinced that finance shared services is a superb function in which to pick up valuable finance and business skills, creating a multitude of career opportunities, the reality is that a rotation is not yet embedded as part of a formal finance career path in a majority of organisations, especially at the critical senior level. Previous ACCA research has established that 71% of finance organisations do not have clearly defined career paths encompassing all finance functions.¹

There is possibly a historical reason for this. As Andrew Parris of Tarmac notes: 'today's CFOs for the most part have not had the opportunity to start their careers – or rotate through – a finance shared services operation; therefore, the career paths have not yet been institutionalised nor has a rotation through shared services been a prerequisite'.

Respondents to this survey see shared services recruitment as primarily confined to the existing operation, with over 50% promoted from within. There is some external hiring at senior levels (17%), but relatively little recruitment from retained finance (11%). This could be due to several reasons: a lack of formal rotation exposing the retained team to the potential of a shared services career and its resultant attractiveness, or the fact that shared services professionals, with a broader skills base, may be more equipped to succeed in this fast-paced, multi-faceted environment. As Rolls-Royce's Colin Glynn explains, 'we bring people in at the lower levels and then in two to four years they can become a real asset for the business'.

What is the solution for career pathways for shared services executives? Interviewees believe that the career pathways for finance must track in and out between shared services and the retained team. There is some evidence of a growing adoption of this trend, with some finance organisations now actively implementing such career paths. Increasingly, organisations are building career paths encompassing all levels from junior accountants all the way up to controller

and CFO, and that span across the finance operating model. More evolved organisations look beyond finance skills – they look very closely at capability – to design multiple branches that include 'stopovers' or very senior positions, within shared services or GBS.

Standard Chartered Bank has such a joined-up approach in its Africa operations. According to the bank's Mariam Mendy Njie, 'traditionally, people used to move from finance shared services to a retained role, allegedly to perform a more "challenging" role. I see the reverse happening now because there are growth opportunities in our finance SSC [shared services centre]'. Colin Glynn concurs by saying 'we recruit a mixture of externals and also people from the retained finance teams'.

Standard Chartered's Dedan Muugi and Richard Torsu, respectively head of financial reporting for Africa and head of Global Finance Services in Ghana also see mobility from the retained organisation; however, perhaps this is made easier in countries where shared services centres are co-located to retained / local HQ's.

And the shared services brand is not always helpful

British Gas' Head of Finance Operations John Dickens is aware that the perception of the shared services brand is not always helpful. 'We need to change the reputation; it is starting to improve. Culturally, it is not always seen by our finance community as a place they'd desire to work as part of their career plan'. National Grid's Head of Shared Services Gary Critchley, concurs: 'essentially we have some way to go in terms of attracting people into the shared services – but we are now in a position to say: come to shared services not as an end point, but if you are interested in joining us on this journey ahead'.

AkzoNobel's Rob says that his organisation has put together a campaign to convince people that shared services or GBS is a place where you, 'want to stop on your career, that it's actually good for your career progression and that it is a place to grow new talent to put back into the organisation. We see professionals join us from other parts of the business, then we ensure they take our enthusiasm for improving processes and customer experiences back into the business again'.

Scale and scope of activities are key factors in career path development.

Shared services scope impacts career paths

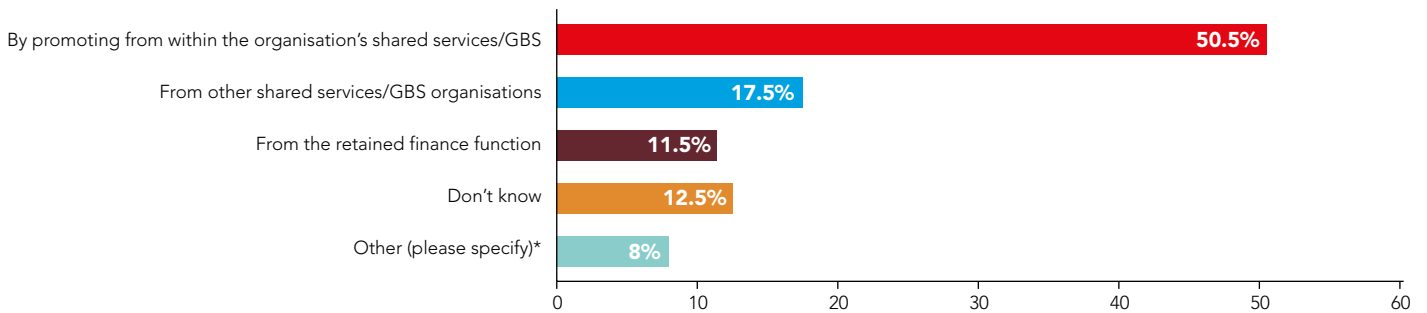
Maturity of scope is also a factor in career path development, both inside and outside shared services. If the SSC is only performing rules-based transactional work, career paths will develop accordingly and shared services personnel will be relegated to transactional roles. Rob Bradford says, in this scenario, 'there are a lot of people who pigeonhole you as a group that doesn't add any value over the cost savings that are delivered through labour arbitrage. Trying to change their opinions and prove to people that you can provide services and capabilities far up the value chain can be both a challenge and ultimately the greatest reward'.

Suzanne Ryder agrees: 'I have seen instances where we had the ability to move people from the business into shared services, and found that people think very much "call centre"; they think that shared services provides uninteresting, mindless, repetitive work and their value as finance professionals will be downgraded'.

Career path challenges

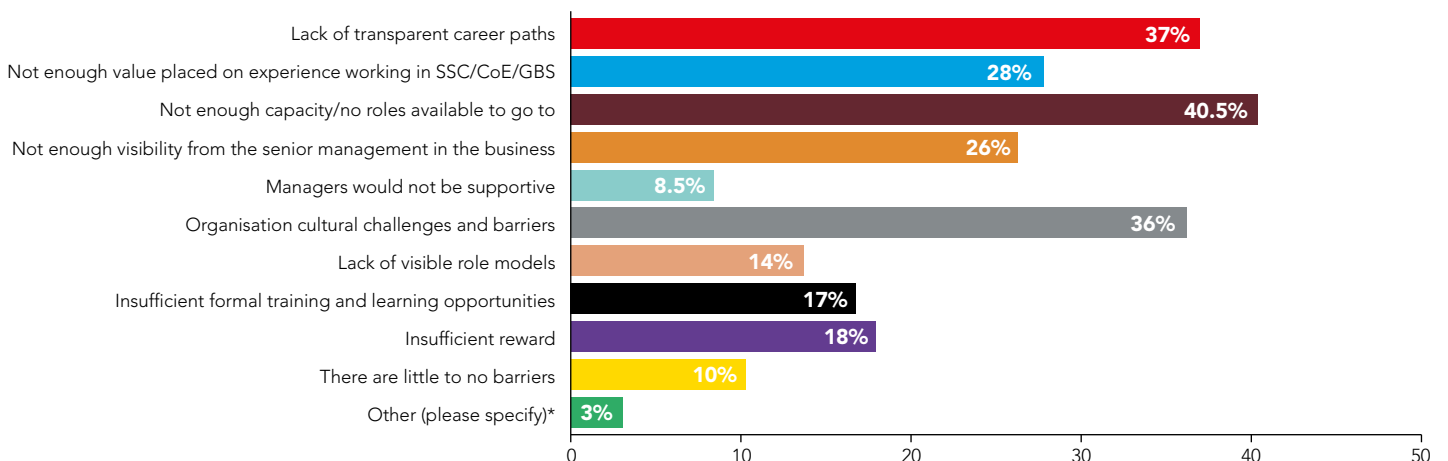
No matter what the respondents believe about opportunities in both shared services and retained teams in their current organisation, the career challenges faced are strikingly similar (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). Lack of capacity, and organisational cultural challenges and barriers rank high,

Figure 3.1: How respondents' employers typically recruit for senior roles



* Both from within and from retained; reorganisation through centralisation; failed senior managers from other trust; agencies; varied; diversified skill sets and qualifications; from other organisations; internal recruitment; external candidate search; mix of all of the above; mix of 2 & 3; agency; external and internal recruitment; if you are friends with senior management then you're likely to get the job; internal promotions or outside recruiting if no staff ready for role; external recruitment campaign, internal can apply; internal pool of talent challenge; mix of approaches; both internal promotions and external hires mainly from other sscs gbs; recruitment; mix of internal and external recruitment.

Figure 3.2: Respondents' perceptions of career progression barriers in SSCs



* Not enough positions in career ladder; geographical barrier (some SSC/CoE/GBS are outside of UK); reduction on virtual roles reducing opportunities if not able to relocate; Saudization; politics; lifecycle of the SSC which are typically active for first few years, before tapering off, and when cost considerations come into play, jobs are moved again to another cheaper location; in some roles moves capacity is an issue although there is progression within some roles; once people in a position they rarely move on so you can't move into that role yourself.

Another challenge shared services professionals are facing is geography.

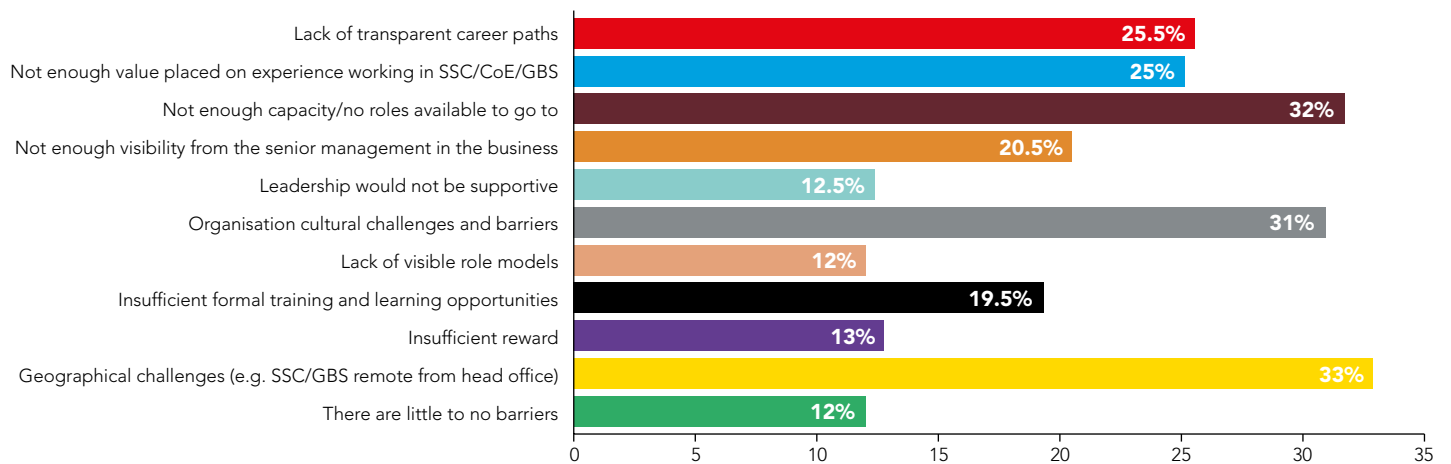
whether progression is within shared services or by moving to the retained finance team from shared services. Career path transparency also ranks high for both progression within an SSC organisation and for movement from shared services to the retained team; as noted previously in this chapter, ACCA research has established that finance organisations do not have clearly defined career paths encompassing all finance functions.

Nonetheless, shared services professionals wishing to move to the retained team are also confronted with another challenge – geography. Because locating shared services operations in lower-cost locations – away from corporate or regional headquarters locations – means that shared services professionals have limited exposure and access to other parts of

the business except at the very senior levels; advancement into the retained team can be problematic.

GBS – Global Operations Lead John Gregory from Kellogg’s shares this concern and notes that, ‘prior to GBS we had functional shared services centres that were typically close to the business. This meant that shared services became a recruitment ground for talent. We would recruit individuals at the lower grade and they would get an excellent grounding in many skills, which would mean they would become very attractive employees for the business. Now we are in a GBS set up – there are far more career opportunities for people – but the separation physically from business locations, means that it won’t be as easy to seed the organisation’. (Figures 3.2 and 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Respondents’ perceptions of barriers to entering the retained finance function from an SSC



Shared services will often be in reactive mode to wider corporate business decisions such as merger and acquisition, divesture or other significant strategy changes.

Management challenges are no different – shared services or retained team

Whether finance tasks are performed through a shared services model or within a retained team, the management challenges are similar; shared services managers name skills gaps as their primary challenge in managing staff (53%).

In addition, shared service leaders are often faced with two unique management challenges – changing demands upon staff as a result of business decisions that are not under their control, and the traditional reputation of shared services as not necessarily career enhancing.

Shared services will often be in reactive mode to wider corporate business decisions such as merger and acquisition, divesture or other significant strategy changes. This recognises the political reality of providing a service that may not be the highest corporate priority. Challenged by brand and its historic positioning as a finance transactions factory, many

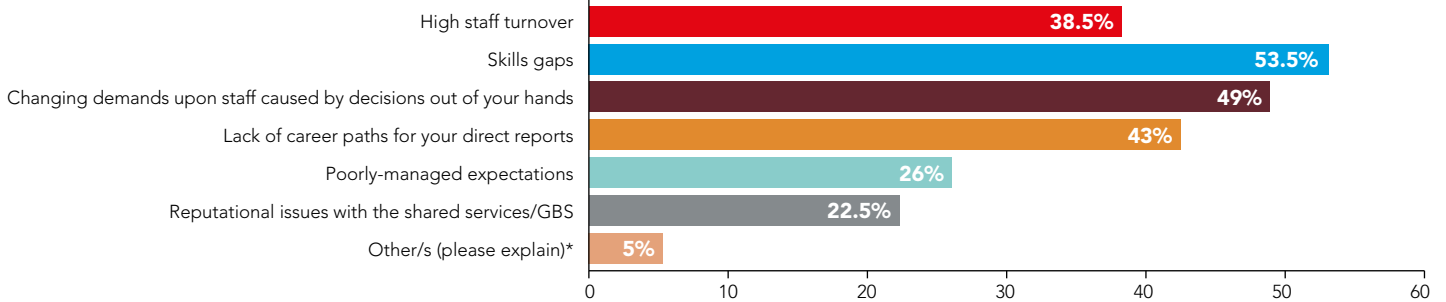
organisations may also look upon shared services with a master/servant mentality, making it difficult to communicate shared services’ value to the enterprise. This may have implications for career paths.

Other challenges mimic those of both finance and other business functions: the usual pyramid structure with lack of opportunity as staff mature in their roles, and high staff turnover (Figure 3.4).

SSCs are still sometimes seen as a transaction factory for the finance function

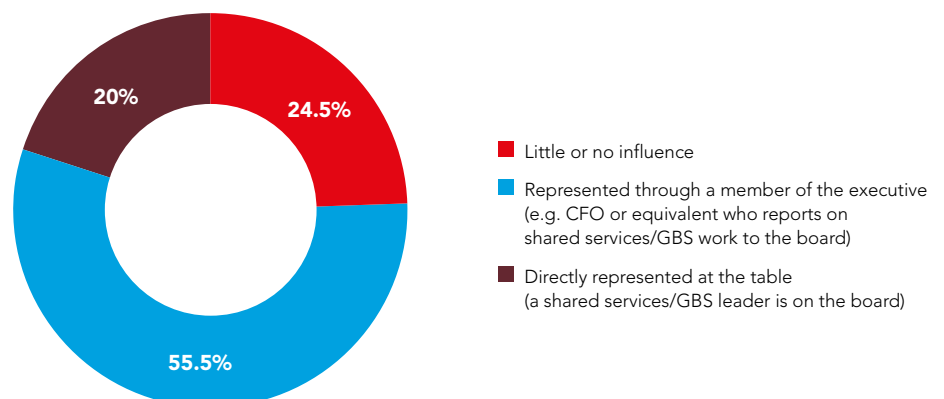
Despite broad acceptance as a finance business model, and increasing evidence that shared services create value beyond cost and efficiency, only 20% of survey respondents say shared services have direct representation at the highest levels. Just under 25% maintain that their function has little to no corporate influence, while most organisations access top leadership through a CXO reporting relationship at the management board level (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.4: Managers’ main challenges with SSC staff



* Paying market rate and meeting savings expectations; failures to meet deadlines coupled with no approved set targets; Generation Y expectation – demanding, more \$ less work, lack of ownership, title is more important than exposure; job market is buoyant, sometimes benefits package in other companies seems better and leads to turnover; lack of business knowledge/experience; morale due to ever increasing workload demands; none other than the market is currently competitive for recruiting finance colleagues; multiple sites across continents; increase in regulation leading to increased demands, knowledge and understanding; Generation Y issues – generally there are easy to lose focus and some are less committed.

Figure 3.5: Respondents’ perceptions of the influence of the SSC at the executive level



Shared services can change their subordinate positioning by addressing career-path issues.

To some extent, this belief may arise because many finance shared services have been performing high-value, complex work over only a 10-year period or less. It takes time to earn a "seat at the table"; achieving standardisation, compliance and cost reduction is not going to be sufficient. Interviewees concur that it takes time to win respect, and the key is consistent performance and innovation along with having a leader who has demonstrated skills commensurate with those of any executive in the enterprise. One interviewee is adamant that influence is directly tied to the skills of the leader, believing that if he or she markets shared services and communicates in the right way, building trust among the broader business leadership, it is possible to elevate shared services above the parapet and get recognition for the value they create.

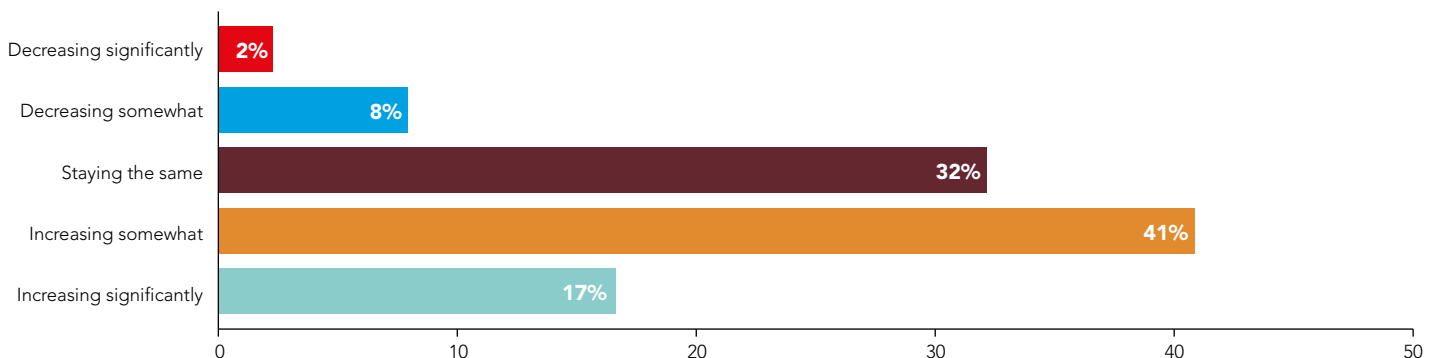
So it is a matter of baby steps. The interviewees indicate that typically that shared services report to a CXO (generally the CFO) level position. As a result of this level of representation and/or sponsorship, respondents see improvement in influence, with almost 41% seeing somewhat of an increase, but fewer than 17% seeing a significant increase (Figure 3.6). The survey

did not track responses by particular shared services operating model, however GBS models, by their very nature, may have significantly more corporate influence than single-function shared services models, as does AkzoNobel's GBS model.

Suzanne Ryder makes a very important distinction about the definition of influence, calling it a 'seat at the table'. She says that there is a difference between having a strategy that influences the business as opposed to simply agreeing to provide a service. In short, executives buy into the strategy on paper, but treat the actual operations differently where shared services does not have the appropriate influence.

Interviewees argue that shared services can change its subordinate positioning by addressing career-path issues. As John Ashworth says, 'I would like to see a more proactive approach to moving talent in and out of the Back Office and Front Office Finance. Back office finance probably suffers a little bit from being a slightly tainted brand and not necessarily being the commercial hub of the business and not having the perceived glamour of engaging day-to-day with senior people'.

Figure 3.6: Respondents' perceptions of whether their SSC's influence is increasing or decreasing



The shared services leaders of tomorrow will need greater appetites for technology.

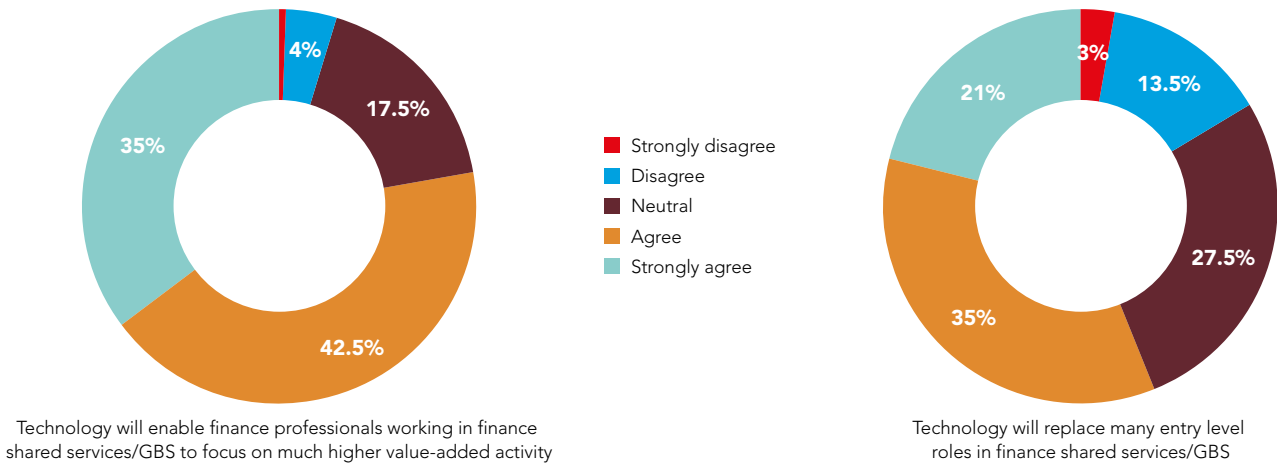
Technology may hold one of the keys to shared services career value recognition

Despite the current level of corporate influence, there may very well be great opportunities for shared services leaders as vanguards of change through the application of technology in finance. Given the nature of the tasks finance shared services perform, professionals are the natural evangelists for the application of technology, changing the perception of the value that the model creates.

Respondents are bullish about the ability of automation, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies, to transform shared services and ultimately the finance function, creating increasing value for the business. Close to 78% of respondents agree or strongly agree that technology will allow shared services professionals to focus on much higher-value-added activity, ultimately putting to rest the 'finance factory' reputation (Figure 3.7).

Similarly, the survey confirms the belief that entry-level finance tasks will ultimately be automated, with over 56% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that robotic or workflow software will eliminate these roles. This trend will put new pressures on finance shared services professionals, who will require the mastery of team management and communication skills, along with technological expertise and high-value strategic planning techniques. Whilst new opportunities will emerge, it also presents new challenges – according to Solvay's Guy Mercier, 'it may become increasingly difficult to source the leaders of the future in shared services, because of the technology capability that will be needed'. To him, the leaders of tomorrow will need a greater appetite for technology, combined with the ability to be 'multi-cultural and multi-dimensional' as well as having the attributes of 'a good story teller'.

Figure 3.7: Respondents' views on the impact of technology on their work



'According to Deloitte, now – more than ever – shared services leaders need to keep themselves abreast of advances in technology. Over the next couple of years, we predict that Robotics will significantly disrupt the traditional shared services roles and structures. Shared services leaders should be at the forefront of this shift and given their typical skillsets are well placed to successfully manage the integration of this technology as well as think through what this means for the traditional shared services jobs.

In addition to that – the concept of 'work the way you live' will become a real focus for companies. This is about replicating at work the level of connectivity, access to information, and power we have at our fingertips via phones or tablets in our personal lives. Shared services leaders have a role to play in identifying and adopting the technologies that will create these kinds of agile technology environments within shared services and GBS organisations to both satisfy the next generation workforce and data hungry customers'.

Emma Lawson, Senior Manager, Deloitte

The findings suggest that taking up a role in finance shared services is no longer viewed as career limiting, but rather a unique opportunity to broaden the capabilities and soft skills increasingly sought by the business.

With over 44% of respondents saying that it is becoming more attractive to work in shared services or GBS organisations, and high levels of satisfaction voiced by the interviewees, it is apparent that shared services models diversify career options for finance professionals. With their aspirations no longer confined to climbing the traditional career path to CFO, shared services leaders, building upon a strong grounding in finance, now have increasing options.

The findings suggest that taking up a role in finance shared services is no longer viewed as career limiting, but rather a unique opportunity to broaden the capabilities and soft skills increasingly sought by the business. There are indications that both finance and the enterprise are starting to value careers or rotations in shared

services, given the growing influence that the respondents say that their operations are attaining in their organisations.

Yet some believe this cannot be fully achieved until organisations demonstrably nurture and export well-rounded finance (and business) talent. However, organisations that have not yet fully institutionalised and accepted careers in or through finance shared services as critical creators of business value are lagging behind the trend.

Regardless, shared services models are here to stay as a vital component of the finance function. Their leaders embrace and harness change, demonstrate strong business acumen, and are passionate about transforming the way finance operates. That is a 'good news' story.



Success will depend on the ability to create tangible, measurable business value.

SHARED SERVICES CAREERS: WHAT FINANCE PROFESSIONALS NEED TO KNOW

- **View finance skills as a foundation.** Research findings suggest that while having a finance background is critical to understanding and communicating finance shared service value to the organisation, effectiveness as a shared service leader, and access to the most rewarding career opportunities, is dependent on the demonstration of a much broader set of management capabilities. Interviewees have used their finance skills as a point of entry, and then gained other business skills as they progressed.
- **Demonstrate value to the business.** Nothing validates shared service career success like having the right customer metrics, communicating them, ensuring their buy-in and meeting them consistently. Doing so gives the shared services leader a fact base for demonstrating value and helps dispel preconceptions that shared services is just a “transaction factory”. Attaining the skills to manage and nurture customer relationships is key - meeting service-level agreements (SLAs), honouring commitments, and ultimately creating tangible, measurable business value. This helps build networks and relationships across the organisation, and affords new career opportunities.
- **Capitalise on shared service experience.** Interviewees are consistent in articulating the valuable experience roles in shared services can offer. Some even go further, suggesting service delivery roles present opportunities to acquire new capabilities not necessarily present in the retained organisation.

Skills in continuous improvement, programme management, global delivery and customer service can be harnessed effectively in the shared service environment. In today's business environment they have high value in the wider enterprise too.

- **Build collaborative relationships.** It takes time for an organisation to work effectively with, and accept, a new finance operating model, or a new finance leadership team. The capacity to build strong collaborative relationships across the business matters for careers within and beyond shared service boundaries. Successful transformation is dependent on fixing the situation rather than assigning blame when the customer does not provide the right information accurately or on time.
- **Create a brand.** Shared services leadership roles give the finance professional a unique opportunity to create both personal and business brands. While capability is critical to success, nothing puts the finance leader in the way of attractive career opportunities – in and out of the organisation – more than a strong personal brand associated with a successful finance shared services operation.
- **Be technology savvy.** Shared services leaders have a unique leadership opportunity to apply technology to the finance function. Given the scope and scale of the finance tasks shared services generally encompass, the benefits of automation and Artificial Intelligence can be easily proved, and ultimately help reposition the brand of shared services from ‘factory’ to ‘innovation engine’.

If shared services is seen as a centre of technology innovation it could become an attractive entry point for younger generations entering the workforce, and help grow future talent pools.

**SHARED SERVICES CAREERS:
OPPORTUNITY FOR EMPLOYERS**

- **Formalise the career path.** By formally including shared services on the finance career path, the talent pool becomes much bigger, broader – and richer. Shared services experience gives finance professionals opportunities to work globally, manage larger teams, promote change, interact directly with the business, and acquire not only finance but also vital commercial skills. Smart finance organisations map these skills sets, and devise pathways that are win-win, adding value to both the finance professional’s career and the enterprise as a whole.
- **Demonstrate visible sponsorship.** Findings suggest that there is a correlation between the SSC’s performance, and its ability to attract and retain top talent when CXO level executives actively and enthusiastically endorse and promote the shared services model. In short, when top executives visibly support shared services leaders, the potential for enterprise value creation expands exponentially.
- **Look to increase scope and scale.** Finance professionals’ career opportunities (and capabilities) increase when the organisation adds processes, functions and geographies to shared services operations. Delivering

processes across businesses in multiple geographies requires finance professionals to learn to deal with a range of scenarios and solve real business problems. Moving to a GBS structure – incorporating other functions under one enterprise umbrella – can bring further challenges and enhances the finance professional’s capabilities.

- **Value broader skills typically nurtured in a shared services environment.** Think of finance shared services as a business within a business. To be successful, it must demonstrate consistent qualities – customer service skills, the ability to manage change, to manage cost across the enterprise on a commercial basis, and deliver processes ‘end to end’ to create efficiencies. When the attainment of these capabilities is put on a par with core finance skills, the finance function in its entirety can demonstrate so much more value to the enterprise.
- **Use shared services as your innovation lab.** Shared services units have a unique opportunity to trial new technologies – whether they are automation, analytics, artificial intelligence or process workflow. If shared services is seen as a centre of technology innovation it could become an attractive entry point for younger generations entering the workforce, and help grow future talent pools.



The ACCA survey from which data was collected was conducted in September 2015. Over 260 finance shared services professionals responded.

The ACCA survey from which data was collected was conducted in September 2015. Over 260 finance shared services professionals responded.

Current roles range across the spectrum
Survey respondents represent roles across the shared services spectrum, ranging from process leadership to multi-functional global business services (GBS) organisations (Figure 4.1).

Shared services careers are maturing

Notably, almost 30% of respondents currently working in a finance/GBS function have always worked in a shared services function, while over 50% were, in their last positions, employed in a retained function, either in their current organisation or a different one (Figure 4.2). Over 64% were in management roles (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.1: Job descriptions of the managers among the respondents

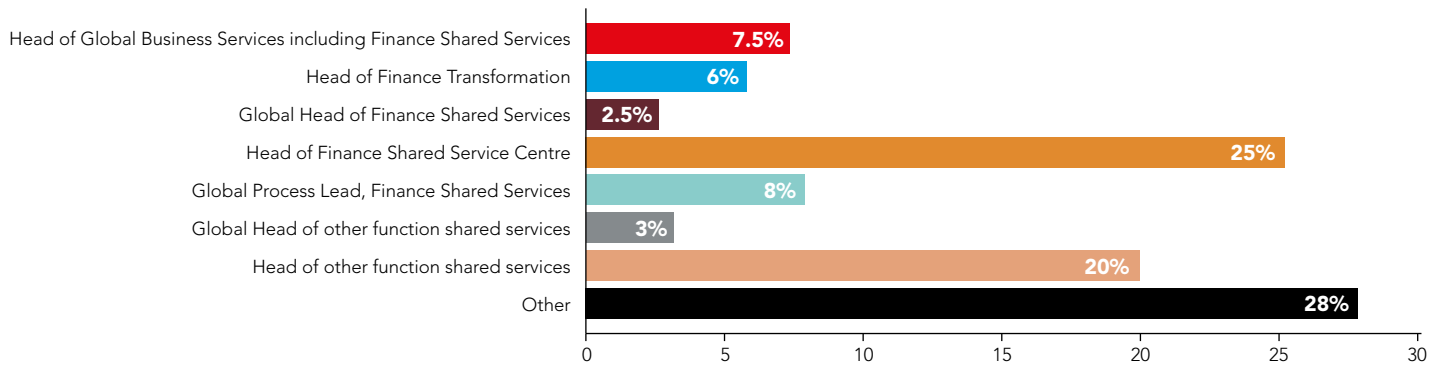


Figure 4.2: Respondents' previous roles

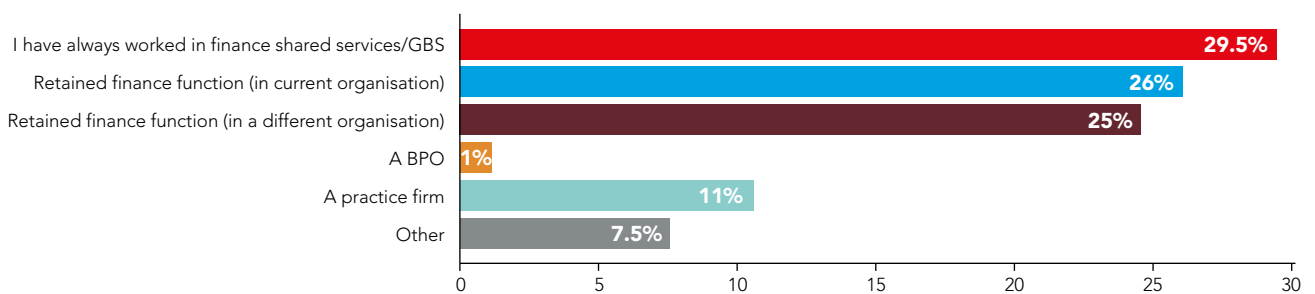
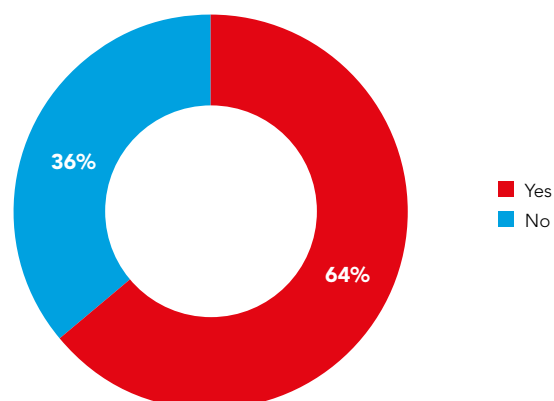


Figure 4.3: Percentages of respondents in management roles



The majority of respondents has spent an average of 50% of their career in shared services.

Shared services career tenure is substantial

Employment in a finance shared services role is not a new opportunity for respondents. Reviewing responses to the survey, the majority of respondents has spent an average of 50% of their career in shared services (Figure 4.4).

Demographics are representative

The median age range of respondents is 41–45 (Figure 4.5), while their gender split is 49% male/51% female (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.4: The percentage of their careers that respondents had spent in different areas

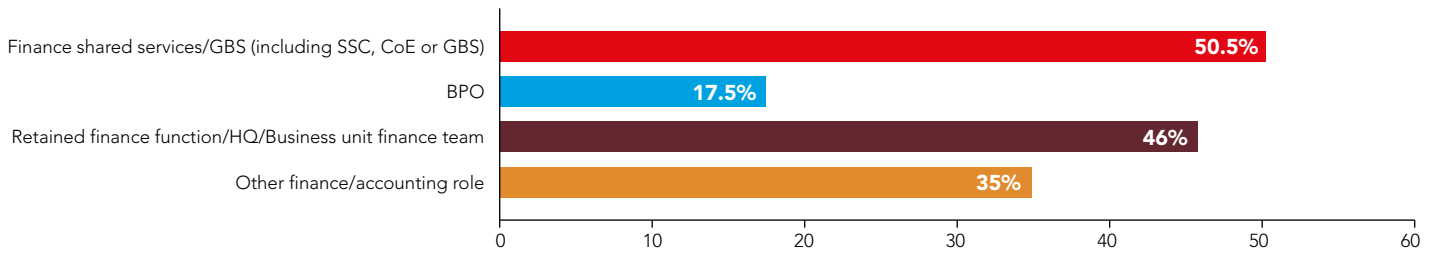


Figure 4.5: The age range of respondents

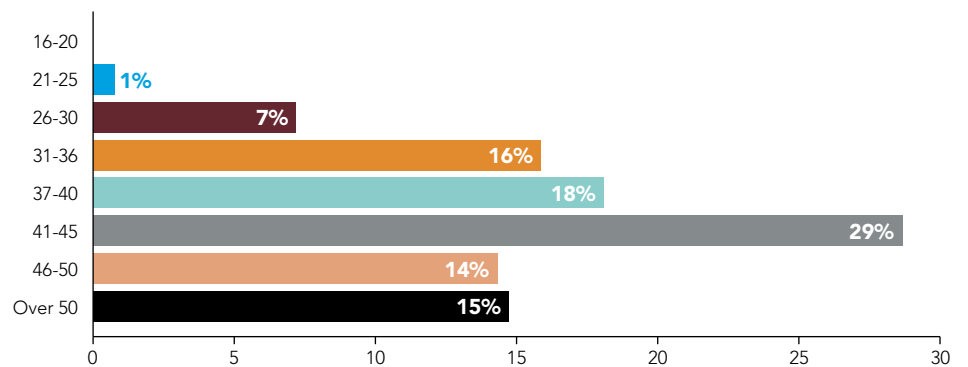
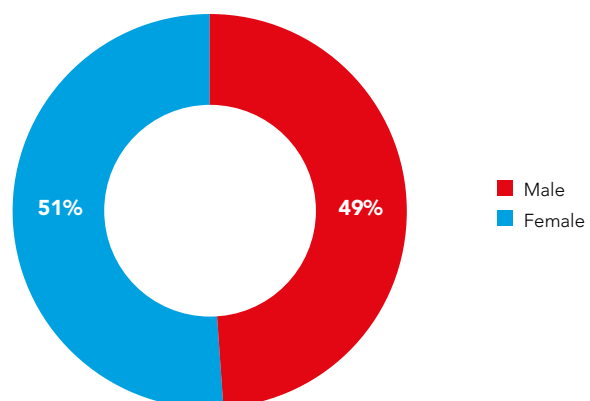


Figure 4.6: Male/female split among respondents



Respondents overwhelmingly work for organisations with total employment in excess of 2,000.

Shared services operations of all sizes are represented

Respondents overwhelmingly work for organisations with total employment in excess of 2,000. Their shared services operations vary in size from under 100 to over 500 (Figure 4.7).

Shared services models are mature

Model tenure varies across respondents, with over 50% in place in excess of six years, and over 31% in place for more than 10 years.

Figure 4.7: The sizes of respondents' employer organisations and the deployment of their finance professionals

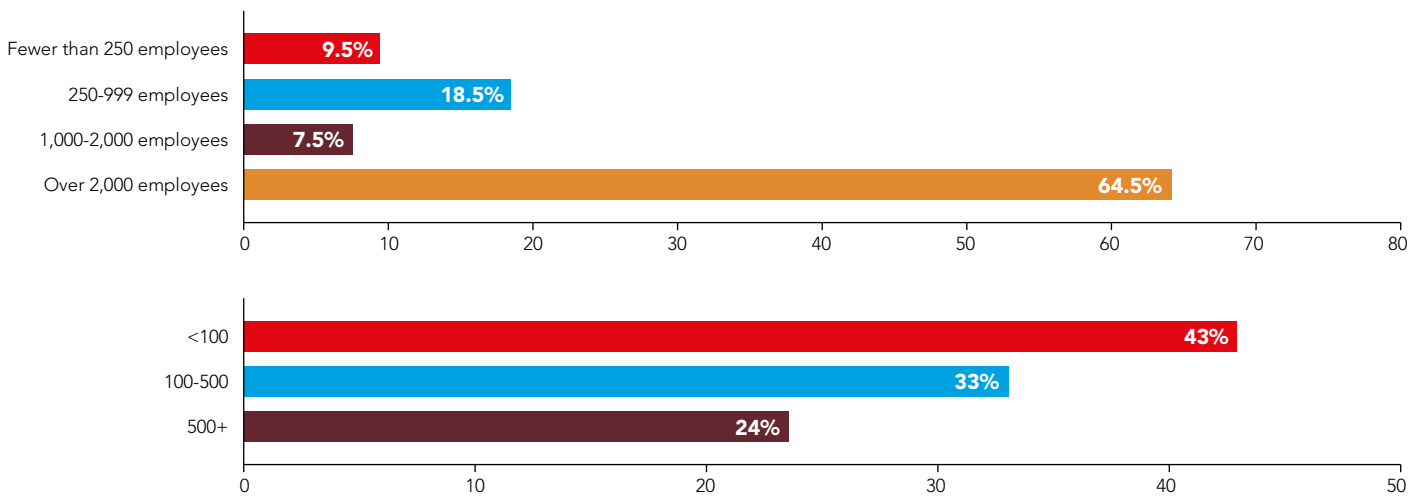
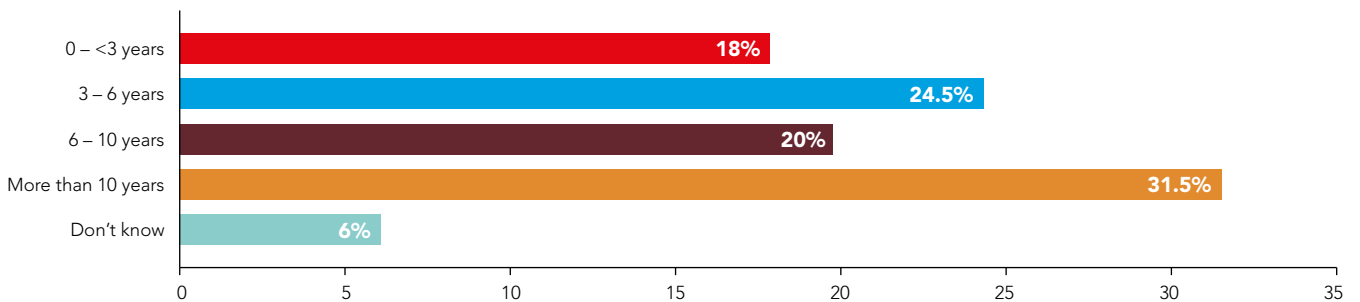


Figure 4.8: Length of time for which respondents' organisations have operated a shared services model



John Ashworth

SVP Finance and Operations, Smith and Nephew

John, currently SVP of Finance Transformation at Smith & Nephew, trained as an accountant. His entry into the shared services world occurred at Pearson plc when he moved from retained finance in progressively responsible roles, ultimately becoming MD of the company's finance shared services operations.

John believes that transformation through a finance shared services model never stops; he embraces the pace of change and the opportunity to evolve service delivery.

Career advice:

'Acquire strong technical skills and the ability to embrace digital and obtain insights from data, along with a keen mastery of customer service and the desire to keep on learning and adapting. In the future, these will be a powerful career enhancing combination.'

Rob Bradford

SVP – GBS Customer, Demand and Support, AkzoNobel

Unlike other leaders, Rob comes to shared services with a math and science background, coupled with consulting experience, which led him into roles consolidating finance back office processes across the enterprise. Since then, Rob has held senior shared services roles at Becton Dickinson and now at AkzoNobel, where he is building the GBS organisation, responsible for both BPO and SSC delivery of several global functions, including finance.

Key to Rob's success has been his analytical and project management skills. Over the course of his career, he attributes his growth to having high level financial analysis and strategic skills, along with the ability to influence and find, develop and nurture talent.

Career advice:

'Even a junior role gives finance professionals a broader business exposure.'

Gary Critchley

Finance & Shared Services Leader, National Grid

Gary, Head of Shared Services at National Grid, started his career as general accounting manager within a shared services centre before moving to Marks & Spencer as Head of Cash Management. After taking on the leadership of the Marks and Spencer Shared Service Centre he relocated the operation and led its expansion and migration to a Business Services model. Later on in his career, he moved to the Qatar Foundation in Doha to develop their shared services strategy and structure, before repeating the exercise at PepsiCo in Dubai where he was part of a global Shared Service review including the migration in AMEA of 7 countries in 3 years to offshore locations.

Gary believes the skill sets required in shared services are much broader than a general finance skill set. Having a balance of people management skills and a commercial mind-set is critical and, while leaders may not necessarily set overall corporate strategy, they have a greater ability to influence it through business services enablement and culture change.

Career advice:

'Have a clear path, a clear direction, and build credibility across the entire business.'

John Dickens

Head of Finance Operations, British Gas

John, currently Head of Finance Operations at British Gas, started his career in Barclays in a management development role. After a series of general management roles, he moved into a credit control position focused on process reengineering and performance management. His entry into shared services occurred at Wang Global, where he took up a process reengineering role.

Subsequently, John has held progressively responsible shared services roles at NEC, Discovery and now British Gas. He believes shared services give him the opportunity to create value beyond cost savings, putting the customer at the centre of the offer.

Career advice:

'To be successful in shared services, focus on the customer and aggressively leverage the tools you have in order to change behaviours.'

Cindy Gallagher

SVP Global Business Services, Discovery Communications

With a background in finance and accounting, Cindy started her career as a consultant, working with clients in a variety of industries. In 2006, she joined AOL as director of accounting. Cindy subsequently took up her first shared services role when she was appointed VP and assistant controller, combining operational accounting activity with shared services management.

Her move to Discovery as SVP Global Business Services was built upon a strong finance and operating skills base. Cindy believes that her technical finance skills were a prerequisite to career progression, but that her ability to build trust with the business, and nurture and mentor her team has been instrumental in her career advancement.

Career advice:

'To succeed in shared services, listen to the business, don't tell the business.'

Colin Glynn

Global Head of Shared Services, Rolls-Royce

Colin spent his entire career at Rolls-Royce, assuming various finance positions on the path to financial controller. He subsequently was selected to lead the company's UK finance shared services centre, evolving it into a pan European centre. A series of centres across the globe followed, positioning Rolls-Royce to increase the scope and business value that shared services can create.

Colin believes the most rewarding aspect is the people side of the role. Seeing people develop from school leavers to finance managers in shared services is hugely rewarding, not only within shared services, but across the business. He sees the shared services team as a font of talent.

Career advice:

'There is exciting change on the shared services horizon. Leaders now must embrace the opportunities offered by innovation such as robotics.'

John Gregory

Global Business Services – Global Operations Lead, Kellogg's

John's career started his career at Kellogg's in the audit team, then took on a range of European finance leadership roles. He then was tapped to lead Kellogg's Manchester-based finance shared services centre, subsequently taking on the role of finance lead at the company's Dublin GBS centre where he is expanding the scope of finance beyond the usual transactional processes.

John now firmly believes that shared services offer more career development opportunities than retained finance. He says that shared services leaders must have a head for figures, but the ability to manage large teams and focus on the customer is critical.

Career advice:

'Create a culture where the team feels empowered to make decisions.'

Emma Lawson

Senior Manager, Deloitte

Emma Lawson is a contributor to this report. Emma is a management consultant with extensive experience of working with global organisations to set up their shared services organisations – as well as recruit and upskill shared services leaders and teams. Specifically Emma specialises in organisation design and change management.

Emma believes that to be a successful shared services director – you need to be a leader of change, an expert in stakeholder management, and an individual who can engage and motivate large teams – often across multiple borders.

Career advice:

'You need to be thick skinned and be prepared to constantly challenge and push boundaries.'

Cora McLoughlin

Senior Manager, PwC

Cora, now a consultant helping major multinationals transform their functions, started her career as a finance transformation leader, setting up and running finance shared services for companies such as Amdahl, Yahoo and Coca-Cola.

In her experience, managing end-to-end processes is critical to the shared services leaders' success; working as a shared services leader is frustrating when there are upstream issues. Cora believes that engagement with all her key stakeholder ensures that shared services delivers on its promises. In short, shared services success, is all about service delivery, influencing skills and team work; anyone wishing to lead in this industry must be comfortable with change.

Career advice:

'Embrace change and strive for continuous process improvement.'

Mariam Mendy Njie

Head of Finance Systems & Control for Africa and Head of Global Finance Services for East Africa, Standard Chartered Bank

Mariam started her career as an auditor, subsequently taking up a role as head of finance of NGO ActionAid in Gambia. She then moved to Standard Chartered in 2001, moving up the retained finance career ladder taking on progressively responsible roles. Mariam is now combining retained and shared services roles, acting as both head of financial control and operational risk for the bank's Africa region, and governing its East African shared services operation (FSSC) based in Kenya.

In her own words, Mariam serves as a 'go-between' linking the processes of the FSSC team and retained finance. She believes that the relationships she has built throughout her career at the bank are an invaluable asset to her shared services operations.

Career advice:

'Have a plan, build your relationships and ensure that you provide for continuity by training your successor.'

Guy Mercier

Head of Services Strategy & Delivery Operations, Solvay Business Services

Guy is a shared services pioneer, having set up Solvay's first treasury shared services centre in Brussels in the 90's then other captive back-office centers in Lisbon in 2005, in Curitiba in 2009 and Bangkok in 2010. He was prior to that appointed VP of Finance & Administration for US-based Solvay Pharmaceuticals, and then was selected to co-lead the global services delivery operations in a new company's GBS centre called SBS, which he has been running for the services part globally based on 4 end-to-end process organization in 4 regions.

Guy acknowledges that his entrepreneurial approach and service-centric mind-set has been a critical factor in his career progression. To succeed in a shared services or GBS function, he believes leaders must be able to operate across the full scope of corporate end-to-end with an appetite for taking calculated risks.

Career advice:

'If you want to build customer intimacy, you must have a solid business background.'

Sudipto Mukherjee

MD & Global Head of Global Finance Services, Standard Chartered Bank

Sudipto's entry into shared services started at GE Capital and subsequently BPO provider Genpact where he left as Vice President. When he moved to the banking industry, he took on increasingly responsible roles, finally moving to Standard Chartered bank to lead its second largest shared services centre with 1,500 staff members.

Sudipto has had a front row seat watching shared services models develop and mature. He believes as more complex work is delivered, people see the potential for long term carriers rather just taking a job. To him, successful shared services leaders not only have technical skills but are also skilled in networking and developing relationships with senior leaders and peers.

Career advice:

'If your technical knowledge is a cake, imagine emotional intelligence as the icing.'

Dedan Muugi

Head, Financial Reporting, Global Finance Services Africa, Standard Chartered Bank

Dedan joined Standard Chartered Bank after 17 years at PricewaterhouseCoopers where he left as a director in the assurance line of service, working primarily with governments and non-for profit organisations. He now sits within the bank's Global Finance Services where he leads the teams providing financial reporting, accounts payable, inter-company reconciliation and tax services to the bank 14 out of 15 African country operations. He is also part of the senior management team for the governance of Africa's GFS.

Dedan believes shared services have the potential to grow faster Africa. He believes shared services as a model offers significant career opportunities to progress from entry-level jobs to managerial roles.

Career advice:

'A career in shared services is not a dead-end, it's actually a stepping stone.'

Andrew Parris

Director of Shared Services, Tarmac

Andrew took up his first shared services role 2 ½ years ago at Tarmac. He had joined the organisation to lead finance transformation and was subsequently asked to assume a finance shared services leadership role.

Andrew's role still embraces finance transformation and operations; he strongly believes in shared services organisations as the natural home for transformation. Prior to joining LaFarge Tarmac, he held a variety of roles as head of finance and controller.

What he enjoys most working in shared services is the opportunity to make change. For him, the key to success as a shared services leader is to put people first and process second, never losing sight of your ultimate customer.

Career advice:

'Service excellence is the top priority.'

Suzanne Ryder

Shared Services Advisor

Suzanne started her career as a graduate in an accounting firm, making her way up the traditional career path route to partner, ultimately at a Big 4 accounting firm. She then decided to move to industry as CFO in medium-sized enterprises with global operations. After progressively responsible roles in consultancies and business process outsourcing companies, where she managed finance transformation initiatives, she entered the shared services world upon joining WPP. Post setting up four global shared services operations, Suzanne took up a finance transformation role at SABMiller.

Having been a client of shared services, an operator and a consultant, Suzanne is convinced that shared services careers offer the finance professional a breadth and depth of experience that goes beyond that of retained finance – in terms of commercial understanding, operations and working globally.

Career advice:

'Understanding how finance processes work end-to-end is critical to shared services success.'

Richard Torsu

Head of Global Finance Services for West Africa, Standard Chartered Bank

Richard was an audit senior with a Big 4 accounting firm before joining Standard Chartered Bank as head of reporting in Ghana. In 2007 he took on the role of head of FSSC for West Africa.

To him, finance and accounting backgrounds are a 'must have' for finance shared services roles, but other skills such as people management and communication skills, commercial awareness and an ability to engage with all stakeholders are also critical attributes.

Looking forward, Richard believes companies should embrace robotics and invest in technologies that will propel shared services organisations to focus on higher value-added processes.

Career advice:

'In shared services models, you are your own limiting factor.'

Li Zheng

Finance Director, Supply Chain, HP Inc.

Li Zheng started his career by taking a traditional path, as an accountant in major multi-national companies (MNCs) in China and Singapore. After demonstrating his mastery of finance processes, he was promoted to the executive level, leading the entire Asia-Pacific supply chain for HP Inc. Now a senior director, part of his role includes building HP's financial service solution organisation in India. This has given him the opportunity to architect the scope of shared services to promote better cohesion between functions such as supply chain management and the business.

To Li Zheng, leadership is all about having a growth mind set and being able to continually reinvent oneself; he believes that while picking up leadership skills is a journey of self-discovery, he also strongly believes that his finance and accounting background has been critical enablers of his success.

Career advice:

'Learn, accommodate to change, but most importantly, ensure that you help the organisation realise the value creation you generate.'

DEBORAH KOPS

Deborah Kops is the founder and managing principal of Sourcing Change. Formerly a founding partner of one of the first global business processing outsourcing (BPO) units, the CMO of a leading offshore BPO, managing director of FleetBoston's (now Bank of America) Services Group, managing director of Global Sourcing Transformation for Deutsche Bank and consulting partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers and Arthur Andersen, Deborah now works with leading companies to manage globalisation challenges. She is also programme director focusing on global business services for the eminent US based research organisation The Conference Board and a research fellow for award winning analyst firm HfS Research.

PAULINE SCHU

Pauline Schu is a policy and research manager within ACCA's Professional Insights department. Pauline has led and supported a number of global research projects across the finance and accounting profession, addressing issues as diverse as corporate governance, corporate culture and behaviour, risk management and talent management. Pauline holds two master's degrees, one in politics and international relations and the other in intelligence and international security. She is specialised in strategic risk analysis and has prior experience in international crisis mitigations.

PI-FINANCE-SHARED-SERVICES-CAREERS