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GBS, re-engineered

Efficiency can now be bought.
Performance must still be designed.

Agentic AI offers large businesses the chance to turn a sprawling shared-services estate into an engine for outperformance.

Most will settle for cheaper execution.

While the new capability may make large organisations more productive, whether it makes them better performers depends on what it's asked to scale.

Here, we look at why successful AI investment has to start with the operating model.

Four years into the corporate AI race, leaders have heard countless versions of the same promise: a business that moves faster and costs less. Whatever your operational issue, there's an agent for it. A use case in every function, an automation fix for every inefficiency, and savings that can be counted this year. It's a good pitch. And the gains are real.

But they're quickly becoming the price of entry. Aim agents at a cost-out programme and your competitors will do the same. And as speed and efficiency become easier to buy, large groups' legacy scale no longer confers the automatic advantage it once did. AI will test what that scale has actually built.

Old ways of working are now cheaper to run – but too expensive to keep.

Large groups were already under growing pressure from investors to account for the cost and complexity of Global Business Services (GBS). What was built as a rational response to scale has become opaque, hard to run and harder to defend. GBS moved work into the centre but didn't always bring the whole process with it.

Acquisitions leave behind duplicate processes, and centralisation leaves local teams to fill in the gaps.

The business still pays for the service – sometimes heavily. Central charges can consume up to 40% of business-unit EBITDA. That represents not only overhead but also earnings absorbed by a model that's drawing market attention for all the wrong reasons.

Agentic AI will make that scrutiny even harder to deflect.

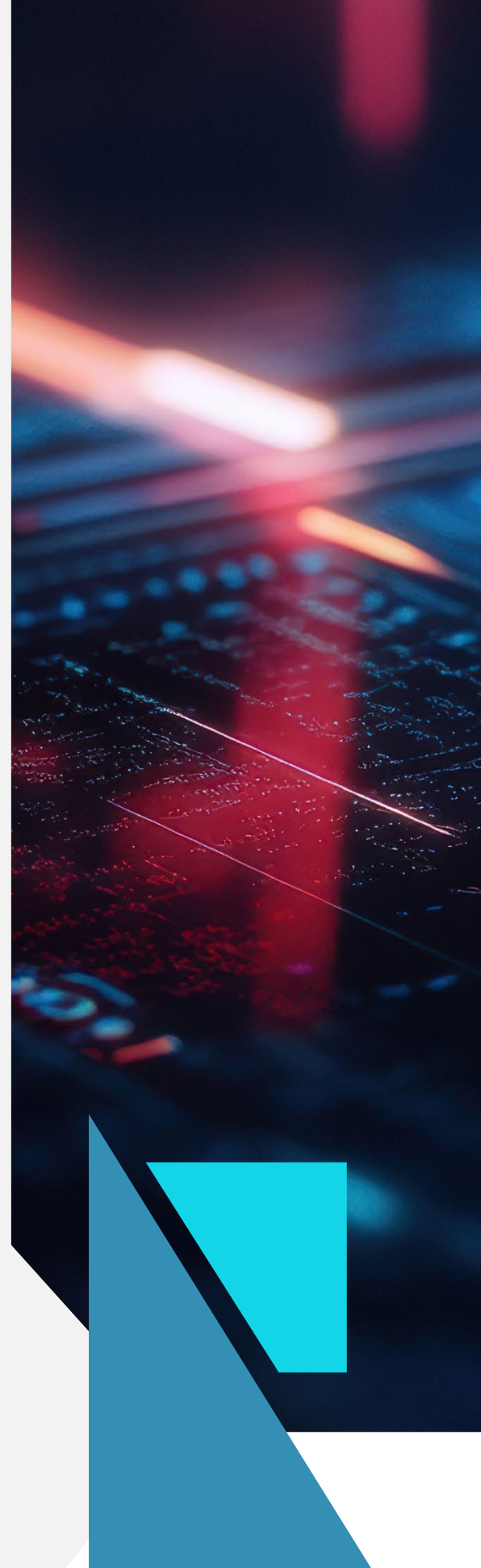
It can lower the cost of running an overbuilt GBS construct, but it can't settle the unresolved choices that produced it. The rush to deploy agents is encouraging companies to build before they've done the real work of deciding what needs to be dismantled or redesigned. Without a reset, the technology will run existing dysfunction at speed.

That's a poor return on an AI bet: more technology, more complexity, and more for investors to question.

The pressure is real – but so is the opportunity.

For the first time, agents can connect expertise and information across a group and put it to work wherever it drives performance. But the first task is to get the operating model right, rather than deploy the agents: to streamline how the group works as one business, without losing the ownership and judgement that belongs close to customers and markets.

Agents can then help the group work as one, without a single way of deciding, thereby improving performance.



How we do it: Make AI a force multiplier for a business organised to perform

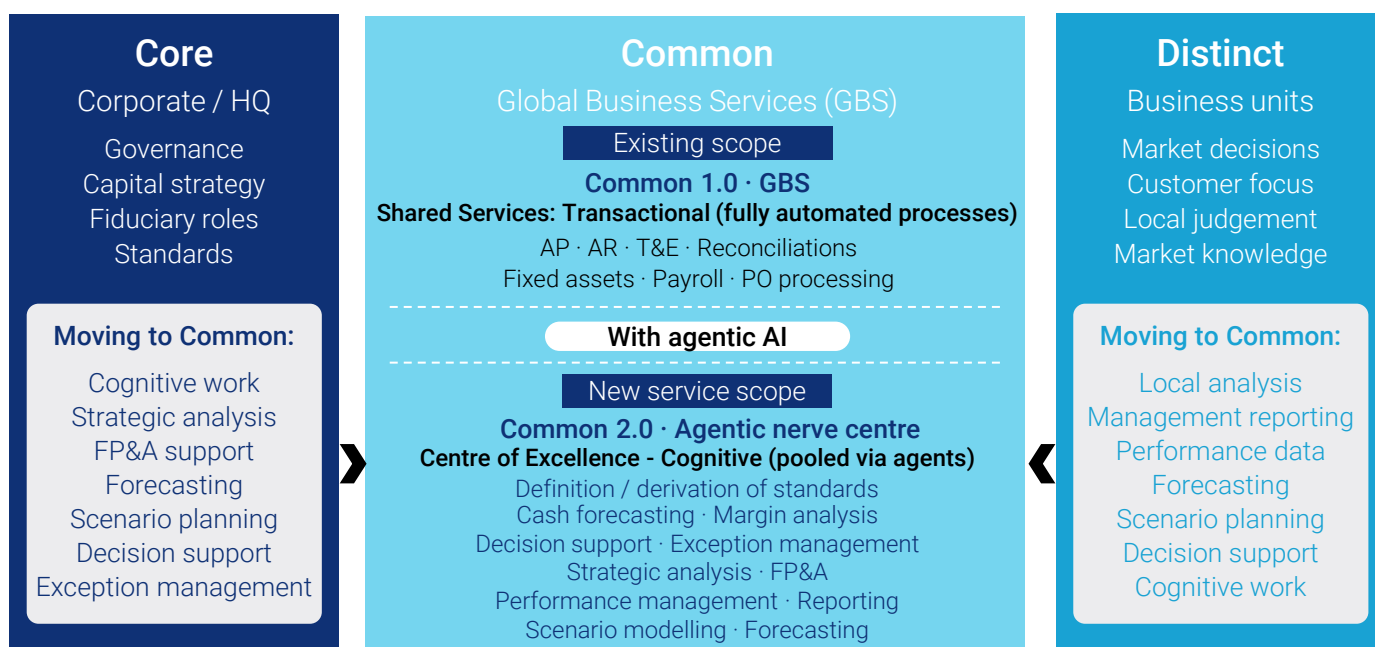
An implementation-first approach asks: what can we automate, how quickly, and at what cost? Start there, and investment will flow to wherever agents are easiest to embed, rather than to the work that matters most.

We start with the performance constraint.

Where are you losing time, money, or management attention for reasons that ought to be within your control? What's stopping the business from seeing clearly and responding quickly?

The answer rarely sits in one function. We trace the decisions, information and activity around the constraint – across the businesses, GBS, and the corporate centre – to see where the group is working at cross-purposes or losing control of the outcome. That's the dysfunction agents can't fix. It's also where value leaks out of the operating model, in weaker margins, slower cash conversion, delayed capital decisions, and management attention pulled away from the calls that drive returns.

With agentic AI, cognitive work pools from HQ and Business Units into GBS



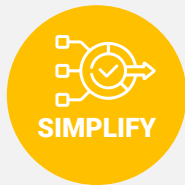
NB: Light grey boxes show cognitive activities migrating from Core and Distinct into the expanded Common layer

Core-Common-Distinct is more than a taxonomy. It's a practical framework for identifying where a large organisation can pool and scale shared capability – and where its businesses need room to win.

Core sets direction and allocates capital. Distinct work stays with the businesses, because customer and market knowledge is too valuable to centralise away.

Common is where the group stops paying several times over for the same capability. Shared services have long applied that logic to transactions. Agentic AI can apply it to the repeatable parts of management analysis: cash forecasting, margin analysis, exception management, and decision support.

If a capability is being recreated across businesses, but the method, data and rules underneath it can be standardised, it belongs in the Common layer. Build it once. Each business then uses it in the context of its own market, with every use sharpening the underlying data, rules, and exception-handling for the next. A better way of working in one business becomes a better way of performing across the entire enterprise.



Stop. Simplify. Automate.

Identifying a capability worth sharing is step one.

Step two is making it fit to run at scale.

Stop activity that no longer contributes to the outcome. Simplify the data, rules, hand-offs, and exceptions that remain. Then – and only then – automate the target state, not a legacy process that reproduces its own complexity at lower cost.



Case study:

That work produces value that automation alone can't touch.

An \$8 billion consumer-products company reviewed the SOPs and shadow-finance activity behind transaction processing and reconciliations, rebuilt the processes, and only then automated the ten highest-value workflows.

Within three months, the result was 36% of finance capacity and 15-20% additional savings beyond the BPO case alone.

Performance now, optionality later

As agents become more capable, the longer-term frontier is an organisational architecture rebuilt around them.

One plausible end-state is what we'll call Common 2.0: an upgraded centre of excellence that becomes the company's agentic nerve centre, running its cognitive work and overseen by a far leaner Core.

That isn't GBS with better tech; it's a company in which agents do the work and people direct, govern and intervene.

That may be abstract futurism for now – but it's the direction of travel. And today's operating-model choices will make the next move easier or harder. The right redesign provides the structure for taking on new forms of autonomy as they become useful.

This is how a complex group turns its next wave of tech adoption into a performance advantage that competitors cannot buy or copy.

AlixPartners

Contact the authors



Eric Benedict

Partner & Managing Director
ebenedict@alixpartners.com



Johannes Kraemer

Partner & Managing Director
jkraemer@alixpartners.com



Lisa Steberl

Vice President
lisamarlen.steberl@alixpartners.com

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These are the moments when everything is on the line—a sudden shift in the market, an unexpected performance decline, a time-sensitive deal, a fork-in-the-road decision. But it's not what we do that makes a difference, it's how we do it.

Tackling situations when time is of the essence is part of our DNA—so we adopt an action-oriented approach at all times. We work in small, highly qualified teams with specific industry and functional expertise, and we operate at pace, moving quickly from analysis to implementation. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our clients until the job is done and only measure our success in terms of the results we deliver.

Our approach enables us to help our clients confront and overcome truly future-defining challenges. We partner with you to make the right decisions and take the right actions. And we are right by your side. When it really matters.

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