Beyond the title: why some GPOs succeed where others fail

Arpero

In major organisations, finance transformation only succeeds when someone is genuinely accountable for how processes run end to end. That's why the Global Process Owner (GPO) model is becoming a priority investment for CFOs. When it is implemented well and backed by strong executive support, it creates clarity, consistency and control across the entire finance operation, and it accelerates the delivery of change.

Why GPOs matter

GPOs exist to solve a specific problem: fragmented ownership. By creating a single accountable leader for how a process runs end to end, organisations get faster decisions, better controls, and more consistent outcomes.

From governance to execution

The GPO role has been around for some time, but its impact has evolved. Where it once focused on documenting processes and rolling out local fixes, today it's about driving transformation at scale.

Modern GPOs lead global design, data standards, and system alignment, bridging finance, operations and technology. It's no longer just oversight. It's accountability for end-to-end delivery and lasting change.

What modern GPOs safeguard

Today's GPOs do far more than define processes. They lead across:

- Global design, governance and performance
- Master data standards, integrity and governance
- Finance system enablement and alignment
- Change adoption and continuous improvement
- Cross-functional collaboration with technology, shared services and the business

This blend of process, data and change ownership is why the role is becoming central to finance leadership teams.

Why CFOs are building GPO capability now

CFOs are under pressure to deliver transformation that sticks, not just redesign on paper. GPOs are one of the most effective ways to ensure:

- Faster, more confident programme delivery
- Reduced variation and manual rework
- A stronger, more consistent control environment
- Better data flow into FP&A, reporting and audit
- Long-term sustainability of transformation benefits

CFOs are realising that without strong GPOs, global programmes move slower, cost more, and fail to scale.

Characteristics of a high-performing GPO model

The most successful organisations give their GPOs:

- Clear authority to make and enforce design decisions across business units
- Ownership across both process and data
- Support from PMO and change specialists
- Active sponsorship from the CFO and transformation leadership
- Direct partnership with technology and shared services

This is what turns the GPO role from “process documentation” into real operational leadership.

What makes a GPO work, and why that's rare

Most CFOs we work with don't need convincing about the value of a GPO model. They see the logic. The challenge is making it real.

The job description sounds straightforward: end-to-end ownership, standardisation, control, and improvement. But the real question is: who's capable of delivering that? And what does that person actually look like?

It's not a standard career path. You don't graduate into global process ownership. Many of the strongest GPOs we've seen have built their credibility through delivery (finance change, systems rollouts, cross-functional programmes, master data management), not policy-writing or process mapping.

The reality is: very few people have the right blend of experience and behaviour. You need someone who can move between the strategic and the operational. Someone who can push for standardisation, yet still win over a regional CFO. Someone fluent in data and systems, but not

buried in the detail. Someone who can lead without needing hierarchy to do it.

That mix is hard to find. And even harder to develop.

We've seen plenty of organisations build the right GPO structure, but then fill it with people who lack the mandate, sponsorship or delivery credibility to make it work. The model isn't broken, but the execution often is.

The organisations that get it right make two things clear from the outset: GPOs have the authority to enforce design decisions, and they have visible sponsorship from the top. Without both, the role risks becoming token rather than transformational.

> **In that sense, GPOs aren't appointed. They're built.**

Built, not appointed

There's no defined route to becoming a GPO. But we've seen consistent patterns in the people who succeed:

- A foundation in core end-to-end finance roles
- Exposure to systems implementation and transformation programmes
- Understanding of master data management and governance, and of how IT solutions are set up
- Experience leading cross-functional delivery
- A track record in navigating complexity and building credibility across teams

Many started in business-facing roles and then rotated through shared services or change. Others came up through project delivery. Very few had a clear plan to become a GPO. But all of them earned the trust to lead across silos, because they'd done it before.

In that sense, GPOs aren't appointed. They're built.

Our view

From what we've seen, the success of a GPO model depends less on structure and more on people.

We've worked with GPOs who've become the glue in global finance transformations. They hold the design steady, unblock delivery, and help systems and change teams move faster. But it only works when the person in the role is credible and empowered to act.

This isn't a theoretical capability. It's a delivery role.

The concept is well known. The challenge is execution. That's where the real gap is.