

# Charging against the transactional mind

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**Clarios Slovakia, Bratislava's backbone of the global battery producer, strives to revolutionize how shared services centers operate and treat their clients. This conversation with Juraj Barus, Global Director of Clarios Finance Shared Service Centers and Michal Guštáfič, Senior Transformation Manager at Clarios Slovakia, describes their vision of a modern business center and its core values.**

## Why is the transactional mentality that was boosting the economy after 2008 crisis currently killing shared services centers?

Juraj Barus (JB): Nearly everyone in this sector puts automation and robotics on top of the prioritization list. Fair enough. You can find smarter work and roles with higher added value following right behind. Unfortunately, despite all these priorities, mind-numbing transactional work still represents a larger portion of the shared services industry and our reputation is receiving lot of flak because of it. Changing the mindset proved to be more difficult than changing the process. And more importantly, automation is just the first layer of the transformation.

This era is different. Covid-19 accelerated the progress and going digital finally gained its true meaning. Conventional wisdom and orthodoxies were broken. Digital does not recognize geographical boundaries, or local competition. Digital means largely different customer experience expectations and global competition. Are we ready to follow this new digital playbook with transactional mentality still hijacking our daily operations? I doubt it.

## So what can be done to change this mentality? Clarios is still the new kid on the block of shared services centers, started as recently as May 2019 but with certain rebellious aspirations. What are they?

JB: The traditional approach would be to automate processes and to develop an expert skillset so people can explain standard reporting areas and connect the dots. We agree, but in Clarios we

see this as a starting point. We believe our teammates must possess the business acumen as well. This means to really understand the business setup and transactions outside of the center. Our people need to understand the product, be proud of it, and have one common goal with the business. Therefore we call ourselves a business center, not shared services center anymore. And to the surprise of all our newcomers, we treat our colleagues as business partners.

Michal Gustafik (MG): If you possess a back to back understanding of the company processes, your decisions about setting priorities, what to automate or which new services should be put in place, are not focused on processes inside your center only. And the trust of your business partners increases because they finally see that you have a complex picture and that you are not only providing a partial solution.

JB: We all enjoy ordering food or getting a lift using easy apps, right? It's simple, transparent, customer experience matters. You can provide feedback on any specific part of the delivery process. What does it mean for business? It listens and improves. So why don't we talk about customer experience and feedback culture more in shared services? At Clarios we strongly believe that the experience of our business partners, energetic communication and ever-present feedback loop are essential stepping stones to the new normal.

**How about walk the talk? How are you going to make it happen?**

JB: Right after our split from Johnson Controls in May 2019 we focused on changing the transactional mentality to business partner mindset. This is not an easy cultural change, not everyone can stand such heat. We hired people empowered with creative imagination and start-up leaning. This helped us to sell our own strategy to global headquarters. With firm endorsement and full trust we started to manage projects and processes all around the globe from Bratislava. That is, as far as history of shared services in Slovakia is concerned, really unprecedented.

MG: We made dramatic changes in designing our hiring process, talent acquisition and learning experience. External certification courses such as ACCA, CIMA, or Corporate FP&A are well known for everybody. On top of these, we have developed our internal Finance Academy focusing on utilizing the theory from external courses to apply it perfectly to our internal processes. Additionally, our Academy leverages people from Clarios business departments providing trainings and developing the business acumen, they also share information about internal tools and processes, in order to possess a back to back knowledge and experience going beyond our own center environment. How are you going to know that you turned your team into business partners?

JB: We have changed the way we set up goals internally and the way we measure them quarterly or monthly. We will give a heavy workout to our feedback

culture system, learning and adapting with every response from our business partners over time. This feedback will adjust the development paths of our teammates. Last, but not least, our service portfolio is upgraded – reporting goes on demand, demand for decision-ready data, cash and supplier management during the Covid situation and many others.

**JURAJ BARUS** has more than 15 years of experience in the area of financial management, team development and company leadership. Since the establishment of Clarios Slovakia in 2019, he has held the role of Global Director for Clarios shared service centers in Europe, North and South America and Asia. He was previously Managing Director and CFO of IBM Romania since 2014. In addition, he was a member of the Board of the American Chamber of Commerce and Chairman of the Capital Markets Committee in Romania in 2015 and 2016. Prior to that, he worked at IBM since 2005, where he was involved in the establishment of the center for statutory accounting and direct tax in Bratislava.

**MICHAL GUŠTÁFIČ** has held the role of Senior Transformation Manager in Clarios since January 2020, leading finance transformation of the organization to better respond to fast-changing economic and business conditions. He has over 18 years of experience in corporate finance, management and audit. Previously, he was a Finance Director of management accounting for EMEA and North America at Johnson Controls and before he worked at Dell as the Senior EMEA Consolidations Manager. He is a member of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants in the UK.