



Navigating Key Turning Points in India: **A Strategic & Cultural Playbook for Swiss MEM Companies in India**

A Special Report for Swissmem's Industry Day 2025

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Introduction

Senior executives at Swiss MEM companies venturing into India often discover that success hinges not on technical expertise alone, but on **cultural intelligence and strategic agility**. This guide is organized around critical strategic and cultural themes – the real-world turning points where Swiss HQ mindsets have had to shift to thrive in India.

Each section highlights common challenges (*drawn from anonymized case experiences collected by the [India Competence Center at the University of St. Gallen](#) over the years*), explains why these turning points matter, and provides practical checklists or tips for adapting business and governance models to the Indian institutional context. **The focus is on the Swiss headquarters perspective**

– **those leading from Switzerland** – and how they can better support and govern their India ventures through a flexible, relationship-centred approach.

#1: Network Orchestration in a Complex Market

In India's dynamic and relationship-driven market, Swiss firms quickly learn they **cannot go it alone**. Successful market entry or expansion often requires becoming an **"orchestrator"**, building a network of local partners, suppliers, distributors, and even government or community links that can collectively deliver value.

One Swiss industrial SME (*"Company A"*) initially tried a direct approach, only to face roadblocks in distribution and bureaucracy. The turning point came when they formed a legal partnership (not a joint venture) with a well-connected Indian partner. That partner had an established service network and personal connections across industries – assets that a newcomer simply couldn't replicate on their own in a useful timeframe. In India, *"one has to constantly contact and persuade people to achieve milestones,"* the Swiss team learned, and having a local ally with boots-on-the-ground relationships was indispensable.

Crucially, the Swiss firm shifted from a mindset of controlling all operations to one of orchestrating a collaborative network. This meant identifying ideal partners with complementary strengths and aligning them with the business model for mutual co-learning and success. In practice, Company A became the "lead firm" architecting a hub of multiple alliances – a business network tailored to India's environment. By transparently communicating strategy and building trust, they attracted strong partners and managed overlaps in roles. The result was a flexible yet coordinated network that could adapt quickly to market changes. Not only did this network approach facilitate initial market entry, but it also set the foundation for faster expansion. As experts have noted, building a local partner network is key to tackling India's complexity, allowing a foreign SME to adjust to an unstable environment and scale with lower risk.

Checklist – Orchestrating a Local Network:

- **Map the Stakeholders:** Identify key players in your value chain – suppliers, distributors, agents, industry bodies, even educational or government institutions – and seek partnerships rather than doing everything in-house.
- **Choose Complementary Partners:** Target partners whose capabilities fill your gaps (market access, local manufacturing, service network) and align with your business model. Ensure incentives for all parties are aligned for co-learning and shared success.

- **Build Mutual Trust and Transparency:** As the lead firm, communicate your long-term strategy openly to partners to create credibility. Encourage transparency among all players to avoid misunderstandings while protecting your core know-how (e.g. retain control of critical IP or components).
- **Establish Flexible Structures:** Set up agreements (partnerships, alliances, supplier contracts) that allow adjustments to changing conditions. A rigid structure won't survive India's dynamic market – incorporate flexibility in scope, timelines, and roles.
- **Coordinate and Empower:** Play the role of a network “conductor” – convene regular joint meetings or workshops with partners to align goals and solve issues collectively. Empower local partners to make certain decisions, leveraging their on-ground expertise while keeping a clear communication channel for major decisions.

#2: Building Trust and Personal Relationships

Trust is the currency of business in India. Swiss executives often encounter a **relationship-driven culture, where years-long personal ties can matter more than legal contracts.** A common turning point occurs when Swiss HQ realizes that their usual arms-length, formal management style is faltering – deadlines slip, information flow is patchy, and local stakeholders seem uncooperative. In one case, a Swiss CEO was puzzled that the Indian distributor wasn't meeting commitments despite a solid contract. **The breakthrough came when the CEO began investing time in face-to-face relationship building** – flying in for unstructured visits, sharing meals, and getting to know the partner's family. Slowly, the dynamic shifted as rapport and mutual understanding grew. As one seasoned Swiss-India consultant put it, *“problems arise when management is delegated without sufficient supervision and control – you need to invest not just money but personal dedication in India”*.

Personal presence is often interpreted as commitment. For example, a Swiss industrial firm found that its Indian joint-venture partner highly valued frequent visits from Swiss representatives. The partnerships' success was underpinned by *“numerous meetings in both countries”* over time, which built up full transparency and relationship-based trust between the partners. The Swiss company deliberately showed its presence with Indian clients and staff, sending senior managers regularly to India – a crucial step, since *“it is crucial to frequently show one's presence with executives in India”* to maintain trust. Even simple gestures of cultural adaptation by Swiss staff can pay high dividends. For instance, Swiss team members at one company learned that by traveling as their Indian colleagues do and even eating local foods with them, they signalled respect. Seeing a Swiss colleague *“trying his best to adapt to [the Indian] way of*

thinking” made local employees feel understood – **paving the way for relationship-based trust and smoother cooperation**, as in one Swiss firm’s experience.

Checklist – Building Trust at a Distance (and Up Close):

- **Invest Senior Time:** Don’t assume a local team alone can maintain the relationship. Schedule regular visits by HQ executives to key Indian customers, partners, and the local team. High-level personal engagement shows that the partnership matters.
- **Cultivate Personal Rapport:** Begin meetings with friendly small talk – inquire genuinely about family, health, or local festivals (an integral part of Indian business etiquette). Be patient; initial meetings are about getting acquainted, and *“it is unrealistic to expect initial meetings to lead to straight decisions”*.
- **Demonstrate Commitment:** Little signals count – responding promptly despite time zone differences, keeping promises, and showing flexibility for requests. Indian counterparts will *expect you to be committed for the long term*, and they focus on partners who show reliability and consistency. Avoid cancelling trips or changing plans last-minute, as this can be seen as lack of interest.
- **Empower and Respect the Local Team:** Show faith in your India team’s judgment. Publicly recognize their contributions and give them titles that carry decision authority (*hierarchy matters – an Indian manager with a senior title is taken more seriously by clients*). Also be mindful of cultural nuances – for example, experienced managers in India may expect certain levels of respect or authority; sending an unseasoned junior from HQ to “oversee” them can breed resentment in a culture where age and experience are still highly valued.
- **Build Informal Channels:** Beyond official meetings, use informal gatherings – dinners, cultural events, site visits – to deepen personal connections. *Business may not get discussed* at these events, but attending a colleague’s family celebration or sharing in a holiday shows you see them as partners in more than just transactions. Such goodwill gestures create a reservoir of goodwill to draw on when challenges arise.

#3: Local Adaptation vs. Global Process Rigidity

One of the toughest turning points for Swiss HQ is realizing that some global standard processes may hinder success in India. Swiss companies pride themselves on efficient procedures, precision, and sticking to plan – but in India, those very strengths can become stumbling blocks if applied too rigidly. A classic example was Company C’s early strategy in India: The Swiss company’s HQ

insisted on a limited range of standardized products to simplify operations and cut costs. They soon hit a wall because Indian customers demanded **customized solutions** – and local competitors readily offered them. Company C's initial refusal to adapt led to lost bids and frustration, forcing a strategic shift to allow more tailoring of products to Indian needs. In retrospect, the Swiss team acknowledged that while standardization worked in Switzerland, in India "*facing resistance to product standardization*" was inevitable, and **success for the Company C's team in India meant bending the rules to meet local expectations.**

A similar scenario played out for a Swiss pharma company shipping temperature-sensitive vaccines. HQ's processes mandated vetted logistics and strict cold-chain protocols. But when rugged rural areas and sketchy infrastructure threatened delivery, the Indian partner proposed a creative workaround – a "**jugaad**" **solution**, enlisting local vehicles and drivers informally to get the job done. *Jugaad*, a Hindi term meaning frugal innovation or a clever hack, is a hallmark of Indian business creativity. Initially, the Swiss procurement head balked at this ad-hoc approach, fearing loss of quality control. This conflict became a turning point: either insist on the formal process and risk a failed delivery, or trust the local improvisation with appropriate safeguards. Many Swiss firms have learned that **over-insisting on HQ processes can alienate Indian partners and stifle local initiative.** As one Indo-Swiss business expert observed, "*Indians are satisfied if a technical solution is working reasonably well, [whereas] the Swiss demand perfection,*" which can frustrate collaboration. Moreover, an Indian salesperson might promise to solve all a client's problems – not out of deceit, but operating on the principle of *jugaad*, confident that the team will later "*magic*" a solution through ingenuity. This improvisational ethos collides with the Swiss preference to promise only what's already proven – but it also **opens doors to innovation** if harnessed properly.

Checklist – Balancing Process Discipline with Flexibility:

- **Identify Non-Negotiables:** Clearly define which standards **must** remain uncompromised (e.g. patient safety, core engineering specs, anti-corruption practices) and where you can allow flexibility. Communicate these priorities so your team knows where creative tweaks are welcome and where to stay strict.
- **Embrace Jugaad (Selectively):** Instead of dismissing "unofficial" solutions, evaluate them. Often, local workarounds can be prototypes for a more formalized improvement. Encourage your India team to propose ingenious fixes for local challenges – reward creativity that achieves the goal without undermining essential quality.
- **Simplify Procedures:** Review your HQ processes through a local lens. Do you require layers of approval or documentation that slow Indian

operations unnecessarily? Trim bureaucracy where possible. For example, if purchase order paperwork is delaying procurement, empower the local office with higher approval limits to act faster. Speed is often essential in India's fast-moving environment, and **polychronic work styles** mean multiple things happen in parallel – lengthy sequential processes may not hold.

- **Localize Offerings:** Be ready to adapt your product or service to Indian tastes and requirements. If customers ask for additional features or customizations, treat it as valuable market feedback rather than a nuisance. As one Swiss manager noted, Indian clients might listen to a polished product pitch and still ask, “*What else can you do?*”. Anticipate this by building some flexibility or modularity into your offerings so you can respond with options.
- **Stay Open and Flexible:** Culturally, **openness and flexibility are prerequisites** to build relationships and seize opportunities in India. Train HQ teams working with India to expect plans to change. Scenario planning is useful – have Plan B (and C) ready for project timelines, supply chain snafus, etc. When the unexpected occurs, react with a problem-solving mindset alongside your Indian colleagues, rather than defaulting to “but this is the process.”

#4: Delivering on Value: The Paisa Vasool Mindset

One Swiss executive in the packaging industry recounted a critical negotiation with an Indian FMCG client that nearly fell apart over one issue: **price-value perception**. The Swiss firm offered a high-end, eco-friendly packaging solution – top quality, but at a premium price. The Indian client acknowledged the quality but flatly said it wasn't “*paisa vasool*”, meaning “**worth the money**”. In India, “*paisa vasool*” is more than a phrase; it's a cultural yardstick that measures whether a purchase yields maximum value for every rupee spent. It reflects a mindset of **maximizing value in every interaction, where people expect high quality and low cost** – the complete package. If that sounds paradoxical, consider that Indian consumers (and businesses) are skilled at stretching resources. They will compare, bargain, and seek extra goodies to ensure they get their money's worth. In fact, delivering that perfect mix of quality and value is considered the **highest praise** – when customers experience it, they'll often exclaim “*paisa vasool!*” as a genuine compliment.

For Swiss HQ, the turning point is recognizing that a global premium pricing strategy may need local recalibration. **The Indian partner's cost-first focus isn't simply haggling; it's a different way of defining value.** Swiss companies have learned to shift from selling a product's features to selling its **value proposition in Indian terms**. In the packaging case, this meant quantifying how

the eco-friendly packs would save costs in disposal, improve brand image with consumers, and last longer – essentially **converting quality into ROI** language. It also meant exploring a more flexible pricing structure (for example, smaller upfront cost with longer-term supply agreement) to meet the client’s “*paisa vasool*” expectations. Another pattern is Indian clients asking for **add-ons or expanded scope at the same price** – a reflection of that “*what else do I get?*” mentality. Rather than view this as unreasonable, savvy Swiss firms treat it as a chance to differentiate. For instance, one Indian industrial customer started including a complimentary training program and 24/7 support hotline with their equipment in India. The extras cost a bit, but they cemented the customer’s sense of getting a great deal, without the Swiss firm having to slash the base price.

Checklist – Aligning with the Paisa Vasool Ethos:

- **Translate Quality into Value:** Don’t assume superior Swiss quality speaks for itself. Articulate how your product will *save money or add tangible benefit* for the customer – e.g. energy-efficient machinery means lower operating costs, or higher uptime means more production. Help the customer calculate the long-term savings or returns.
- **Offer Tiered Solutions:** Consider having a “good-better-best” range for India. Not every client can afford the top tier. A slightly simplified version at a lower price point can capture value-focused buyers, while your premium version still appeals to those who want the best.
- **Be Ready to Bargain:** Negotiations in India often involve bargaining and requests for concessions. Maintain a courteous, patient approach during price discussions. Build in a small margin for discounts or extras so you can grant something without hurting your bottom line. **Never show irritation at hard bargaining** – it’s seen as part of the process, not an insult.
- **Add Value-Adds:** If you face resistance on price, think creatively about sweeteners. Can you bundle an additional service or extended warranty for free? Include some spare parts? Indians appreciate getting something “extra.” These gestures enhance the overall value perception (even if the contract remains at your target price).
- **Demonstrate “Worth”:** Share case studies or testimonials quantifying value. Indian decision-makers often need to justify purchases to their superiors or finance teams by proving *paisa vasool*. Provide data or references that back up how your solution delivered ROI for other clients. When they see that “*high quality and great value*” can indeed go hand-in-hand, you’ve won half the battle in their minds.

#5: Sharing Risk and Reward through Partnership

In Switzerland, a contract often cleanly allocates risk: if one side fails to meet terms, penalties ensue. In India, businesses prefer a more relationship-centric risk sharing approach. This can be a major adjustment for Swiss executives. A turning point occurs when a project hits trouble – say, a delivery is delayed due to a sudden regulatory change or a supplier issue. The Swiss instinct might be to enforce the contract (penalties, blame, etc.), but the Indian partner expects a collaborative solution, with both sides bearing some burden. For example, in an infrastructure equipment deal, when government permits were delayed, the Indian customer didn't immediately levy liquidated damages. Instead, they invited the Swiss vendor to work out an updated schedule together, implicitly expecting the vendor to perhaps expedite air-freight at their own cost to catch up – *“shared sacrifice”*. If the Swiss side rigidly said *“not our fault, not our problem,”* the relationship would have soured irreparably. Instead, by each taking on some of the pain (*the Swiss firm paid for faster shipping; the Indian client extended the timeline slightly without penalty*), they preserved goodwill and eventually completed the project successfully.

The foundation for such risk-sharing is **trust and mutual dependency**. In the earlier partnership example (*“Company A”*), both partners set it up so that each had skin in the game: the Swiss kept production of a key component in Switzerland (ensuring the Indian partner relied on them for that *“critical switch”*), while the Indian partner brought the customer access and local execution to the table. Both would lose significantly if the partnership failed – the Swiss from lost investment and the Indian from reputational damage and lost business. This mutual vulnerability fostered a spirit of *“we're in this together,”* leading to proactive risk management. They created extensive partnership agreements and aligned long-term goals, but beyond paperwork, **the strength of their relationship at different hierarchy levels was the real safety net**. One Swiss manager noted that after spending four years building relationships before seeing any profit, they learned that *“openness and flexibility”* were prerequisites for opportunities – in other words, by staying adaptable and not giving up when early results were thin, they eventually unlocked a big reward. **The lesson: patience and shared risk-taking in the early days can yield significant payoffs in the long run.**

Checklist – Fostering Risk-Sharing and Collaboration:

- **Align Incentives:** Structure deals so that both sides win when things go well *and* lose when things go wrong. For instance, in a partnership or agency deal, avoid setups where the partner makes money even if sales don't materialize. Instead, use performance-based incentives (bonus

commissions, revenue sharing) so you're motivated to help each other succeed.

- **Use “We” Language in Problem-Solving:** When issues arise, approach them as a joint challenge. Avoid finger-pointing. Emphasize phrases like *“How can we solve this?”* or *“Let’s find a workaround together.”* This signals your commitment to mutual success and reduces defensiveness.
- **Include Flexibility Clauses:** In contracts, consider clauses for **flexible execution** – for example, agreed review points where both sides can revisit terms if certain external conditions change (currency fluctuations, regulatory shifts, etc.). By acknowledging uncertainty upfront, you set a tone that adjustments are permissible by mutual consent, rather than breaches of contract.
- **Protect Your Core, but Share the Upside:** It’s wise to protect core assets (like Company A keeping a critical component in Switzerland as leverage), but also show faith by investing in the partnership. This could mean sharing technology gradually, co-investing in local R&D, or opening access to some proprietary training. Such gestures demonstrate trust (which your partner will likely reciprocate) and make clear that you both have *skin in the game*.
- **Build Exit/Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** A truly collaborative partnership will plan for disagreement resolution without blowing up the relationship. Establish joint steering committees or escalate channels that include senior folks from both sides, to arbitrate disputes fairly. Knowing there’s a process to address grievances makes each side more willing to take calculated risks.

#6: Relationship-Based Negotiation: The Importance of “Darshan”

In the Indian business context, deals are rarely sealed purely on the merits of a proposal – who you are and the relationship you build can tip the scales. A vivid illustration was a Swiss cleantech company negotiating a major supply contract with an Indian energy firm. The Indian CEO insisted that the Swiss company’s country manager (*let’s call her Ms. Müller*) personally attend **every** significant meeting. This slowed down the project (*Ms. Müller couldn’t be everywhere all the time*), and the Swiss HQ felt it was inefficient – after all, they had delegated decisions to technical teams on the ground. What they hadn’t grasped was the cultural principle akin to *“darshan”* – a Sanskrit term meaning *“to see and be seen in the presence of the respected.”* **In business terms, the Indian side needed the visible involvement of the top brass as a sign of commitment and respect.** The turning point came when Swiss HQ acknowledged this and adjusted the negotiation approach: the country manager prioritized those meetings, and in parallel they worked out a plan to gradually

introduce delegation once trust was solidified. The negotiation climate immediately improved. The Indian CEO, having “*seen*” the Swiss leader’s commitment, became more receptive to allowing the Swiss technical team to handle details thereafter. In essence, the Swiss learned to combine *darshan* (personal senior engagement) with a path to eventual delegation – addressing the CEO’s need for respect without derailing efficiency.

This example underscores how **hierarchy and relationships intertwine in Indian negotiations**. Decisions are often made by the highest-ranking person, and that person expects to deal with an equivalent peer on the other side. Approaching a deal by sending a junior representative can be a non-starter, or even taken as an insult. Moreover, **Indian businesspeople typically want to know who they’re dealing with at a deeper level**: they will assess your character, flexibility, and reliability in the negotiation process itself. **It’s not just what you propose, but how you behave**. Long silences, protracted discussions, even side conversations are used to build comfort. As one guide notes, “*expect negotiations to be slow and protracted... be prepared to make several trips if necessary*”. Relationship-building is not a separate activity from negotiation – it **is the negotiation** until trust is established. The Swiss tendency to get straight to business must be tamed; impatience can be read as arrogance or desperation. On the upside, once a solid relationship is formed, Indians are extremely loyal to their partners and will strive for *win-win solutions* despite the hard bargaining style. They appreciate counterparts who show respect, maintain poise, and focus on long-term mutual benefits.

Checklist – Succeeding with a Relationship-centered Negotiation:

- **Send the Right Team:** Ensure senior leadership is involved at least at the kick-off and key milestones of a negotiation. Titles matter – Indians “*expect to deal with equals*” in rank and authority. If your CEO or Director can make an appearance (even via video for minor meetings), it signals respect.
- **Prioritize Face Time:** Whenever possible, conduct important negotiations in person. The impact of a handshake, a shared meal, or a respectful gesture (like using a few words of Hindi or a local greeting) **cannot be replicated over email**. Being there is a sign of commitment.
- **Be Patient and Persistent:** Plan for multiple meetings. Don’t rush to the contract details on the first meeting. Use initial sessions to listen and to let your counterparts talk about their concerns, even unrelated to the deal. Demonstrating patience in hearing them out builds trust. And if negotiations stall, don’t walk away too quickly – maintaining a courteous connection and revisiting issues later is often fruitful.
- **Respect Hierarchy and Protocol:** Identify early who the real decision-maker is on the Indian side (*it might be the company owner, the eldest*

family member, or a government official behind the scenes). Ensure you **show appropriate deference** to that person. Something as simple as inviting the top executive to speak first, or literally offering them a higher seat in a meeting, can show you understand Indian hierarchical etiquette.

- **Leverage Informal Diplomacy:** Outside the boardroom, engage in what Indians call “building rapport” – invite key stakeholders to dinner or cultural events, or ask a neutral intermediary who knows both parties to sing your praises. Often, critical deal-making happens in informal settings once the formal meetings establish the basics. Having an influential local advisor or board member with the right connections (and who understands the concept of *darshan* and relationship building in India) can ease your path by vouching for you within their circles.

#7: Flexible Contracts and Adaptive Governance

After a hard-won deal is signed, Swiss HQ might heave a sigh of relief – but **in India, signing is often just the beginning of negotiation. This is a pivotal mindset shift: contracts in India are sometimes viewed as living documents**, frameworks that guide the partnership but will evolve as circumstances change. A Swiss manufacturing firm learned this when their Indian client, weeks after contract signing, requested changes due to a “*minor policy change*” in import duties. The Swiss instinct was to say “*a deal is a deal*.” However, the local team cautioned that a rigid refusal could jeopardize the entire relationship (and future business) – far costlier than making a concession now. The reality is that enforcement of contracts through courts is typically a last resort in India; day-to-day business relies more on flexibility and the ongoing relationship. As a negotiation expert notes, “*Indian partners usually expect the other side to remain somewhat flexible if conditions change, even if that means modifying contract terms*.” Moreover, you “**do not expect Indian business partners to follow commitments to the letter**” – deadlines might be missed and yet considered met if only a week late, and so on. This isn’t about untrustworthiness; **it’s about a different perception of time and obligations, where practicality and intent can trump black-and-white contract clauses.**

Swiss HQ leaders need to adapt their governance models to handle this fluidity. **This might mean giving the India country manager more leeway to renegotiate certain terms on the fly (within agreed guardrails) without seeking multiple approvals.** It also means maintaining an active dialogue post-signature. “*Signed contracts may not always be honoured. This depends on the strength of the continuing relationship between the partners,*” advises one of our cross-cultural guides. **In practice, that means Swiss executives should stay involved via relationship check-ins, not just legal oversight.** If an Indian partner calls to explain an issue affecting the contract, being responsive and open

to adjustment will build long-term loyalty. **Of course, not all requests should be granted – but they should be evaluated in light of the overall partnership, not dismissed on principle.**

Many Swiss firms now include **contract flexibility clauses** (*for example, arbitration or mediation steps, or scope change mechanisms*) to provide an official path for amendments, rather than risking an impasse or breach. The governance approach also shifts from “*monitoring for compliance*” to “*monitoring for alignment*” – focusing on whether the partnership is meeting its strategic objectives, rather than micromanaging every contract term. **This flexible governance has another benefit: it encourages your Indian counterparts to be frank about problems.** If they know you won’t react rigidly, they’ll raise issues sooner, allowing joint problem-solving before things escalate.

Checklist – Making Contracts Work as Dynamic Tools:

- **Incorporate Adjustment Mechanisms:** When drafting agreements, include clauses that allow for periodic review or renegotiation of certain terms by mutual consent. A contract that acknowledges change is less likely to be broken; it provides a formal **safety valve** for both sides.
- **Avoid Over-Legalism:** While you should have solid contracts, don’t lean on them in every interaction. Indian business culture can view an overly legalistic approach as a sign of distrust. For example, bringing a lawyer to routine negotiation meetings might be seen as hostile. Use your legal tools wisely and sparingly – rely more on business discussion to resolve issues, resorting to the contract or legal letters only when absolutely necessary.
- **Empower Local Decision-Making:** Decide what level of variation the local team can agree to without HQ approval (e.g. accepting up to a 5% price change or a 1-month delivery extension). By the time every small change request travel to Switzerland and back, the opportunity or goodwill may be lost. Set clear boundaries, then trust your India leaders to manage the fine print adjustments in real-time.
- **Stay Engaged Post-Deal:** Don’t file away the contract and forget it. Schedule quarterly stewardship calls or visits with your Indian partner to discuss how things are going. This creates a forum to address any emerging concerns or necessary changes collaboratively, rather than letting frustrations simmer. It also reaffirms that you value the *relationship over just the contract*.
- **Plan for Dispute Resolution:** Despite best efforts, disputes happen. Agree in advance on a process to handle them – whether it’s escalating to senior executives bilaterally, involving a neutral mediator, or arbitration in a mutually agreeable jurisdiction. Knowing there’s a civilized way to handle conflicts **keeps both sides at the table** when challenges arise, instead of ending up in stalemate. Often just the knowledge of this process will

encourage parties to be more reasonable and find a middle ground informally.

Conclusion: From Mindset Shift to Operational Agility

Navigating the Indian market as a Swiss HQ executive is a journey of continual adaptation. The common thread in all these turning points – whether it's orchestrating a network of business partners, building relationship-based trust, adapting business processes, emphasizing value-for-money, sharing risks, face-to-face negotiations, or keeping contracts flexible – is the need to **shift from a fixed global mindset to a fluid, empathetic approach tailored to India's realities**. Swiss MEM companies that have succeeded in India did so by supplementing Swiss efficiency and quality with a hefty dose of cultural intelligence, patience, and humility. As one veteran put it, *“don't give up, do the right things but take small steps in the right direction.”* It often takes longer to see results in India, and early on you are investing in learning and relationship capital. But that investment, combined with the practical strategies outlined above, is what eventually converts challenges into opportunities.

By using this playbook, **Swiss HQ leaders can better anticipate the pivotal moments that require a change in their approach to India**. Instead of being caught off-guard, you will recognize when to tighten and when to loosen, when to lead from the front and when to empower from behind. **This ability to toggle between Swiss and Indian modes as context demands is the hallmark of successful Indo-Swiss ventures.**

With checklists in hand and an open mindset, you can steer your Indian business with strategic agility and cultural realism – ensuring that both your company and your partners prosper together, turning potential clashes into synergies.

Remember: in India, flexibility is strength, relationships are assets, and every challenge is an invitation to innovate. By embracing these principles, Swiss executives will not only avoid pitfalls but also unlock the immense value and growth that India promises.

GANESHA – India Intelligence Platform

Insights and Relationship Building for Swissmem Members

The **GANESHA – India Intelligence Platform**, developed by Prof. Dr. Roger Moser and NR Nik Gugger, is a specialized Decision Intelligence Platform service designed to help companies navigate the complexities of India's business environment. It is not a replacement but a **complement** to traditional market expansion services like S-GE, Swiss Business Hubs, and chambers. The platform offers a structured, research-backed, and relationship-centric approach to enhance the likelihood of success of market entry and expansion, especially when it comes to **checking 'what must be true'** and building **trust-based partnerships** with Indian firms and institutions.

The platform functions through three integrated service pillars:

- **Hypothesis Testing for Strategic Fit with India**
GANESHA helps companies define and test the key “*What Must Be True*” hypotheses for their business model success in India. Using a structured Delphi-method based expert panel, companies can test assumptions with local experts (industry, academia, government) before major investment decisions, thereby reducing the risk of misaligned strategies or failed entries.
- **Executive Education on the Indian Context**
GANESHA embeds real-time learning along the market entry or expansion process. Executives receive curated, on-demand education material—videos, infographics, and frameworks—covering both strategic methodologies (e.g., scenario analysis) and essential cultural concepts like *Jugaad*, *Darshan*, *Paisa Vasool*, and *Trust as Mutual Vulnerability* WHILE they are developing and testing hypotheses.
- **Relationship-Building via F2F Scenario Workshops in India**
GANESHA facilitates structured, face-to-face scenario development workshops through the academic partners of the University of St. Gallen in India (e.g., IIM Bangalore, Shiv Nadar University). Such 1-day workshops bring together Swiss executives and Indian stakeholders to co-develop market entry/expansion pathways. **More than insight generation, these sessions build trusted interpersonal relationships**—a vital success factor in Indian business culture. Instead of ‘*boring*’ presentations these workshops facilitate long, structured discussions about future developments among Swiss and Indian executives – “*there is no better way to start building real relationships with local decision-makers!*”

Unique Value for Swissmem Members

- **Access to Strategic Decision Intelligence:** *GANESHA* empowers Swiss HQ leaders to access unique expertise in India to efficiently test whether there is a fit between what the Swiss company has to offer and the demand

and institutional context in India. Or, how Prof. Dr. Moser often puts it: *“As a Swiss company doing business in India, every assumption is wrong until proven right!”*

- **Building Relationships not just Extending Networks:** *GANESHA* allows Swiss HQ leaders to efficiently initiate the development of meaningful relationships (*not just exchanging business cards*) with key decision-makers in India – be it in government, business or society. Or, as Nik Gugger often says: *“I rather have 3 people in India that pick up the phone anytime I call them than a list with 60 business cards of people I met at an exhibition in India.”*

More Information

*If you want to stay updated on practical insights and cultural analyses in the Swiss-Indian context, please sign up for our **GANESHA Newsletter** on [LinkedIn](#).*

*If you want to improve your cultural understanding of key cultural concepts, including ‘Darshan’, ‘Paisa Vasool’, ‘Jugaad’ or ‘Trust as Mutual Vulnerability’, while doing business in India, please use our **free [Negotiations in India Coach GPT](#) training opportunity**.*

For more information, please write to: info@nikgugger.ch

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