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**India**

International Management

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# International Trip to India

My overwhelming experience from my short stay in India was the astonishing kaleidoscopic variety of India and the apparent chaos was quite mind-boggling. It strikes me that there are four things for essential success in adapting to India:

1. Patience - You'll need patience everywhere in India. Patience... in terms of getting anywhere in the city. The roads, streets, alleys, dirt tracks, railways, underpasses, overpasses, pavements are heaving with big cars, little cars, auto-rickshaws, motorbikes, bikes, lorries, cows, people, people...so many people all jostling for space. Despite the incessant beeping of horns and queuing it all seems to be in good humour with little signs of impatient road rage that we experience here in the West. Even so, there are still no words to describe the traffic. As one Put-put driver proudly told me, "After visiting our city, even Michael Schumacher said he would not dare drive in Mumbai!"

Patience...in terms of service. A visit to the Central Cottage Industries Emporium a stone's throw from the Gateway to India, was an experience in itself. Aimed at the tourist trade, the shop was a Mecca of Indian 'goodies' from bags to boxes, rugs to wooden elephants. Though a feast for the eyes the shop would certainly not win any prizes for its customer-centricity. Wandering aimlessly from department to department picking up souvenirs to take home was virtually impossible. After filling my hand-woven basket I was then told politely, I'd have to back-track and obtain a hand-written form from each department to be filled in by each departmental salesperson. And, when I say, 'Department', this usually consisted of only one or two shelves. Having received my forms, I was then sent to a beautiful, at least 100 year old mahogany 'Paying kiosk' supervised by a very officious-looking gentleman with pince-nez glasses who rubber stamped all my forms after payment. Finally, I was sent to the packing desk where my various gifts were individually wrapped. I'm sure if necessary, there would have been someone else to carry my packages to my waiting taxi. It was a fantastic experience for those of us who know a retail world where buying no longer requires any human interaction but I'm sure would require the patience of a saint after time. Incidentally, the Emporium is a Governmental venture where prices are fixed, is all that bureaucratic rubber-stamping an everyday occurrence in the public sector... I couldn't possibly say.

2. Connections - In India you need to get to know the people before you can hope to make a true connection with the country. The basic values of the society seem to revolve around the family. The business culture seems to reflect this as many Indian businesses appear to be family owned. An extension of this is the fact that the social fabric in India is hierarchical. Indians base their identity on their family, their religious group and to some extent (still) their caste membership. There are certainly distinct zones within the Megalopolis of Mumbai categorized by religion; Muslim area, Parsi area, Zoroastrianism areas etc. etc. Even though these zones are squeezed side-by-side, the inhabitants of each zone visit their own local mosques, local temples, local pavement-side shops, whether they sell perishable goods, electric items or plastic pipes all owned by members of the same 'group'. This begs the question would western-style business and especially retail conglomerates which aim at all spectrums of society work in India?

3. Awareness of local customs – Apparently, there are 22 major languages in India, with 900 minor ones. As a European this is not so difficult to comprehend and as such, is not so hard to understand the importance of learning local customs. For example, eating only with the right-hand, does that headshake from side to side mean yes, no or maybe or their insatiable appetite for playing cricket. And is it a custom that everyone from a waiter to a security guard at the Prince of Wales Museum has a business proposition?

4. Knowledge of how the Indian worldview is different from the western. In India the worldview is not linear like in the west but cyclical. A visit to Elephanta was hugely important to providing an insight into how the majority of Mumbains (Bombayans?) view the structure of their lives but the evidence is all around...from taxi drivers with fairly-lit Ganesh's on their dashboards to what seems like unbelievable acceptance, in the eyes of a westerner, of many bare-footed individuals scavenging in the rubbish. Almost all of life's major events are widely believed to be predetermined and thus beyond the control of the individual. Although, having said that, I was struck by how hard-working, proud of India's achievements and ambitious, particularly the students we met, are...

...perhaps they are not so different from us, after all.