

PwC touts India as strategic growth hub, investing in the country's tech and talent for long-term gains

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***PwC Analyst Day, Gurgaon, India, May 8-9, 2024** — Over dinner and then a full day of presentations and discussions, PwC India leaders and partners, along with members of PwC's global leadership team, described the PwC India member firm — and the India market overall — as considerably changed since the last analyst event in late 2019.*

Vibrant, multinational and driving change: India and PwC India

Consensus among presenters and attendees that India will be a massive growth market for PwC over the next few years underscored every aspect of the early May event, tempered only, perhaps, by the sentiment expressed by a number of PwC leaders and clients that India is a great growth market *right now*.

A shared assumption among the analysts and PwC leaders and professionals, based on the presentations and numerous sidebar conversations, was that today's investments in India-based talent and technologies will be considered, in 10 years, to have been foundational and strategic for PwC. In short, everyone presenting was bullish on India as a market in its own right. Coincidentally, [The Economist published a special report](#) on India the week before the analyst event and noted, "Since 2012, India has been the world's fastest-growing large economy" and "the number of new business registrations in India has tripled since 2015."

Martin Scholich, PwC's deputy global advisory leader, described India as an "open, fast-growing, technology-driven market." Arnab Basu, advisory leader for PwC India, added that the Indian economy has spurred the development of more "vibrant, large, multinational Indian companies," clearly a plus when it comes to expanding PwC's India client base.

Ritu Rekha, a partner and leader of finance transformation and a co-leader of business transformation for PwC India, noted the recent expansion of Global Capability Centers (GCCs) in India and explained that the value proposition of GCCs was evolving from cost savings to capabilities expansion to innovation, with PwC facilitating those changes and

enabling growth. Basu added that the changing nature of the work completed at these centers provides a greater opportunity for PwC to bring consulting value to clients.

PwC India Chair Sanjeev Krishan noted the Indian government’s desire to see GCCs expand beyond traditional IT hubs and call centers into facilities focused on engineering services and innovation. Krishan added that PwC India is aligning with India’s road map and the priorities outlined by the Indian government, to include a sharpened focus on certain industries, and supporting the domestic market (India businesses built to serve India clients).

Krishan rounded out his talk by asserting that disruption around the world could be a net positive, as India is ahead of the curve in not only adapting to technology and business shifts but also mitigating other countries’ supply chain challenges. Excitement and growth mixed with opportunities that are based on chaos elsewhere but grounded in increasing internal stability are a good recipe for a country as well as a professional services firm.

GenAI for the many Indias

When talking about generative AI (GenAI) — whether in a breakout session dedicated specifically to the technology, during an individual client case study or as part of a larger discussion about the firm — PwC’s leaders repeated a consistent refrain around skills: The technology itself is not a challenge, but people can be.

PwC needs professionals skilled enough to not only develop the GenAI-enabled solutions that clients want but also bring in the right expertise to meet a client’s broader-than-technology goals. In short, GenAI has further accelerated training imperatives across the full spectrum of everything PwC delivers. GenAI is not replacing people but challenging the firm to make everyone more valuable.

During a panel session, Scott Likens, PwC’s global AI and innovation technology leader, explained that the firm adopted a “people-first strategy”

A few notes on PwC India:

- According to Basu, PwC has seen 30% year-to-year revenue growth in India, driven by India-based clients, across a wide spectrum of services.
- PwC India has focused on five industries — financial services, healthcare and pharma, manufacturing, infrastructure, and retail — which, not coincidentally, are the same industries the Indian government has determined to be strategic for the country’s sustained growth.
- India clients look to PwC for integrated solutions in a wider variety of areas, including supply chain management, human capital management and operations consulting. In addition, India clients have matured since 2019 and are more adept at evaluating and buying consulting services.
- PwC India is increasingly serving PwC clients in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, such as the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

with respect to all AI, with an emphasis on safety and responsibility. He further noted that within PwC at the partner level, training around GenAI has been greater quantitatively than any other nonmandated training, a sentiment echoed by other PwC partners in attendance.

Turning from internal to external support, Likens said that because “everyone can use GenAI,” the firm “must reskill and upskill,” while adding that PwC’s clients have looked to the firm for help in training clients’ own professionals. Likens also noted that while GenAI tools can be global in nature and application, they — and the professionals using them — must adhere to local standards and regulations, echoing one of the recurring themes throughout the event that global solutions and capabilities need to be tailored to the local audience.

To that point, Rajnil Mallik, partner and leader of GenAI at PwC India, reminded analysts, “There’s not one India; there are multiple Indias,” with companies of all sizes across every sector operating in vastly different regions and markets. Mallik continued to explain that PwC’s clients have been seeking advice primarily around GenAI use cases, data management, risk and necessary organizational changes and the firm has been recommending that more mature clients create an internal GenAI lab where they can focus on all AI and analytics efforts. Mallik cautioned that “for GenAI to reach [its] potential, must have some regulation” and made a comparison to the regulations and oversight of the oil and gas industry.

In a presentation focused on PwC India’s work with the government of India on a federal GenAI strategy, Santosh Misra, PwC India Partner, said the government’s priorities around GenAI started with compute power and data. The government of India understood the urgent need to address future skills with current investments, intended to fund multiple AI innovation centers and vowed to work with the GenAI startup community.

Along with these priorities, PwC was advising the government on fully embracing Trusted AI, a sentiment circling back to Likens’ “people-first strategy.” In TBR’s view, the GenAI discussions during the event provided a continuation of PwC’s strategy and story from the last few years, including the firm’s emphasis on people (skills) and client needs (not just related to the technology). The new elements in May 2024 were PwC’s close alignment with the government of India’s GenAI strategy and the firm’s responsiveness to the realities of the Indian market.

A hunger for partnership: Why clients want to work with PwC

Notably reviving one successful component from PwC India’s 2019 analyst event, the firm once again included eight separate and diverse client use cases, including manufacturing tires, providing financial services, and enhancing government operations. While each client story provided unique perspectives on PwC’s capabilities and strengths, three common threads stood out to TBR.

First, the clients who presented were almost all techies: CTOs, heads of IT, chief information security officers (CISOs), and one exceptional client who was both the CFO and head of IT at her company (an almost perfect persona for PwC). While every use case included some traditional consulting services, the underlying current remained centered on the technological capabilities and partnerships that PwC could bring to its clients. In TBR's view, who PwC now serves demonstrates the long-gestating shift across the entire firm, from technology-agnostic professional services to technology-imbued consulting.

Second, the use cases themselves demonstrated the breadth of PwC's consulting capabilities, from cybersecurity managed services to cloud migration to RISE with SAP to blockchain platform building. Again, PwC and its clients mentioned traditional consulting services, such as assessment and road mapping, but the variety of use cases highlighted the diversity in PwC's capabilities and offerings.

Lastly, every client — including the greenfield RISE with SAP example — described a long-standing relationship with PwC and included cultural fit and shared values in their reasons for selecting the firm for their specific use case. In TBR's view, those longitudinal relationships explain the kind of answers clients provided to the question, "Why did you work with PwC?" which included the following:

- PwC displayed a "hunger for partnership."
- "Cultural match, speed and technology capabilities."
- Experience, capability, availability and consistency

TBR recognizes that PwC does not have a monopoly on the multidisciplinary professional services model and that any collection of eight client use cases from a PwC peer could be as diverse. Not being unique does not detract from the impressiveness of a wide-ranging set of capabilities and offerings and the execution needed to bring those services to clients at scale.

Seamless execution, or the satisfaction of a job well done

PwC gets things done. That is the firm's superpower — or, at least, what PwC most deeply believes. In contrast to consultancies that mostly sell road maps, continually add on services to extend an engagement, or sell the A team and then send in the C team, PwC is believed by its clients and own staff to be the firm that gets the job done.

PwC leaders in India, both the PwC India partners and the global partners, repeatedly echoed each other in their commitment to delivering tangible results, not just planning and talking. As Krishan expressed during his keynote address, "How can I make [clients' and PwC professionals'] execution seamless?"

As the consulting business model continues its slow and uncertain evolution, with PwC peers like EY and KPMG also searching — globally — for the best strategies and clients looking for more results and reduced spending on tech, PwC's adherence to getting things

done should resonate across the ecosystem and allow the firm to both retain its most important clients and expand, particularly in fast-growing markets such as India.

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