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## Science diplomacy with swissnex China: A Swiss nation brand initiative

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**Type of article: Case Study**

## **Science Diplomacy with *swissnex* China: A Swiss Nation Brand Initiative**

### **Abstract**

Switzerland has a long tradition of expertise in the fields of science, research and education, with “science diplomacy” (SD) now assuming an important role for innovation economies. Past experience shows that international scientific cooperation can have valuable outcomes for the involved countries and complements traditional foreign policy and diplomacy. In Switzerland, a worldwide network of science and technology outposts under the auspices of the Swiss State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) in cooperation with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) was established in 2000. The very *swissnex* network around the world defines one of those established science diplomacy instruments.

In this article, we discuss the *swissnex* office in China, which acts both as a physical and virtual environment to foster closer ties between Switzerland and China in science and technology, innovation and culture. This case study examines the history and mission of *swissnex* China, its role and organizational structure, and reviews other nations’ comparable branding initiatives. The paper analyzes clients and partners as well as the main challenges for *swissnex* China during its three years of operation.

### **Keywords**

nation branding, science diplomacy, science and technology; higher education; innovation

## 1. Introduction

Science diplomacy (SD) is considered by most innovation economies as an initiative and tool that fosters international relations in the fields of science, innovation and education. The major benefits of SD include the opportunity to promote the domestic scientific environment in foreign countries while gaining an additional foreign policy instrument. Using SD as a foreign policy instrument, international scientific collaborations can have stabilizing effects for countries with divergent ideologies and political systems (Fedoroff, 2009). Also, the scientific component of new global challenges, such as climate change, sustainable development, demographical transformation and energy and food security, will lend even more importance to SD in the future (Berg, 2010).

China is now a major player in the fields of science and innovation. For example, in 2009, China exported \$290 billion of electrical machinery and equipment<sup>1</sup> (e.g., electrical machinery and equipment and parts; sound recorders and reproducers, television image and sound recorders and reproducers, and parts and accessories). The country exported \$246 billion in machinery and mechanical appliances<sup>2</sup> (e.g., nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances and parts) as well as \$39 billion in measuring and checking instruments<sup>3</sup> (e.g., optical, photographic, cinematographic, precision, medical and surgical instruments). Chinese exports to Switzerland in 2009 accounted for \$2,664 million, where electrical machinery and equipment accounted for \$477 million and machinery and mechanical appliances accounted for \$285 million, representing about one third of all imports from China (United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database, 2010). Switzerland imports both low value-added products as well as higher value-added products, indicating a need to foster and improve relationships with China for those activities and products.

In that collaborative context, an organization such as *swissnex*, which promotes and fosters science, research and education, is unusually valuable. *swissnex* China works closely with Swiss universities and researchers, supported by a variety of organizations within the Swiss Federal Administration (e.g. Presence Switzerland, Pro Helvetia, OSEC Swiss Business Hub, SwissCham). Characterized by close relations with the science and technology counselors (STCs) embedded in selected embassies in host countries, *swissnex* is a network of science and technology outposts representing a key component of Switzerland's foreign policy strategy in promoting its domestic knowledge sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Harmonization System Codes (HS) Group 85

<sup>2</sup> Harmonization System Codes (HS) Group 84

<sup>3</sup> Harmonization System Codes (HS) Group 90

## 2. Importance of the Scientific Sector

According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) *Global Competitive Index* of 2010, Switzerland ranks first among all countries in overall business competitiveness (Schwab, 2010). Switzerland is also this year's innovation leader in the EU, according to the newly issued "*Innovation Union Scoreboard*" (European Union, 2010). China recognizes the scientific excellence of Switzerland, as evidenced in a recently issued holistic survey by the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development (CASTED), the "*2010 National Innovation Index*" (including factors such as resources, infrastructure and environment, creation and corporate innovation). In analyzing 40 countries' performances in the science and technology sector, the survey ranks Switzerland in second place, just after the US, with China in 21st place (CASTED, 2010).

### 2.1. Science and Technology (S&T)

Creating an environment that fosters science and technology as well as research and investments in a nation's technology infrastructure is crucial for a nation's competitiveness (Porter, 1990). For China, growing investments in its S&T field is a major concern. According to various development plans, the Chinese government intends to elevate S&T investments to 2.5 percent of national GDP by 2020, up from today's 0.7 percent annually (Wen, 2011)<sup>4</sup>. Further, China's recently issued 12th Five-Year-Plan identifies scientific development as a key element. Although China has still a high percentage of copied goods, it most probably will be less dependent on foreign technology in the middle and long run.

### 2.2. Research and Development R&D

Research and development are especially crucial for the academic environment as well as for certain companies. Although scientific as well as business cooperation between Swiss and Chinese institutions and companies are slowly developing, Swiss companies are looking for more R&D cooperation with China in the future. Nestle for example, has two R&D centers, in Beijing and in Shanghai, with a newly established joint laboratory shared by the Beijing Research Center and the Xi'an University of Life Science and Technology (Nestle, 2011). Novartis and Roche each have R&D centers at the Zhangjiang High-Tech Park in Shanghai (Roche R&D Center; Novartis Institute for BioMedical Research) (Roche, 2011; Novartis, 2011). In China, company investments in R&D reached 40 percent of growth in 2010 (Hernandez, Tuebke *et al.*, 2010) and China already has the highest amount of researchers worldwide

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<sup>4</sup> Additional information also under <http://www.casted.org.cn/en/> and [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cn-dy/2011-03/02/content\\_12098963.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cn-dy/2011-03/02/content_12098963.htm).

(Grueber and Studt, 2009). Swiss universities and research institutions have long been interested in co-operating with Chinese high potential partners.

### 2.3. Higher Education

Basic education increases the efficiency of workers. Those with little education can carry out only simple, manual work and find it difficult to adapt to more advanced production processes and techniques (Schwab, 2009). Education and training are crucial for economies that want to move up the value chain beyond simple production processes and products (Porter, 1990). Switzerland has always maintained a high quality education system nationwide. According to the *“Times Higher Education World University Ranking”* 2010, there are currently six Swiss Universities among the top 200 around the world: ETHZ (15<sup>th</sup>), EPFL (48<sup>th</sup>), University of Zurich (90<sup>th</sup>), University of Basel (95<sup>th</sup>), University of Geneva (118) and University of Lausanne (136<sup>th</sup>)<sup>5</sup>. Concurrently, Chinese universities are steadily gaining higher status worldwide as well. China has also six universities in the top 200 ranking, including Beijing University (37<sup>th</sup>), University of Science and Technology in Hefei (49<sup>th</sup>), Tsinghua University in Beijing (58<sup>th</sup>), Nanjing University (120<sup>th</sup>), Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou (171<sup>st</sup>), Zhejiang University in Hangzhou (197<sup>th</sup>). Science and education will be the next major fields of interest for the Chinese government in the next decade, according to the newest Five-Year-Plan (Liu, 2011).

### 2.4. Innovation

The latest *“Swiss Cleantech Report 2010”* ranks Switzerland as one of the world’s top destinations for innovations in the renewable energy sector (Soltmann, Amez-Droz, and Cosandey, 2010). Innovation has become a scientific core competency and business niche for Switzerland, enhancing the nation’s competitiveness.

Companies from emerging countries can improve their productivity by integrating existing innovation. However, developed countries can only improve their productivity by promoting innovation within a receptive business environment (Porter, 1990). China’s high quality innovations still fall short of the global leaders, although Chinese patents are growing steadily each year. In 2010, China assumed second place after the US in the number of domestic patent applications, but most were design or functional patents instead of innovation patents. Until now, China had three national innovation industry zones: in Beijing, Wuhan and Shanghai, with the latter generating around \$100 billion in revenues in 2010 (Zhu, 2011).

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<sup>5</sup> Source: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/>.

### 3. *swissnex* China

#### 3.1. History and Mission

*swissnex* is a network of science and technology outposts run by the Swiss State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) in cooperation with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). Charles Kleiber and Thierry Lombard, who lead the initiative, were both awarded the Albert Gallatin Award in September 2011. The unique idea of *swissnex* as an international knowledge network has been well received internationally. Its major task is to act as a subsidiary instrument for Swiss institutions in higher education and research that want to pursue international collaboration with potential counterparts abroad and vice versa. By 2012, *swissnex* had networks at five locations, including Boston (2000), San Francisco (2003), Singapore (2004), China (2008) and India (officially opened in 2012).

*swissnex* is a key component of Swiss scientific policy for the promotion of bilateral cooperation in science, education and innovation. According to the Federal Council's dispatch (2008-2011), there are eight non-European countries defined as "priority countries" for further bilateral cooperation, including China, India, Russia, South Africa, Japan, South Korea, Brazil and Chile) (SER, 2011a). The goal of *swissnex* is the establishment and maintenance of a strong network that will lead to a sustainable cooperative environment for Swiss institutions and people.

*swissnex's* China office in Shanghai stands firmly behind its slogans to "*promote, connect and facilitate*" the China area and "*connecting the dots*" in a more interdisciplinary sense which integrates the idea of a "hybrid" construction of *swissnex* in connecting science, business and culture<sup>6</sup>.

The official **mission** of *swissnex* China can be laid-out into as the following (SER, 2011b):

- 1) **Promotion** of Switzerland's excellent location for **S&T**
- 2) **Support** for Swiss institutions and individuals with strong interests in **internalization** efforts (in line with their needs and the conditions in the host countries)
- 3) **Establishment** of **networks** among clients from S&T, education, innovation and the arts
- 4) Strengthening of the **cooperation** and flow of **information** among clients in the above-mentioned domains

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<sup>6</sup> "Connecting the dots" means: Bridging the domains of Research and Education, and interdisciplinary cooperation and establishment of networks among public and private-sector actors in the areas of Research, Education, Innovation, Business and the Arts.

## 5) Promotion of **exchanges** between China and Switzerland through *swissnex*'s activities

Managing each location as a public-private partnership is at the core of the *swissnex* business model. The State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) provides the basic funding (e.g. office, facilities) and one-third of the *swissnex* budget (i.e., project related) (Fetscherin and Marmier, 2011). Two-thirds of the budget has to be generated through third party funding (i.e. mandate, private funding and sponsoring). *swissnex* China from its inception has sought to expand its sponsors and donors willing to support its services. In addition to *swissnex*, the SER maintains and a worldwide network of science and technology counselors (STC) at selected Swiss embassies sharing and supporting the *swissnex* mission as well. Swiss STCs around the world have been in place since 1958 and currently number 22.

### **3.2. Organization of *swissnex* China**

Vital financial support for *swissnex* comes from partners and sponsors sharing the commitment to “connect the dots.” As a public-private organization, *swissnex* has numerous clients and partners. Clients are defined as institutions and people that *swissnex* is working for (i.e. mandates, projects and activities). Partners provide essential resources needed to accomplish the projects (i.e. money, infrastructure, knowledge).

#### **3.2.1. Clients & Mandates**

In the public administration area, *swissnex* China needs to maintain strong relationships and visibility within the networks around government, media, politics and lobbyists. In addition, the organization needs to be in sync with the needs and strategies of companies with a strong R&D focus, such as pharmaceutical and high-tech companies.

#### ***Universities and the Science Community***

Since *swissnex* China's establishment in 2008, various Swiss universities have worked with *swissnex* or have concluded agreements. *swissnex* China represents them and works on specific requests such as connecting researchers, alumni management, promoting graduate and postgraduate studies, branding and media relations in China. Internship programs are available to interested students. For the Commission of Technology and Innovation (CTI), *swissnex* has already accomplished certain mandates. The network can develop customized strategies to support their members (start-ups, young talents and universities of applied sciences). On several occasions it has received mandates from Presence Switzer-

land in fostering ties between Switzerland and China (e.g. the Swiss Pavilion Expo 2010). Notable experts such as Swiss Nobel Prize Laureates Prof. Rohrer (Physics), Prof. Wuethrich (Chemistry), Prof. Zinkernagel (Medicine) and Swiss astronaut Claude Nicollier have already been guest lecturers. In the future, relations with major universities such as Jiaotong, Tongji, Fudan, East China University of Science and Technology (ECUST) and others will be strengthened.

### ***Business Communities***

Often, companies, associations and individuals collaborate with *swissnex* China on specific projects such as workshops, exhibitions, conferences, study tours and lectures. Where there is an opportunity, *swissnex* China is always motivated to connect businesses with the science sector (e.g. cleantech). Swiss Business Hub and SwissCham both serve as partners for *swissnex* China in the business area. *swissnex* China helps young Swiss scientists and artists show their work to the Chinese, reinforcing its commitment to promote talent from different fields of expertise.

## **3.2.2. Partners**

### ***Governmental Institutions***

*swissnex* China actively cooperates with the government in China to create and maintain good relations with many Chinese agencies and high officials, especially in the field of S&T. Coordination of contacts to Chinese ministries resides with *swissnex* and the Swiss Embassy in Beijing. There are a vast number of governmental agencies with interrelated competencies that make cooperation even more challenging, but persistence is forging sustainable Swiss-Chinese scientific cooperation. Certain political delegations visit *swissnex* on a regular basis as well (e.g. parliamentary delegations, Swiss high officials, Federal Counselors).

### ***Embassy and Consulates***

Affiliated with the Consulate General of Switzerland in Shanghai, *swissnex* is integrated into Switzerland's network of **diplomatic** representations abroad and frequently interacts with the science counselor at the Embassy in Beijing. The Swiss system of science counselors together with the *swissnex* offices around the world is unique.

### ***Presence Switzerland***

As an integral part of the General Secretariat of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Presence Switzerland (PRS) is responsible for Switzerland's **image and nation branding** abroad. It implements the Confederation's strategy on Switzerland's global **communication**. The main goals of Presence Switzerland are to establish a network of contacts for future decision-makers, increase general knowledge about Switzerland, and enhance the country's position as a competence center in certain fields. In doing so, it strengthens and coordinates the positive perception of Switzerland abroad, conveying an authentic and vibrant image.

At the World Expo 2010, *swissnex* China was responsible for the scientific program at the Swiss Pavilion (e.g. lectures and conferences). The collaboration between PRS and *swissnex* China was an extraordinary platform to promote the idea behind *swissnex* as well as Switzerland's capabilities. In addition, relationships with Chinese officials and institutions such as the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Shanghai Association for Science and Technology, Tongji University and the Minsheng Art Museum deepened at the same time. During the Expo there were official visits from the Federal Counselors Doris Leuthard, Micheline Calmy-Rey and Moritz Leuenberger. Further collaborations between *swissnex* China and PRS include the "Einstein Exhibitions" and the "E+ Framework University Program".

### ***Pro Helvetia***

Pro Helvetia, as a Swiss foundation, is responsible for promoting the Swiss **artistic and cultural** landscape abroad. For example, in 2010, *swissnex* China, together with Pro Helvetia and the Minsheng Art Museum, organized "barbecue lectures" on art, science and society. Lectures on social responsibility were presented in 2011.

### ***Swiss Business Hub***

Swiss Business Hub (SBH) China is the Trade Commission of Switzerland to China, a "one-stop shop" business solutions agency for small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) to help to promote **trade (export or import)** between Switzerland and China. SBH has three offices in China (Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou), physically linked to the respective Swiss embassy or consulate and providing knowledge of Chinese markets and a global network of trade professionals. Emergent sectors in China such as medtech, biotech and cleantech are of great interest for SBH China. Its business events raise awareness on the quality of Swiss products and Swiss competencies. These activities could lead to **investments** and cooperations in med-, bio- and cleantech in Switzerland as well.

### ***SwissCham Shanghai***

The Swiss Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SwissCham) in Shanghai promotes the country's global success and establishes **relationships** for the Swiss business community in China. SwissCham's competence lies in providing business services and organizing networking events to help Swiss companies in the Chinese market. It also promotes Swiss excellence in science, technology, innovation and the arts.

### **3.3. Performance of swissnex China**

Since 2008, *swissnex* China has attracted third party contributors who give additional financial support for its various activities and projects, acting as a public-private business organization competing for sponsors in the open market. In 2010, *swissnex* China generated around \$390,000 in third party contributions, with SER's project cost share around \$130,000 (*swissnex* China, 2011). Working closely with its headquarters and other *swissnex* offices, *swissnex* China has created a series of criteria that reliably gauge the output and impact of its projects. The Service Level Agreement of the SER defines how the outcomes have to be analyzed (i.e. strategic high-level goals, strategic sub-goals, and performance indicators). There are quantitative as well as qualitative indicators to ensure the continuous development and improvement of services.

### **3.4. Main Challenges**

#### ***Chinese Environment***

In comparison to other *swissnex* offices around the world, *swissnex* China faces the challenge of establishing its scientific network in a very different political, economical and cultural environment. *swissnex* China is not able to fully take advantage of past experiences and expertise from other *swissnex* offices and has to implement strategic elements suited exclusively to China. For example, political as well as social relations in China have to be acknowledged and nourished carefully due to the higher "power distance" which can be observed in China (Hofstede, 2001). So far *swissnex* China has handled its daily work in the complex administrative system and is looking to widen relations with administrative institutions and Chinese officials further. The many Chinese dialects, customs and values as well as certain political restrictions within the country are other factors that influence *swissnex*'s future work.

The following table briefly summarizes and compares the *swissnex* China office with the *swissnex* office in Boston in the context of the economic, political, and cultural environments as well as

internal key figures. It outlines how the external environment influences the internal structure and strategy of the *swissnex* office and shows their similarities and differences.

	<b>swissnex Boston</b>	<b>swissnex China</b>
<b>Country Level Data<sup>7</sup></b>		
Population	313 million	1,336 million
GDP/capita	\$47,400	\$7,400
Political System	Const. Federal Republic	Communist State
Hofstede cultural dimension (2001) <sup>8</sup>	Power Distance: 40 Uncertainty Avoidance: 46 Individuals: 91 Masculinity: 62 Long term: 29	Power Distance: 80 Uncertainty Avoidance: 30 Individuals: 20 Masculinity: 66 Long term: 118
<b>swissnex</b>		
Established	2000	2008
Number of Staff (+interns)	13	14
Budget in million (estimated)	\$2.1	\$1.2
Standardization	Idea of science diplomacy Promoting Switzerland's scientific sector abroad Establishing sustainable networks Director with diplomatic status Design, logos and public appearance	
Country specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic system</li> <li>• Boston, New England, Eastern Canada Area</li> <li>• Known brand</li> <li>• Consular responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese system</li> <li>• Shanghai Area, entire China</li> <li>• Chinese language</li> <li>• Gain visibility</li> <li>• SSSTC Program</li> </ul>

*Table 1: Comparison of swissnex offices*

The major external factors that impact *swissnex* China's performance include doing business in an autocratic system, the Chinese government, the wide income gap and Chinese values. These ele-

<sup>7</sup> Source: <https://www.cia.gov>.

<sup>8</sup> Source: <http://www.geert-hofstede.com>.

ments are unique to China and for Boston have little or no relevance. However, what they have in common is that internally, all *swissnex* offices operate under similar guidelines.

### ***Entrepreneurship and Public Administration***

From managing human resources and finances to building team expertise, the founders of *swissnex* realized that there was no blueprint for this unique framework and business model in foreign policy. How to balance complying with the administrative rules of a public organization (as required of any government entity) while allowing the flexibility and creativity necessary to develop projects and events as a private organization remain under discussion. Since the most important aspects of *swissnex* China's work are personal interactions with visitors, clients and partners, good communication is essential. *swissnex* China leaders have devoted much time in finding people who could work in an environment requiring both rigorous project management skills and interpersonal, multi-lingual communication skills.

### ***Establish Credibility***

*swissnex* China had to define a compelling niche and a unique value proposition to gain visibility, credibility, confidence and reputation in China's science and technology and research field. It had to figure out the best way to work with different groups of clients and partners from academia, industry and business, society and government organizations. The start-up stage has ended and *swissnex* China is currently in the process of expanding its networks, projects, client base and partners.

### ***Branding***

For every event, the organization has to decide which brand (and brand associations and brand attributes) to put forward. In *swissnex* China's case, the choices include:

- *swissnex*
- Swiss Scientific Community
- Switzerland as a Country
- Switzerland as a Tourist Destination
- Swiss Business
- Swiss Culture
- Swiss Embassy or Consulate

Since many events involve a variety of people and organizations, *swissnex* has to find ways to include other Swiss and Chinese partners in the branding effort. In most cases, the events are co-branded, where a fine balance between the *swissnex* brand and the partners' brand must be found. Eventually this process should lead to a credible and comprehensible brand in the Chinese S&T environment (Fetscherin and Marmier, 2010).

#### **4. Science Diplomacy in other Countries**

Many developed countries have already implemented some kind of global S&T networks under their national strategies for science. These networks usually include science and technology, scientific collaboration, government liaison, student and researcher exchanges and contacts with business (Berg, 2010). In addition to "traditional" foreign policy and diplomacy, science diplomacy adds benefits where usual diplomatic measures might be limited.

Although the idea of science counselors has its roots in the 1950s, a scientific global network has only been established within the last decade. About one quarter of the S&T networks are managed exclusively by ministries of foreign affairs (Berg, 2010). For example, Germany and Japan use systems similar to Switzerland's, which are nested in the ministries of education and research. The following table compares various science diplomacy initiatives of selected countries.

	<b>Network Supervision</b>	<b>SD Network Structure</b>	<b>S&amp;T Employees</b>
<b>France</b>	Foreign Ministry (Strong regional interests)	26 Countries, many resources	Diplomats, “Science Envoys”
<b>UK</b>	Department of Business, Innovation and Skills	Science and Innovation Network SIN, 24 Countries, many resources	“Science Officers”, Diplomats, Local Program Officers
<b>Germany</b>	Ministry of Education and Research BMBF	German Science and Innovation Houses, Scientific Institutions, selected Embassies	Science Counselors, Diplomats
<b>Japan</b>	Ministry of Education and Research, Foreign Ministry	Selected Embassies, Scientific Institutions	Diplomats, S&T Counselors, Program Officers
<b>USA</b>	White House Office for S&T	Embassies, Federal Agencies, Semi-Private Institutions, fragmented structure	Diplomats, S&T Counselors

Table 2: Country comparison SD 2010 (Flink and Schreiterer, 2010)

Although the idea behind science diplomacy is the same for each country, each has chosen a specific strategy and procedures to fulfill their purpose (Flink and Schreiterer, 2010). Table 2 shows that the dominant strategy seems to be fostering scientific collaboration through public as well as private institutions. Most countries adopt a multi-level approach which works well for scientific matters. Most countries also employ diplomat level people (i.e. directors, higher management). By integrating or annexing the network offices into embassies or consulates, a certain diplomatic leverage effect behind the networks occurs (stronger political status through the “embassy label”). The idea of a hybrid organization like *swissnex* has also been used by the UK and Germany. The Science and Innovation Network (SIN) in the UK and the Science and Innovation Houses in Germany provide similar functions and procedures as the *swissnex* outposts for Switzerland.

## 5. Conclusion

The *swissnex* model is an early attempt at capitalizing on a niche in nation branding by fostering science and technology, higher education and innovation abroad. The *swissnex* model thus offers a fresh

and innovative approach in science diplomacy to establish connections between countries and regions in which it maintains knowledge outposts. While there are aspirations to build more *swissnex* offices in other countries, other nations are also integrating similar science networks into their foreign policy. As the *swissnex* network continues to grow, it is crucial that each location maintain a certain amount of autonomy. Especially for *swissnex* China it has been crucial to maintain close relations with the Chinese administrative system from the very beginning. By having strong ties to the Chinese administration and officials, *swissnex* was able to achieve its goals and initiatives in an efficient way, but challenges in China's unique economic, political and cultural environment will not disappear. Language barriers also constitute a significant hurdle. These external forces drive the internal structure and strategy of the *swissnex* office.

Further, as the network deals with the creation of knowledge, success must be evaluated in a rather broad and unconventional way. This is especially true in the case of *swissnex* since expertise and "soft skills" play an integral part and activities have rather a long term impact difficult to measure. Innovation cannot be sufficiently measured by quantitative factors alone for success.

Indeed, the emerging "innovation economy" created by the collaborative output of academia, business and industry is fueled by intangible assets. The value of the discussions that *swissnex* triggers – conversations and opinions that can lead to enduring relationships and knowledge transfer, and eventually to the establishment of an international science community where Switzerland's interests are positioned properly – cannot be measured directly and in the short term. As with any other nation branding initiative, the intensity of the efforts must continue, but the results take many years. Shanghai is considered a major and expanding global economic hub and *swissnex* China will be able to observe developments in science, technology and innovation in China on the spot.

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