



Mr Tan says the SMU MBA course is mentally strenuous and physically draining, but is rewarding.
PHOTO: CHENG JUN LIANG

Getting ahead of the pack

Taking the SMU MBA has helped Mr Keeve Tan to hone skills to enhance his performance at work

MEREDITH WOO

LEARNING and gathering insights of case studies from presentation slides and lecture notes is typical of many educational institutions.

But at Singapore Management University (SMU), where Mr Keeve Tan pursued a Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme, he was able to learn about an effective marketing management case study differently.

For example, his professor invited Mr Pradeep Pant, the then

chief executive officer of Kraft Asia Pacific, to talk about how the company successfully turned around the floundering sales of iconic American snack Oreo in China.

Mr Tan embarked on the 18-month course from July 2016 to December last year.

Strategic learning journey

Mr Tan, 34, has been working in the financial sector for about eight years and is currently a director of listed derivatives, over-the-counter and Electronic Forex Exchange at UOB Global Markets.

But while he was confident about his financial and industry knowledge, he felt he needed other skills to enhance his performance at work.

"An MBA would be perfect for me to hone other skills such as negotiation, strategic planning, operations management and marketing," he says.

While he considered other

institutions that also had excellent MBA programmes, he chose SMU because of its part-time option and convenient location near the central business district.

He adds: "SMU graduates seem more vocal, expressive of ideas, and thrive in an environment of diversity and rapid change. These are soft skills that are crucial in the disruptive economy we live in these days."

"Managing disruptive innovations particularly interests me as they not only pose significant threats but also provide significant opportunities for my industry."

One of his favourite modules was Organisational Behaviour and Leadership, where class participation contributed to half of the final grade.

Says Mr Tan: "I remember panicking because when the floor was open for discussions, as usually, more than three-quarters of the class had their hands up."

"This was a microcosm of what happens in the boardroom, and we all benefitted as we could learn from one another's thoughts and experiences in their respective industries."

His MBA cohort comprised 105 students from 17 countries in various industries that included fast-moving consumer goods, finance, communications, health-care and fashion.

Another highlight was the week-long Business Study Mission trip to Vietnam to better understand the challenges and successes of local businesses.

SMU graduates seem more vocal, expressive of ideas, and thrive in an environment of diversity and rapid change. These are soft skills that are crucial in the disruptive economy we live in these days. Managing disruptive innovations particularly interests me as they not only pose significant threats but also provide significant opportunities for my industry.

MR KEEVE TAN
director of listed derivatives,
OTC and eFX
UOB Global Markets

Mr Tan also went on an exchange programme to IE Business School in Spain, where he studied strategic foresight under the tutelage of Professor Alexander Van de Putte. The professor served as principal adviser to the Governor of the Central Bank of Kazakhstan and held key positions in various energy firms like Shell International.

Rewarding experience

SMU's MBA has far exceeded Mr Tan's initial expectations.

He says: "When I met admissions manager Eugene Leong, he stressed that the course would not only be mentally strenuous but also physically draining."

"He accurately highlighted that, despite the sacrifices, the rewards would be plentiful."

In addition, Mr Tan has built meaningful friendships and networks with leaders and friends from various industries. He has also benefited from SMU's MBA alumni network, which provided mentorship, connections and employment opportunities.

There are multiple scholarships available for those who need financial assistance to further their studies.

Recently, Mr Tan's bosses put him in charge of a business segment. This placement, he believes, would allow him to contribute greatly using the knowledge and skills gained through the SMU MBA.