

Executive master of business administration in the spotlight

By RACHAEL BOON

AMBITIOUS business people are always looking for an edge that gets them a step head, and right now they are putting their money on an advanced degree offered widely here.

The degree's title - Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) - points to its high-powered nature.

The EMBA is aimed at chief executives and chief financial officers, technical heads, or those in senior management positions.

Programmes are often an intensive experience, accelerated to be completed within a year to fit into their busy work lives.

Mr Nitish Jain, president of S P Jain School of Global Management, which has a campus in Hyderabad Road, said: "An EMBA is the fastest growing format of MBA.

"It is very relevant as it provides the right skill set to move from a functional manager to a business manager or general manager."

Associate Professor Nilanjan Sen of Nanyang Technological University (NTU) added: "The curriculum is more strategic in nature - focusing less on functional capabilities and more on leadership and strategic issues such as talent development, leveraging cultural diversity, and ensuring proper risk management."

Prof Sen is also the associate dean of executive education at NTU's Nanyang Business School.

About 300 executive MBA programmes are available here, offered by international business schools such as Insead or the local universities - Singapore Management University (SMU), National University of Singapore (NUS) and NTU.

Extensive, intensive course

INSTITUTIONS go all out to woo students with comprehensive programmes and lessons overseas, and with the promise of like-minded individuals coming together in the quest to further their education and businesses.

The EMBA programme at NTU's Nanyang Business School, for example, offers a variety of industry specialisation tracks such as aviation, hospitality, shipping, and small business entrepreneurship.

Prof Sen said: "These allow candidates to gain specific knowledge and insight into a particular sector, on top of general management training... useful for candidates who work in specialised industries, yet want to learn the best practices and knowledge from other sectors."

NUS Business School has two

EMBA programmes offering expertise in Asia.

One is the Asia-Pacific Executive MBA - conducted in English and Mandarin - and the other a double-degree programme with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) called the UCLA-NUS Executive MBA.

Ms Chua Nan Sze, director of graduate studies, said: "Singaporeans tend to enrol in the English Asia-Pacific EMBA and UCLA-NUS EMBA programmes.

"The Mandarin Asia-Pacific EMBA attracts mainly Mandarin-speaking entrepreneurs and senior managers from the region who value the international exposure that NUS Business School offers them."

Institutions here also face competition from big names abroad.

The marketing director of imdesignlab, Mr Lee Tin Lin, graduated from Insead's Global EMBA programme in 2008 but had considered studying at the London Business School and Harvard Business School.

Professor Tan Kok Hian, group director, academic medicine at SingHealth, pored over material from various schools for a few days and eventually chose SMU.

He liked that it was conducted in "four highly reputable institutions across four countries - Singapore and three major powers of the new millennium: The Wharton School, India (Indian School of Business) and China (Peking University)".

Prof Tan added that a recommendation from Prof Kenneth Kwek, chief executive of KK Women's and Children's Hospital, who was in the pioneer SMU EMBA class of 2011, helped his decision.

Relevance of the EMBA

PROF Tan sees a growing need among medical professionals like himself for an EMBA, which was why he jumped at the chance to enrol when SingHealth offered him a scholarship.

"Medical schools do not offer business administration training which is increasingly important in modern system-based practice where competencies in managing a sustainable and successful clinical practice are much needed," he noted.

Mr Jain, of S P Jain School of Global Management, added that a key reason candidates enrol is to speed up their career growth.

"Consider that an EMBA costs approximately \$30,000 and on average a student has 30 years of working life left.

"A higher salary of even \$1,000 per year will recoup the costs. But they usually get \$3,000 to 4,000 per month, so it has a terrific return on investment."



Prof Tan Kok Hian (right), group director, academic medicine at SingHealth, receiving his EMBA degree from Prof Benedict Koh, Associate Dean of the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, Singapore Management University. PHOTO: COURTESY OF TAN KOK HIAN

Insead professor Charles Galunic said candidates are either in general management or rapidly approaching that stage.

He added that Singaporeans making up 6 per cent of its global EMBA programme this year, with an average age of 37 years and 13 years in work experience.

SMU associate professor Gregor Half, who oversees the MBA and EMBA programmes, said demand for the EMBA continues to soar in Asia because companies and executives are figuring out how to handle growth, and markets such as China, India and South-east Asia are so diverse.

SMU has recorded a 60 to 70 per cent increase in the number of EMBA applicants since it began the programme in 2011, while applications at Nanyang Business School have increased 50 per cent since the programme was launched in 2007.

Compared with traditional EMBA markets such as the United States, institutions in this region have the edge when it comes to how businesses work in Asia.

Not everyone is an EMBA advocate. Swiss business school IMD, the latest institution to set up shop in Singapore, is not planning to offer its EMBA here.

IMD president Dominique Turpin said: "The market in Singapore for MBAs and EMBA is very, very crowded, it's unbelievable. We do not intend to bring another EMBA, but to bring programmes you don't find anywhere else.

"I'm not interested... I'm a marketing professor, and in marketing there is a golden rule: 'Be

different.' We have to be careful, not to come here and pull out in three or six months."

The power of the EMBA

BUT Cordlife chief executive Jeremy Yee believes in the EMBA so much that he has two - one from Nanyang Business School and the other from University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

"NBS allows me to see things from a socio-economic perspective, there's a lot of Asia focus, whereas Chicago is very quantitative-based, and using such quantitative methods to derive a decision. As CEO, I believe both facets are important and I try to achieve a balance in both."

Mr Yee has sent four employees to the Nanyang Business School programme and the fourth, an IT manager, just got accepted.

An EMBA is good for people who are pretty senior in their years of experience, and will also particularly benefit scientists or people with specific skill sets who may one day want to venture into general management and the commercial side of things, said Mr Yee.

Investing in his people also shows he believes in them.

"A company is only as good as its people. You can have the best product but if no one is selling or marketing it properly, then the product is doomed to fail.

"So you need good people, and I trust the Singapore education system and the universities which have a rigorous way of teaching."

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