The strengths of S’pore managers

By MATTHEW PHAN

SINGAPOREANS are often accused of having rather “structured” minds, but this does not worry Satish Pradhan, head of human resources at Indian conglomerate Tata Group. He told BT in a recent interview that he finds Singaporean managers very good at meeting customer expectations.

He finds managers from Singapore to be creative at improving and developing processes. Others might be more creative in what he calls “raw ideation” but weaker in terms of “process rigour”.

Mr Pradhan said that these qualities make events like the Crucible – a business competition the Tata Group held for the first time in Singapore last month – easier to execute here. “There is a process that is established, which is applied with the same degree of rigour regardless of the person who is in charge,” said Mr Pradhan. “The process has huge value because regardless of the person, the quality will not change.”

The Tata Group employs about 1,700 staff in Singapore, through its ownership of NATSTEEL, as well as its IT outsourcing arm, Tata Consultancy Services.

Worldwide, the group hires nearly a quarter of a million people. It recently acquired Anglo-Dutch steel maker Corus Group for US$12.9 billion, and is reportedly in talks to acquire British car brands Jaguar and Land Rover from Ford.

Tata runs what Mr Pradhan said is the largest international internship programme in Singapore of any company, taking in about 50 students per year from Singapore Management University, the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University.

Singaporean undergraduates are “much more hungry to learn than students from other places”, and are more flexible, Mr Pradhan also said. Tata does not take in undergraduate interns in India.

He also said that of the interns that apply to Tata’s internship programme, “the bulk seem to come from SMU”.

As for MBA interns, “graduate interns from NUS and NTU are comparable to graduate interns in India”, though there is a larger range of quality among Indian students, said Mr Pradhan.

He declined to comment on how managers from Singapore perform when running parts of Tata’s business overseas, saying the group does not have much experience with moving mid-career managers from Singapore to other countries. It does not emphasise lateral hiring, and is more interested in grooming younger workers to become future leaders, he said.