Chief execs more concerned about external factors, study finds

Panel discussion: (from left) Anna Chan, assistant managing director (planning and policy) at EDB, Mr Dhinakaran of Jay Gee Enterprises, Mr Lai of Mapletree Logistics and Mr Chew of Fish & Co. On the right is moderator Shanker Iyer, chairman, Singapore International Chamber of Commerce

Macroeconomics, competitors and customers top list

By LYNN KAN

BUSINESS chiefs in Singapore are more burdened by uncertainties that crop up from external factors than internal ones.

A preliminary study from the Singapore Management University (SMU) and the Institute of Certified Public Accountants Singapore (ICPAS) showed that external uncertainties chief executives care about are macroeconomics, competitors and customers while internally it is how to manage people.

Furthermore, 2012 is perceived to be an even "choppier" time for companies than 2011.

To deal with uncertainties effectively, CEOs must maintain good communication channels with the rest of business and put in place a proper structure and system.

The panel of CEOs present at the ICPAS-SMU Business Leaders Study to discuss the preliminary study largely agreed with its findings.

Said Maptree Logistics Trust CEO and executive director Richard Lai: "You can mitigate (human resource) issues much better than macroeconomic factors that are beyond your control. You can try to mitigate HR by having a deep enough management bench, so that you can deal with succession issues more easily."

As for Jay Gee Enterprises' managing director R Dhinakaran, the biggest source of uncertainty comes from his competitors and his consumers.

"We have a lot of information to keep in the know about our competitors," he said. "We do a lot of research on what's top of the mind of the consumer. We try to look at all the contingencies and plan according to the issues."

However, the rallying point for all the CEOs present was coping with a looming dearth of talent, particularly in the food and beverage and retail industry.

"Whoever I groom has to embrace the same values - putting customers first and exercising prudence in whatever we do. I have to find the right character who also believes in the same vision."