Singapore should find a way to raise its entrepreneurs to the same heights as its scholarship-holders, writes ARJOT DESAI NARASIMHULU

Singapore has been successful in creating a manufacturing economy to grow its gross domestic product (GDP). The manufacturing earnings required an export-oriented strategy to create jobs in Singapore in order to create jobs for its residents. The strategy worked, reported Singapore’s GDP grew by 5.5 percent in international dollars to $257.5 billion for the year 2010. The GDP and the 2% CAGR from 2005 to 2010 are expected to hit $362.2 billion and $27.3 billion respectively for the year 2010. The growth in GDP per capita in Singapore brings with it increased business costs. Even the most expansive MNCs will always begin to translate their home-cost operations from Singapore to other lower-cost destinations. Some of the government-linked companies (GLCs) have done well to increase their revenues, thereby contributing to Singapore’s economy.

However, there is a need for Singapore to increasingly focus on creating more local companies in order to look at the less of jobs and economic activity due to the expected transfer of certain operations by MNCs, as well as to continue to create more jobs and grow the economy.

Innovation-based entrepreneurship is certainly a success of generating jobs and growing the GDP of a nation. Let us take the example of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

According to a 2007 report by the Kaufmann Foundation, the number of companies that were built by entrepreneurial MIT alumni have total sales of $1.5 billion and 2.24 million employees. Clearly, this evidence of how entrepreneurship can contribute to a nation’s job and wealth creation.

Books such as the one gives us an insight into the profile of successful entrepreneurs. Several successful entrepreneurs were very curious as young children. They tinkered with electronics, computers, or other devices even when they were still in school. A number of these inventions had interest beyond achieving excellent academic results. Curiosity and the desire to experiment are important elements of the DNA of an entrepreneur. It will be interesting to find out the importance of the DNA of the world on curiosity and experimental behaviour exhibited by applicants in their admission process.

Entrepreneurship culture elsewhere

Let us discuss examples of the influence of culture on entrepreneurship. Hong Kong, for example, appears to reinvent and scale entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are seen to be the creators and leaders of society. This societal attitude inspires young entrepreneurs to create new and innovative businesses. Failure is seen as an experience and a stepping stone to success and success is never forever. Another example is Israel, where entrepreneurs plan for their shot at business success. A 25-year-old man, for example, had saved enough for two for a year experiment with his money. He was sure that employers would hire him in case he did not succeed in his venture.

There were many such examples. Was this because they live in an uncertain environment or are they more willing to take risks? Or was it because employers value the experience of a failed entrepreneur? On the other hand, I was told by one of the successful students entrepreneurs that when he mentioned his desire to start a company, his family asked him to get a real job.

The face of a Singaporean entrepreneur

Carl Schramm, in one of the Distinguished Speaker Series lectures organised by SMU’s Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, shared an interesting study by Kauffman on the culture of entrepreneurship in which countries are rated on an average of the 100 factors influencing entrepreneurship. Each country was awarded a number of factors from one to the highest ranking of the young. Let us first consider the student entrepreneurs in Singapore.

Singapore’s students generally practice learning by rote, and there is no room for innovation in their lives. This is because not only is the idea to build up your mind, but it is also to help those who are not as fortunate.

In the world of new business creation, some companies that are best started by experienced professionals while others benefit from outside of the thinking of the young. Let us first consider the student entrepreneurs in Singapore.

Singaporeans usually graduate practice learning by rote, and they are not so� to think outside of the box. Parents put their children through tuition and other enrichment activities, leaving very little time for the students to explore on their own.

It is difficult to expect young students, who for 12 years of their school life have been told to conform, to suddenly become entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs once they step into a university or polytechnic. Singaporeans have a lot of emphasis on marks, where academic performance is a significant component of their education. The students are expected to spend long hours studying and preparing for exams, with little time left for them to develop a sense of entrepreneurship.

The Singapore government has been very good at providing plentiful jobs for its residents. Young graduates can look forward to finding multiple job offers even before they graduate. Investment banks and consulting firms pay handsome starting basic salaries and bonus packages. Not all graduates are successful entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship in Singapore

Singaporeans often find it difficult to support young students, who for 12 years of their school life have been told to conform, in suddenly become imaginative and entrepreneurs once they step into a university or polytechnic. In Hong Kong, it appears, reverence and exalts entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are seen to be the exemplars and are known to be fast-tracked in their careers. This certainly is the case in Singapore, where academic performance IS a significant component.

The MITs of the world place on curiosity and experience. When we consider experienced professionals and entrepreneurs in Singapore, many of them seem to create innovative companies. Failure is seen as an experience and a stepping stone to success.

Can Singapore fast-track its scholarship-holders? Can Singapore-based companies be more open to recognizing and rewarding the experience gained by entrepreneurs and re-award them for their achievements? Will Singaporean parents be more supportive of entrepreneurial ventures? The answers to these questions cannot be found by any one group acting alone — the government, mid-career professionals, parents or students.

Singaporeans are confident in their heads and shoulders together to encourage a bright and innovative future by filling the country with successful entrepreneurs. The government has a clear mind that not all entrepreneurial activities may be sanely