

CAREERS IN ENGINEERING

Pushing the boundaries

DSTA project manager Shirley Wong works closely with people in both the defence and IT communities

KENNETH GOH

STAYING intellectually stimulated after working for 14 years in an organisation is no mean feat.

When an individual feels an affinity for the organisation and its broad objectives, the relationship seems to transcend that of employee and employer.

That is the enviable situation of Ms Shirley Wong, project manager, Enterprise IT Programme Centre, Defence Science and Technology Agency (DSTA).

"I consider my DSTA colleagues as my second family. I go jogging with my teammates together after work, and we organise regular gatherings on weekends. These are relationships I treasure," says Ms Wong, 37.

She knew instantly she had found her prospective employer during the DSTA job interview in 2001.

"The job interview affirmed my desire to work in DSTA. I remember everyone at the interview panel being very warm and friendly, and this was just a very refreshing atmosphere," she says.

Fascinated with science and technology from a young age, she was inspired by her elder brother who built a solar system model for a science project and moved on to software programming eventually.

"Science has been my rock throughout my education journey. I have always been interested in all things futuristic, and understanding the theories behind how things function is just amazing," she says.

That interest led her to pursue a

degree in electrical engineering at Nanyang Technological University, where she met her current employer at the university career fair.

Always up and about

As project manager now, Ms Wong enjoys the fact that she is not desk-bound as she needs to maintain regular contact with people in both the defence and information technology (IT) communities.

By leveraging innovative IT solutions, she collaborates with her peers from the Singapore Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence to provide practical human resource e-solutions for full-time national servicemen (NSFs).

Her roles also involve engaging IT vendors for projects, overseeing budgeting and ensuring the projects meet their objectives and schedules.

In DSTA, Ms Wong has been given ample opportunities to stretch her abilities and develop new skill sets.

She first began as a programmer when she joined DSTA and learnt the ropes in the technical and developmental domains before branching out into managing IT systems.

She lists her work on "enhancing and extending the Employee Self-Service (ESS) online application" as her most memorable project so far.

Leading the project, she and her team developed an online system that eliminated the copious amount of paperwork which used to weigh down NSFs when they applied for leave or submitted medical, transport or meal claims.



Ms Wong lists her work on "enhancing and extending the Employee Self-Service online application" as her most memorable project so far. PHOTO: DSTA

ESS was the very first online application rolled out for NSFs, which made it doubly exciting for Ms Wong and her team. After designing and refining the system prototypes, they went to the various camps to conduct user studies, observing how soldiers took to the system.

Ms Wong admits a prescriptive approach to the ESS rollout would have saved her team a lot of time and trouble, but she says they were intent on developing a system that would benefit a large community of servicemen by catering to their particular needs and requirements.

User-friendly

Her team's diligence and thoroughness paid off when they discovered

that most servicemen appreciated the new ESS system, which was subsequently deployed as a mobile application to allow NSFs convenient access via multiple interfaces.

According to Ms Wong, DSTA employees are encouraged to explore different areas of work and this flexibility encourages them to enhance their strengths and deepen their expertise.

Supervisors also recognise the strengths of each team member to bring out their best during projects.

She says: "In DSTA, staff are also encouraged to map their learning plan to upgrade their skills. There is the Personalised Career Development Plan that DSTA develops with staff to help us chart our growth within the organisation while fulfilling our aspirations."

For individuals passionate about defence engineering in general, Ms Wong says DSTA offers a wide range of projects in which one can contribute to and learn so much from.

"The culture in DSTA is very warm and welcoming as we share a common mission to provide technological solutions to strengthen Singapore's defence," says Ms Wong.

"The supervisors in DSTA are also accessible and are generous when it comes to providing guidance. They are constantly encouraging us to be innovative and to rise above the challenges.

"Overall, DSTA exudes a positive energy and I am glad to be a part of it."