

DSO National Laboratories to do more research in digital tech: CEO



1 of 2 One advantage DSO has over other employers is how it contributes to national defence. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO



Lim Min Zhang
Assistant News Editor

PUBLISHED JUL 19, 2022, 10:43 PM SGT



SINGAPORE - DSO National Laboratories will bank on its head start on artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics and cyber-security research as it gears up to support the Singapore Armed Forces in dealing with threats in the digital domain.

In an interview on Tuesday (July 19), DSO chief executive Cheong Chee Hoo said the capabilities needed by the new Digital and Intelligence Service, or DIS, are not new.

"What is important now is that there is more mission focus. Which means that we will have to do more," he told reporters on Tuesday (July 19) during a media tour of the defence research and development organisation's 50th anniversary exhibition.

He said: "In the 1980s, when you mention AI, you will never get supported in your work. But this is what DSO is about, because we really forward invest in people. We have been looking at AI since the 1980s.

"We're using AI, natural language, as well as image and signal processing to detect deepfakes. So in terms of AI, we not only use it to prevent (threats), we also make sure that whatever we do is robust."

Deepfakes refer to digitally altered media that can be used to spread false information.

There is growing demand for talent in the digital domain, he noted, but one advantage DSO has over other employers is how it contributes to national defence.

"Besides having that sense of purpose, the kind of work we do is very challenging, exciting, and also impactful... That's our value proposition to the younger people in the digital area," said Mr Cheong, 54, who has been CEO since 2016.

Other than doing more outreach via channels such as social media, DSO also brings in 150 to 200 interns from universities every year - mainly from engineering and computer science backgrounds - to allow them to experience working in DSO.

And they solve real problems that engineers and scientists in DSO actually do, Mr Cheong added.

On talent retention, he disclosed that the average length of service in DSO is about 15 years, up from 13 reported in 2017.

The average attrition rate over the last three years is about 3.5 per cent for research scientists and engineers. This is also lower than the 4 per cent reported five years ago.

DSO hires only Singapore citizens due to the sensitive nature of its work.

Asked whether DSO is working on other emerging technology, such as blockchain, cryptocurrency and the metaverse, Mr Cheong said this will depend on potential capabilities that such technology can deliver for Mindef and the SAF.

Blockchain, particularly the idea of distributed ledgers, could be useful, he added, and this is something DSO has been thinking about.

"Cryptocurrencies, less so. I don't think we will spend effort to mine Bitcoin."